



ODD CONCLUSION OR PECULIAR PLOT? A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE IKHWĀN AL-ŞAFĀ' 'S CASE OF THE ANIMALS VERSUS MAN

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Abstract

This paper is centered on *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn*, an allegorical lawsuit authored by a group of intellectual men who operated under the pen name Ikhwān al-Şafā' (The Brethren of Purity) in Iraq in the 10th century. It is a fable that features the cattle and the beasts who are later joined by representatives from six other animal kinds, all of whom gather at the court of the King of the Jinn. They are there to complain of the oppression, injustice, and wrongdoings of humans against them and to protest the human belief about animals being their slaves. On the other hand, the human adversaries, a group of about seventy men belonging to diverse lands, religions, and cultures, try their best to substantiate their claim of authority over the animals. While the plot of the *Case* directs the support and sympathy of the readers in favor of the animals, its conclusive paragraphs interestingly resolve the court-case in favor of humans. Undoubtedly, this unforeseen, odd conclusion has perplexed its readers. In this paper, I address the disagreement between the plot and the conclusion of this fable. By demonstrating that the apparently odd conclusion is not odd at all and, in fact, is consistent with the intellectual system of the Ikhwān, I present an explanation of why they have penned the *Case* in such a manner and what they aimed at achieving by means of it.

Keywords: *animal fable, animal ethics, Islamic traditions, anthropocentrism, human-animal relationship*



Introduction

The interdisciplinary compendium of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (The Brethren of Purity) is entitled the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')* and primarily consists of fifty-two epistles. These epistles are divided into four parts: Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, and Theology (El-Bizri, 2010). Of the brethren's entire corpus, *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn*, the classic allegorical lawsuit, is undoubtedly the most popular. Its reception across cultures and translation in numerous languages bespeak the great magnitude of interest it has managed to draw over the centuries (Goodman, 2010). It occupies the major portion of the Ikhwān's twenty-second epistle, entitled "On the Species of Animals, their Marvelous Corporeal Structures and their Wondrous Peculiarities" (de Callatay, 2018, p. 358), which is the longest of the fifty-two epistles and the eighth under the category of Natural Sciences. In the epistle, preceding the *Case* is a non-allegorical, non-fictional prologue that is an equally important piece of text for our analysis.

In the *Case*, by allowing the animals to speak and engage in discourse, the Ikhwān have managed to compose an amusing and insightful rebuttal of a number of familiar justifications of human superiority over other beings. Sarra Tlili (2014) asserts that the *Case* is truly unique in its critique of the anthropocentric assumptions, not only in the Islamic civilization but in pre-modern times as a whole. However, it is interesting and quite baffling, that after making such a strong case against humans, the animals, in the end, do not only lose the case but willingly concede it in favor of humans. This end-of-the-story twist, therefore, has remained a site of extraordinary confusion, speculation, and debate.

This paper addresses the disagreement between the outcome and the plot of the *Case* by situating it within the Ikhwān's intellectual system. When analyzed in this manner it becomes apparent that, as opposed to the general view, it is not the conclusion of the fable but its plot that is peculiar. This is because the conclusion perfectly aligns with the Ikhwān's hierarchical worldview wherein humans enjoy a higher rank than animals. This, however, does not mean that the brethren intend to champion an anthropocentric worldview. Though humans occupy an elite position in this world, it is only God who is at the center of the Ikhwān's scheme. In fact, as I shall argue in this paper, the importance that the brethren attach to the existence of humans is rooted in their notion that human beings

have the unique potential to cultivate their souls. As we shall see in the Case, the brethren reject any claim of human superiority that is based on anything other than this inherent potential. I propose that by making humans recognize their inherent potential as the true basis of their nobility, the Ikhwān's goal is to encourage them to toil for realizing this potential. This, of course, is not possible without appreciating the vitality of other creatures of God on earth and treating them with justice and compassion.

The Ikhwān and their intellectual system

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' was a 10th-century group of anonymous intellectual men based in Basra, a city in southern Iraq, with an active branch in Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate (El-Bizri, 2010). In their epistles which are the only source of information about their nature and beliefs, they put forth a coherent intellectual system based on their belief that knowledge can “bring to fruition and perfection the latent faculties of [humans] so that [they] may gain salvation and spiritual freedom” (Nasr, 1978, p. 30) from the prison that this material world is.¹

Since the brethren operated under the cloak of secrecy, their religious and political affiliations as well as their proper names and identities have remained a subject of debate amongst scholars. Though a number of contemporary scholars argue that the members of the Ikhwān belonged to the Ismaili branch of Shi'ism (Nasr, 1978), it would be inappropriate to restrict one's understanding of them on such basis. This is because it contradicts their “eclectic syncretism” (El Bizri, 2006, p. 10), the embracing attitude of the Ikhwān towards knowledge from diverse religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions, which is evident throughout their work. Investigating for diverse religious and

¹ “All the sciences they [the Ikhwān] consider—whether astronomy, angelology, or embryology—are discussed, not with the aim of a purely theoretical or intellectual interpretation or for their practical application, but to help untie the knots in the soul of the reader by making him aware, on the one hand, of the great harmony and beauty of the Universe and, on the other, of the necessity for man to go beyond material existence. And in order to reach this end they combine in their ideal education the virtues of many nations” (Nasr, 1978, p. 30).

cultural influences, Netton (1991) identifies Christian and Jewish influences in their work and argues that the Ikhwān also drew from Buddhist, Manichaean, Persian, Sanskrit, and Zoroastrian literatures available to them. He also recognizes elements from various strands of Greek philosophical tradition in the epistles. For the Ikhwān, knowledge is not and cannot be owned by any particular culture, civilization, or religion, and, therefore, could be utilized for their purpose with necessary modifications. This indicates that the embracing attitude of the brethren towards various religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions does not translate into “uncritical acceptance” of them. Rather, they adapted what they found from these sources to develop and bolster their own philosophy (Netton, 1991).

The central piece in the brethren’s intellectual system is their emanationist scheme of creation and subsequent hierarchical view of being. Emanation is from Latin *emanare*, which means to flow out, spring out of, arise, or proceed from (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). The Ikhwān are of the view that all creation flowed or emanated from a single divine source, the Creator, in descending degrees of perfection and nobility. It is important to note that “emanation” and “hierarchy of being” are also of principal importance to the Neo-Platonists (Netton, 1991). Owing to this similarity, the Ikhwān are considered to be influenced by Neo-Platonism more than any other strand of Greek philosophy (de Callatay, 2005, Netton, 1991). Plotinus, who is regarded the father of Neo-Platonism, proposed a scheme of three levels of being above the material world². The brethren adapt the Plotinian scheme and postulate their own “emanationist hierarchy” (Netton, 1991, p. 34) consisting of nine levels of being. Unlike Plotinus, the brethren include the material world in their scheme. Moreover, as opposed to the Plotinian scheme that regarded emanation to be a necessary but unwilled and involuntary outflow of creation, the brethren believe the act of emanation and, thus, creation to be a conscious and deliberate act of the One, the Creator.

Sarra Tlili (2014) argues that the Ikhwānian scheme of creation, wherein God creates the world “through emanation rather than *ex nihilo* creation” (p. 44), diverges from the orthodox Islamic understanding of creation. Nevertheless, it is important for the purpose of our study since it lies at the heart of the Ikhwān’s work. The first level of being, as we know, is the Creator (*al-Bārī*). The next six

2 The three-level scheme of Plotinus is as follows: the first level was the One, the transcendent God, the second level that emanated from the first was called the Intellect, and at the third level emanated the Soul (de Callatay, 2005; Netton, 1991).

successive levels are as follows: the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿAql*), the Universal Soul (*al-Nafs*), the Prime Matter (*al-Hayūlā ʿl-Ūlā*), the Nature (*al-Ṭabīʿa*), the Absolute Body (*al-Jism al-Muṭlaq*) or the Second Matter i.e. the corporeal world, the Sphere (*al-Falak*) consisting of seven planetary spheres. Below this level is the sublunary world consisting of two levels, the eighth and ninth levels in the scheme of the Ikhwān. The eighth level is the Four Elements (*al-Arkān*), namely Fire, Air, Water, and Earth, whereas, the ninth and the last level is this world, the world of generated Beings (*al-Muwalladāt*) which is divided into the successive kingdoms of mineral, plant, and animal. Every being in the ninth level possess an individual soul corresponding to the species of beings it belongs to (de Callatay, 2005; Netton, 1991).

The Ikhwān (2010) explain in the prologue of the *Case* that minerals are generated prior to all other beings and possess the mineral soul which makes them capable of coming into being and then passing away. Plants are generated next and possess the vegetal soul, which endows them with the additional faculties of nourishment and growth. Next in the chronological order are the animals who possess the animal soul and enjoy the capabilities of locomotion and sensitivity. Humans—who are also animals—come last in this scheme of generated beings in the sublunary world and share the traits of the beings that antedate them but are additionally endowed with the superior faculties of discernment and reason because they possess the heavenly rational soul.

It is important to note that for the first seven levels in the scheme of the Ikhwān, the preceding level of being is nobler than the succeeding level. For example, the Universal Intellect is nobler than the Universal Soul. In the sublunary world, however, this relationship between chronological priority and nobility is reversed. The beings that arise earlier are primitive, whereas the beings that succeed them are developed. For example, minerals precede humans chronologically but are the lowest of the generated beings, and humans, though chronologically the last of the generated beings, are the noblest (de Callatay, 2005). Also, all the other beings exist for the sake of the well-being of humans and their protection against harm (Ikhwān, 2010).³

3 The Ikhwan (2010) write in the prologue of the *Case*, “Know further, dear brother, that mineral and plant substances are all of them temporally prior to the animals. [...] They, that is, the plants, are the mother of the animals [...] [...] Know, dear brother, that all the other animals arose before man. For they all exist for his sake, and whatever exists for the sake of something else antedates it” (pp. 66-69).

The inverse relationship between chronological priority and nobility in the sublunary world is crucial to the scheme of the brethren as it validates humans to occupy the noblest rank in this world. Moreover, since humans are the only beings in this world to possess an immortal spiritual soul that is potentially capable of returning to its divine Origin in a beatific state, the Ikhwān attach immense importance to human beings in their intellectual system. In fact, in their epistles, the brethren are largely preoccupied with questions that revolve around the creation and salvation of humans (de Callatay, 2005).⁴

The Case: A Synopsis

Background of the *Case* is as follows: Years after Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) who had invited all humans and jinns to Islam, a king, Bīwarāsp the Wise, rose from the band of jinns who had become good Muslims. His capital was on the island of Ṣā'ūn wherein he ruled with justice. One day, a storm brought a ship carrying “men of commerce, industry, learning, and others of the humankind” (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 101) to the island. Impressed by its riches, these men decide to settle there. Following the convention of their homelands they soon began to force the cattle and the beasts into their service. The cattle and the beasts of this island, however, recoiled and ran away. The humans set out in their pursuit, determined to bring them back for they were “convinced that the animals were their runaway and rebellious slaves” (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 102). Upon discerning this human notion, the cattle and the beasts petition against them in the court of Bīwarāsp, charging them for their abusive and unjust behavior and protesting the belief that animals are slaves and humans their masters. The King summons both parties to his court. The cattle and the beasts and a group of seventy men of diverse religions and cultures appear in the court.

4 Commenting on the theme and questions that lie at the heart of Ikhwān's work, Godefroid de Callatay (2005) writes, “Whoever sets out to read the Rasāil [epistles of the Ikhwān] must be prepared endlessly to move back and forth between, as it were, the two “poles” of a same structure, one the human being, the other the divine principle to which it hopes to return. Where does man come from? Which place does he occupy in the creation? Is it so that he may contemplate the idea of becoming one again with a divine principle? These are the questions that preoccupy the Brethren from the beginning to the end of the corpus” (p. 17).

When the case opens, a human, who is an Arab by lineage, quotes several verses from the Holy Qur'an⁵ and argues that, since God has subjected the animals to humans, we are their masters and they our slaves. The representative of the beasts, a mule, responds to this human proclamation by explaining that the quoted verses, rather than establishing slavery of animals to humans, highlight the blessings of God bestowed upon humans for which they ought to be thankful. The human spokesperson, next, boasts the beautiful form and erect stature of humans and resorts to ridicule the stature and forms of various animals, labelling them "misproportioned". The mule, however, reminds humans that a slander to the creation is a slander to the Creator and argues that the animals are just as well-proportioned as humans are because God has provided the form of each creature according to His wisdom. The case proceeds in the following manner and soon turns towards the account of human oppression against the cattle and the beasts. The ass, the ox, the ram, the camel, the horse, the pig, all complain of heedless humans showing no mercy to them.

It is night by the time the cattle and the beasts have pleaded before the King to free them from human persecution and the case is adjourned until morning. The King, then, consults his vizier and other renowned jinns of the kingdom. The humans and the animals also hold their separate meetings that night to discuss the case and their future course of action. On the one hand, we see humans trying to anticipate how the case would unfold, "reasoning" the tactics they could use, the excuses they could present, the arguments they could use to convince the King of their higher rank and thereby, keep the animals from getting the King's sympathy and favor. On the other hand, the animals, in their meeting, decide to "send messengers to all the other animal kinds sharing the news and asking them to send delegates and orators to aid [them] in the contest that [they've] entered" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 150). Therefore, six messengers are sent to each of the six animal kinds: beasts of prey, birds of prey, the fowl, swarming creatures,

5 "[He gave you] livestock, as beasts of burden and as food. So eat what God has provided for you and do not follow in Satan's footsteps: he is your sworn enemy" (6:142). "And livestock--He created them too. You derive warmth and other benefits from them: you get food from them; you find beauty in them when you bring them home to rest and when you drive them out to pasture. They carry your loads to lands you yourselves could not reach without great hardship -- truly your Lord is kind and merciful -- horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and use for show, and other things you know nothing about" (16:5-8). "[S]o that you may remember your Lord's grace when you are seated on them and say, 'Glory be to Him who has given us control over this; we could not have done it by ourselves'" (43:13). Holy Qur'an (M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Trans.). (2004). Oxford University Press.

crawling creatures, and aquatic animals—the seventh being the cattle and the beasts who were already present.

The next eight chapters of the Case, in which each kind chooses a representative to appear before the King in support of the cattle and the beasts, beautifully address the characteristics of various animals from all the six kinds mentioned above. Delegates from each of the six kinds join the cattle and the beasts in their case against humans which continues for two more days. Throughout the Case, humans try their best, presenting one argument after the other, to substantiate the claim of their superiority over the animals. The animals, however, successfully counter their arguments each time. For example, when a Persian delegate in court takes pride in the ingenious and skilled arts and crafts that humans are capable of, he is humbled by the parrot who informs the court about the skilled bees “who build their homes as round, multi-storeyed hives [...] form each apartment as a perfect equilateral and equi-angular hexagon [...] need no compass to guide them, no straight-edge to rule, [...] as human builders do” (Ikhwān al-Şafā’, 2010, p. 275). At another point, the humans boast the unity of their form to establish their mastery over animals whose forms are diverse. They argue that since “rule belong[s] to unity, and servitude to diversity,” therefore, animals are our slaves (p. 301). To this, the nightingale, representative of the birds, responds by highlighting religious differences and sectarian rivalries amongst the humans and how each group denounces and devours the other. On the contrary, the nightingale remarks, the animals, though diverse in their forms, are united in their monotheistic belief and unlike humans, “assign God’s divinity to no other and do not fall into hypocrisy and lawlessness” (p. 302).

The Ikhwān, through such arguments, confute a majority of the typical anthropocentric assumptions that champion human supremacy over other creatures. Even arguments regarding immortality of the human soul and resurrection are not spared criticism. We see that when a Hijazi mentions these as human distinctions and takes pride in the subsequent promises of paradise and eternal rewards made to humans in the Qur’ān, the nightingale reminds that every promised reward is duly juxtaposed with chastisement and warning for humans. Though the animals do not enjoy God’s promises of eternal rewards, unlike the humans, they are spared from the threat of His punishment, meaning that they stand at par with humans.

It is only when, at last, the Hijazi delegate upholds the presence of the prophets,

imams, saints, and persons of piety and insight within the ranks of humans that the animals concede the case. “Ah humans, now at last you’ve come to the truth,” (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, 2010, p. 313) acknowledge all the animal delegates and the wise jinns, as they express their curiosity to know more about these persons of piety and insight that the Hijazi had mentioned. But, all the human orators, who had been speaking and debating throughout the case, fall silent and have no answer. Finally, a pious and insightful human who embodies the embracing attitude of the Ikhwān towards various religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions across the human race speaks. He details the qualities of the persons of piety previously mentioned:

Persian by breeding, Arabian by faith, a ḥanīf by confession, Iraqi in culture, Hebrew in lore, Christian in manners, Damascene in devotion, Greek in science, Indian in discernment, Sufi in intimations, regal in character, masterful in thought, and divine in awareness. (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, 2010, pp. 313-314)

Of all the humans, belonging to different faiths, cultures, and schools of thought, only this human, who is truly cosmopolitan in nature and combines the highest human virtues in character, is able to describe the characteristics of the “pure and righteous figures” mentioned by the Hijazi. And with his description of them, the *Case* ends.

What are the Ikhwān up to?

One of the most confusing features of the conclusion of the *Case of the Animals versus Man* is the fact that not all humans are saints or sages. Hence, it is absurd to use the nobility of a few humans as a pretext to discharge a majority of humans for their oppressive and unjust treatment of the cattle and the beasts. Also, of note is that the *Case* opens with two allegations against humans: 1) abuse of the cattle and the beasts at the hands of the human race and 2) humans mistaking the cattle and the beasts as their slaves because they (humans) are superior and nobler. It is, however, perplexing to find that the *Case* not only largely revolves around the latter but also concludes without any concrete word on the former. Moreover, it is not clear that how does establishing the nobility of humans make the sufferings of the cattle and the beasts any less.

Richard Foltz (2006), while appreciating the *Case* for its extensive critique of the mainstream notions of humans about themselves and the animals, expresses his discontent with the outcome in the following words:

This unexpected, abrupt and, from an animal rights perspective, highly unsatisfying conclusion leaves one wondering just what point the Brethren were trying to make. Is their treatise intended to awaken the reader to a non-anthropocentric reality? If so, the ending is clearly unacceptable. (p. 52)

However, it is important to fathom that the Ikhwān have written and compiled their epistles according to a sophisticated rationale. Informing the reader about “the great harmony and beauty of the Universe” (Nasr, 1978, p. 30) on the one hand and reminding them of the reality of this debased material world on the other, the Ikhwān’s chief purpose is to help the soul of the reader go beyond the imprisoning matter and embark upon the journey of return to the Origin. It can be rightly argued that the purpose of authoring the *Case* is no different.

The Ikhwānian scheme of creation champions a hierarchical order of being, wherein, in the sublunary world, humans are the noblest of all beings and it is for their wellbeing that all the other beings exist. As a result, it should not be surprising that the *Case* resolves in favor of humans since this is more consistent with the principle of human nobility in the Ikhwān’s intellectual system. The seemingly odd conclusion, thus, is not odd at all. Rather, it is the plot of the case that is peculiar. Why so convincingly make a case in favor of the animals if eventually humans are to win it?

Trying to answer this question, Tlili (2014) conjectures that the outcome of the *Case* is a product of an en route change in plan. She cogitates that, as described in their prologue, “their initial intention was simply to teach their readers about the wonders of the animal world [...] and to call for a better treatment of animals” (p. 78), however, as they progressed, their fable took a different direction. “Once they gave voices to their nonhuman characters, [...] and allowed their animals to draw from the Qur’an, the fable took a turn the authors perhaps did not foresee” (p. 78). The conclusion that they were about to reach was inconsistent with their intellectual system and would cast doubt on it. But, since they had invested so much in the *Case* and the “animals’ arguments and refutations were too provocative to deserve abortion” (p. 78), they opted to manipulate its final outcome.

Both in Tlili's hypothesis on the matter and Foltz's discontent with the conclusion of the fable, it is interesting to note that the idea of an egalitarian world for all creatures is deemed incompatible with the hierarchical worldview that the Ikhwān espoused. Tlili (2014) also wonders how the Ikhwān, so immersed in their hierarchical worldview, were even able to entertain such egalitarian views throughout the fable. Moreover, since humans occupy an elite position in the sublunary world in the hierarchical scheme of the brethren, they are assumed to purport an anthropocentric worldview, which then appears to be in stark contrast with the plot of the *Case* that staunchly advocates for non-anthropocentrism.

However, it is imperative to understand that the Ikhwān, as opposed to what appears to be the case, do not espouse anthropocentrism. For the brethren, God is the sole Master, whose scheme of creation is hierarchical, and the nature of His bounties is proportional, such that His provisions "are matched, species by species, by creaturely needs" (Goodman, 2008, p. 266). In the *Case*, for example, when the dragon, king of the crawling creatures, breaks down in tears for the "frailty and lack of device of so many of his subjects," he is reminded by the cricket that a lot of them such as "worms, grubs, and intestinal parasites are compensated for their lack of limbs and organs by the simplicity and ease of their lives, their cosseted habitats, and ready access to all that they need" (Goodman, 2008, p. 266). The brethren believe that since God treats all species according to His balance and "sustain[s] each according to its needs", His is "proportional, not arithmetic, equality" (Goodman, 2010, p. 26). According to the Ikhwān, an egalitarian worldview is not incompatible with a hierarchical one because hierarchies based on God's wisdom translate neither into inequality nor inequity. Therefore, the brethren do not entertain egalitarian and non-anthropocentric beliefs in the fable to protest God-ordained hierarchies. Likewise, the higher rank of humans in the sublunary world is not meant to champion anthropocentrism. Consequently, in the eyes of the brethren, it is not the case that animals are slaves and humans their masters since the Master is God alone.

Recalling from the first section, the Ikhwān consider humans to be noble because they believe them to possess an immortal, heavenly rational soul that is potentially capable of returning to its Origin in a beatific state. The key phrase here is "potentially capable" which suggests that humans have to endeavor to realize this potential and they cannot claim nobility for themselves without doing so. According to them, only a soul that has been cultivated to pursue higher ends would be able to return to its Lord in the state of purity and satisfaction. The Ikhwān (2010) assert in the prologue that "every human being should live thus,

so as to deserve [emphasis added] to be one of God's intimates" (p. 64). It is probably because of this that the Ikhwān do not entertain the immortality of the human soul as true basis of human nobility, for immortality of the soul is no good if it is unable to realize its potential and fails to achieve its true purpose.

In the prologue of the *Case*, the brethren also argue that "man at his best [...] is a noble angel, the finest of creatures; but at his worst, an accursed devil, the bane of creation" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 65). This implies that though humans occupy an elite position in the sublunary world, they are further graded, primarily on the basis of their actions. The prophets, imams, and sages mentioned at the end of the *Case* undoubtedly constitute the highest ranks of humans and, thus, are presented as models of what humans can become. It can be argued that by bulldozing humans' self-deceptive edifice of superiority throughout the fable, the brethren seek to call their readers' attention to the true basis of human nobility i.e., the potential of humans to cultivate themselves, pursue higher ends, attain similitude to the Divine as much as possible, and become God's intimates. Also, corresponding to the educational rationale behind the composition and dissemination of their epistles, the Ikhwān educate humans about the diversity, attributes, and vitality of the animals.

Lastly, for the Ikhwān, the nobility of humans amplifies their responsibility towards other creatures and heightens their accountability for their actions before God. As opposed to what humans had assumed in the fable, they are not allowed to be whimsical in their conduct with animals, especially the cattle and the beasts who are put in their service by God to aid them. Hence, it can be argued that by invoking human nobility at the end of the *Case*, the Ikhwān do not intend to discharge humans of their abusive treatment of the cattle and the beasts but rather it was meant to provoke a realization of their responsibility, as humans, towards them. They also do not evade the issue of animal abuse as appears to be the case, rather they regard the ethical treatment of animals to be of substantial importance for human salvation. For the Ikhwān, humans ought to follow God's precedent in looking after the earth and all the creatures in it with justice, insight, and utmost compassion.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a contextual analysis of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's *Case of the Animals versus Man* which seemingly is a case convincingly in favor of the animal plaintiffs with an outcome that is in favor of the human perpetrators. Since, the conclusion of the *Case* seems irreconcilable with its plot, it has remained a point of speculation and debate for its readers who deem it odd, unsatisfying, and unacceptable. By situating the fable and its prologue within the context of the brethren's intellectual system, this paper demonstrated that the conclusion of this fable is not odd because it aligns with the Ikhwān's principle of human nobility. After pursuing a contextual study of the fable, I propose that the brethren allowed the animals to make a strong case against humans by reproaching them for their haughtiness and discarding their empty claims of superiority. In this way, they lead the humans to the true basis of their nobility i.e., their potential to cultivate their souls, as opposed to flaunting arrogance and acting recklessly towards the pursuit of higher and nobler ends. Moreover, the brethren have also elaborately informed humans of the extraordinary distinctions of the animals in order to make them (humans) cognizant of their (animals) value, which is not just limited to their usefulness for the wellbeing of humans. Finally, it goes without saying that the *Case*, its purpose, and its message remain essentially relevant centuries after it was originally written. At a time when a great number of animal species (and plants) are at risk of extinction due to unabated human recklessness (Leahy, 2019), it is imperative, more now than ever, to hold a mirror up to humans.

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