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The thought and philosophy of the Brethren of Purity

Baza El Hadj

University of Mohamed Boudiaf, M'sila
Algeria

Email: elhadj.baza@univ-msila.dz

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Abstract

Any student of the Brethren of Purity will find that they held a philosophical and ethical school of thought that addressed all sciences. The essence of their doctrine was to examine all beings, investigate their principles, the cause of their existence, the levels of their order, and discover how their effects are related. Among the topics addressed by the Brethren of Purity and the Friends of Loyalty in their treatises were topics that fall within the realm of the philosophy of history, when they focused on the stars and the celestial spheres and their influence on living beings. There is no disagreement that Islamic intellectual production is more deserving of proper study and analysis. Since the Islamic conquest, historical awareness and philosophical thought in history have had a large share of theoretical and practical knowledge. Throughout the history of Islam and its successive eras, this knowledge has been developing, renewing, and taking on different colors that have honestly expressed the opinions of its owners, their manifestations, and the signs of their era. The establishment of the Brethren of Purity and Friends of Loyalty was a response to the crisis of the era and at the same time an attempt to overcome it based on the knowledge and messages they proposed. This was done in a creative and innovative style that aimed to enlighten a new generation through messages that were not written by a single author, but rather were a collective effort that resulted over two centuries.

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Introduction: It is clear that talking about the beginnings of historical thought is not an easy matter, as many ideas did not find their share of immortality, either due to the difficulty or impossibility of the act of documentation in prehistoric times, or due to its scarcity in the early historical ages and its dissolution into mythical thought that concealed the direct connotations of meanings, which was also followed by ambiguity and overlap in spatio-temporal ideas and concepts. With the emergence of historical awareness, the philosophy of history occupied a primary position among the historical and social sciences and became the basis for formulating the epistemological foundations of every school, theory or trend. However, if we return to the Islamic nation, we find that it is, unfortunately, still ignorant of the important position occupied by the philosophy of history and its pivotal role in engineering patterns of social, political and economic systems appropriate to bringing about a civilizational renaissance that would reflect on the reality of the Arab nation and enable it to take its place on the global civilizational ladder. Based on the extensive philosophical output of the Ikhwan al-Safa, which encompassed philosophy, history, religion, the arts, and various sciences, we can say that the goal set by this group was to enlighten, educate, and enlighten minds. Therefore, in this article, we aim to take a sample of the contents of the philosophy of history in Islamic thought, namely, an obscure philosophical group in the history of Arab-Islamic thought: the Ikhwan al-Safa and the Khilān al-Wafā. The central question of our study comes as close as possible to touching on the intellectual methodology of the Ikhwan al-Safa and the intellectual development they achieved, which enabled them to present new ideas during that era. It also touches on how these ideas contributed to the movement of development, enlightenment, and intellectual change, and the

resulting impact and influence on the factors of the Renaissance and the achievement of cognitive harmony between religion and philosophy.

To analyze the problematic of the study, we chose to adopt an analytical approach, as it is the most appropriate for tracing the views of the Ikhwan al-Safa and extracting their

Introduction to the Brethren of Purity: They were a group of Arab Muslim philosophers who united to reconcile Islamic doctrines with philosophical truths (Abdul Razzaq Mustafa 1975, 87). They lived in the second half of the fourth century AH (tenth century AD), between Basra and Baghdad. They exchanged fifty-two philosophical letters among themselves in complete secrecy. Five of them are known: Abu Sulayman Muhammad ibn Ma'shar al-Sabti al-Maqdisi, Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Harun al-Zanjani, Abu Ahmad al-Mahrajani, Abu Hasan al-Awfi, and Zayd ibn Rifa'ah. The modern researcher Ahmed Al-Khatib comments on the group, saying: "There is no doubt that the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity were not written by one person, but rather by a diverse group, whose knowledge and methods varied. This is very clear in their epistles. Perhaps some of the hidden Ismaili imams were among them, or that these imams instructed their preachers to write these epistles to serve as a voice for their doctrine" (Al-Khatib, 1984, 169). There is no doubt that the only historical evidence specific to the Brethren of Purity is what Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidi recorded when he said: "The minister of Samsam Al-Dawla asked me around the year 373 AH about Zayd ibn Rifa'a... Abu Hayyan said that day - and he apparently knew Zayd ibn Rifa'a and his companions - 'He is not attributed to anything and his condition is not known... he spoke about everything... He lived in Basra for a long time and encountered there a group of various kinds of knowledge and various crafts... because they said that the Sharia had been defiled by ignorance and there was no way to cleanse and purify it except by...' In philosophy, because it contains the wisdom of belief and the interest of ijihad... They compiled fifty treatises on all aspects of philosophy, both scientific and practical, and named them the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. They concealed their names in them, disseminated them among the copyists, and gave them away to the people (Omar Farroukh, 1953, 13). Their Shiite doctrine is clearly evident in many of the topics in their treatises, and in their exaggerated concealment and the presence of esoteric interpretations of some things and concepts (Saeb Abdul Hamid, 246). It is clear that the Society of the Brethren of Purity and the Friends of Loyalty was founded in the city of Basra, Iraq, and all we have learned about the members of this group based on their letters is that they were numerous individuals from different classes and strata, without specifying the names of these individuals, especially some of them at least (Fuad Masum, p. 45). However, this research has not been able to lift the mystery surrounding the origins of the Brethren of Purity, given the letters' reliance on innuendo and insinuation, and the presence of contradictions in many of them. This perhaps indicates that the Epistles were written during a period of transitions during which the Brotherhood expressed their views (Ismail Mahmoud, 1996, p. 117). Here, it would be more accurate to say that the Brethren of Purity concealed their names from the public, avoiding publicity and preserving their lives, which were threatened by rulers and commoners in this turbulent era. Therefore, they preferred to work in secret, taking precautions and caution on the one hand, and following wisdom and enlightenment on the other (Mahmoud Ismail, 1996, p. 51). Regarding the intellectual aspect, we note that the Ikhwan al-Safa relied on various methods in their epistemological approach. They relied on hearing, experience, rational proof, and the senses. However, they considered reason to be the decisive factor in receiving and evaluating knowledge. Anyone who did not accept this principle and refused to make reason the standard for all matters would be excluded from the Ikhwan al-Safa friendship and would be disowned by the group (Mahmoud Ismail, 2000, 27). We should also add that the Ikhwan al-Safa had preachers and councils throughout the country and across all classes (Ikhwan al-Safa, 1992, 421). In a similar vein, some studies indicate that Islamic peoples "knew numerous brotherhoods, similar to those found among Sufis and dervish sects, which are based on the idea of solidarity among their members and on establishing their interactions on justice, equality, and brotherhood" (Farid Hijab, 1982, 25). When investigating these brotherhoods and their history, we find that these "brotherhoods are not in themselves a doctrine or political trend as much as they are a characteristic that is attributed to the followers of a certain doctrine, which opens the way for reconsidering the belief that the Brethren of Purity is the name of a religious and political organization distinct from Ismailism" (Yahyawi Ismail, 2022, 212).

It is no secret to the student of philosophy that the Brethren of Purity are a philosophical school in their own right, famous for the unique visions and ideas contained in their fifty-two letters, which contained many of the sciences popular at the time, including theology, philosophy, physics, mathematics, astrology, and ethics. Therefore, some thinkers have rightly described them as constituting the intellectual chandelier of the fourth century AH. The adverse conditions experienced by the Islamic state during this century had a profound impact on the crystallization of the thought of the Brethren of Purity. Their primary ambition was to achieve the ultimate

goal sought, which included the achievement of two steps: First, "identifying the problems of the era and attempting to find solutions for them... and second, defining the intellectual and social entity of the virtuous city that the Brethren seek to establish" (Fouad Masum, 1998, 306).

Thus, we understand from this that the goal of the Brethren of Purity was to elevate humanity to higher ranks by integrating it into a virtuous society free from the obstacles that might prevent it from embodying its virtue and achieving its happiness.

All researchers agree that the emergence of the Brethren of Purity occurred in the fourth century AH, corresponding to the tenth century AD, following the disintegration of the Abbasid state and the spread of corruption in government before the Buyid dynasty entered Baghdad in 344 AH, the widespread spread of Greek philosophy, the proliferation of Islamic sects, and the outbreak of disputes among them in the social, political, and religious spheres. In any case, "the era in which the Brethren of Purity emerged was distinguished through several events, the first of which was the division of the Abbasid state in the fourth century AH, with the emergence of several states that gained effective sovereignty. The authority in the center of the caliphate (Baghdad) was held by the Banu Buba, in Andalusia by the Banu Umayyads, in Africa by the Fatimids, in Egypt by the Ikhshidids and in Aleppo by the Hamdanids, in the Euphrates region by the Shaybanids, in Oman, Bahrain, and Yamamah by the Qarmatians, and in Khurasan and Transoxiana by the Sassanids (Raafat al-Sheikh 2000, 52).

Philosophy held special importance for the Brethren of Purity, who placed it at the forefront of the sciences. They stated in their letters that the sciences studied by man are divided into three fields: mathematical and logical sciences, religious and positive sciences, and true philosophical sciences. The Brethren believed that it was necessary to examine these sciences gradually, and that mathematics should be considered first, then logic, then physics, then theology (ibid. 54).

In their letters, they adopted a comprehensive, universal approach, as they declared that they did not They are hostile to a particular science, do not adhere to a specific doctrine or are fanatical about it, and do not abandon any particular book. Their doctrine encompasses all doctrines and unites sciences regardless of their subject matter and methodologies. Regarding the relationship between religion and philosophy, we find that the Ikhwan al-Safa seeks to reconcile religion and philosophy. Their theory states that the relationship between religion and philosophy is complementary, as the goal of Islamic law is the same as the goal of philosophy. The difference between the proponent of Islamic law and the philosopher, in their view, is one of form, not content. Sharia worship is a condition for philosophical worship. This means, among other things, that philosophy is subordinate to Islamic law. Regarding the Ikhwan al-Safa's political philosophy, the philosophy of the absolute human being is the core of their political philosophy. It is one of the esoteric beliefs in Islam, stating that man is a small world and the world is a large human being. (Raafat Ghanimi al-Sheikh 1988:88)

The Brethren of Purity assert that philosophy aims to refine the soul and advance from its status as a potential to actual, in order to attain permanence and immortality.

As for the purpose of prophecy, "Refining the soul and advancing it is to refine and reform the human soul and free it from Hell so that it may enter Paradise. While this is the purpose of both Sharia and philosophy, each has its own distinct path to achieving its intended purpose. The reason for their difference, in the view of the Brethren, is the different natures and varying characteristics that souls are subject to" (Muhammad Farid Hijab, 1982, 218). We understand from this that the Brethren of Purity and the Friends of Loyalty consider the distinction between the possessor of the Sharia and the philosopher to be a distinction in form and not content. The specialist in the Sharia does not attribute anything of what he says to his own viewpoint, his attempts, and his own interpretations, but rather "attributes it to the intermediary between him and his Lord, the angels who inspire him at unknown times. As for the wise and philosophers, if they extract a science from the sciences or a craft from the crafts or plan a policy, they attribute that to the strength of their souls, their own effort, the quality of their opinion, their examination, and their research" (Muhammad Farid Hijab, 1982, 218). Thus, since the goal of both religion and philosophy was the same for the Ikhwan al-Safa and the Khilān al-Wafa, their views were generally based on combining philosophical law. They therefore glorified "philosophy mixed with religious law and placed the sages and priests on a par with prophets and messengers. Thus, the virtuous city of the Ikhwan al-Safa included, alongside the adherents of structural religions and religious laws, those of philosophical and wisdom-based views" (Muhammad Farid Hijab, 1982, 219).

The Philosophy of History among the Ikhwan al-Safa:

All scholars of the Ikhwan al-Safa's thought agree that this school did not devote specific works to directly interpreting history. Rather, this was reflected in their works as a result of their interest in the stars, the heavens, and their influences. By drawing attention to these influences, they developed something resembling a philosophical perspective on interpreting history. In general, given the disintegration of the Abbasid state and the spread of corruption in government during the Ikhwan al-Safa era, as we mentioned earlier, they developed a comprehensive view of the problems and issues of their time. They initiated reform attempts aimed at addressing many of the political problems, sectarian rivalries, and ethnic and religious conflicts (Fuad Masum, 30 August 1998).

1- Political Problems and Administrative Tyranny: The first thing the Ikhwan al-Safa recorded regarding the political aspect was that most of the caliphs and sultans who exercised power in the Islamic world did not meet the required qualifications for a ruler. They violated the covenants they had made and transgressed the rules set by Islam, such as integrity, honesty, and concern for the interests of the governed. We note that the Ikhwan al-Safa often denounced the tyranny of rulers and described their actions through symbolic stories. As soon as the caliph ascends to power, he usurps rights and commits immorality. He treats God's servants as slaves, turns their days into a state, and seizes their wealth as booty (ibid., 308, 1998). As the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa) point out elsewhere in their Epistles, the ruler does not attain power through legitimate means, but rather imposes himself on the people by force, then controls their destinies and acts as he pleases. This "unjust sultan, who has seized control of the people through coercion and oppression, enslaving them openly and unwillingly, rules over them as he pleases, elevates and honors whomever he wishes among those who serve him, obey him, act under his authority, and abide by his commands and prohibitions. He degrades and removes those who disobey him and punishes those who betray or deceive him" (ibid., 1998, 309).

Based on this situation, the phenomenon of bribery spread among governors, judges, and senior officials, and the exchange of gifts among people increased to please the minister, the caliph, or others. While the Brethren of Purity detailed the problems and negative, destructive phenomena that plagued Islamic society, they proposed some solutions to reform and reduce political and administrative corruption. The caliph, or "leader," is essential to society, and he occupies the highest position. In his hands are the reins of power; if he is righteous, the rule is righteous. Therefore, whoever assumes this position must possess most of the qualities of the prophets: he must be intelligent, eloquent, a lover of knowledge, truthful, just, strong-willed, and renounce worldly interests (ibid. 1998, 311). That is, he must be well-versed in the limits of his job and duties, including preserving the Sharia for the nation, redressing injustices, repelling and suppressing enemies, restraining evil, and supporting good people.

2- Sectarian disputes and cultural conflict: The Brethren of Purity often complained in their letters about the multiplicity of sects and sectarian fanaticism. Their rejection of this situation and their revolt against it was based on the fact that it was a means of leadership, domination, and prestige. Therefore, some people invented many things that had no connection to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), saying, "To the weak among the people, this is the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his conduct." They made this seem good to themselves until they believed that what they had invented was true, and that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had commanded it... Thus, the nation became divided and divided, and enmity and hatred arose among them, leading to sedition and wars, and some of them considered it permissible to shed each other's blood (Fuad Masum 1998, 311).

The conflict that gradually spreads will have negative effects on the cultural lives of individuals, increasing the intensity of sectarian conflict among them. Therefore, the Brethren of Purity paid great attention to this cultural aspect, attacking those who were fanatical about a particular branch of knowledge or a particular book. The Brethren also clarified the nature of sectarian differences and the means of eliminating their consequences. According to them, this can only be achieved by rejecting fanaticism for a particular school of thought. They consider abandoning personal desires an effective remedy for these sectarian conflicts. This remedy, which the Brethren offer for the issue of cultural conflict, requires that "there should be no fanaticism for a particular science or a particular book... and that all sciences should be examined and all books should be read, as much as possible, since all these sciences are links that complement each other in the chain of human knowledge" (Fuad Masum, 1998, 314).

3- National Conflict: The fourth century AH witnessed a fierce conflict between the large and influential nationalities within the Abbasid Empire, and each nationality was proud of its nationality and all the positions and advantages it obtained. However, this matter stopped the Ikhwan and they engaged in it, emphasizing the issue of equality between nationalities and peoples, as there is no nationality that achieved all the qualities of distinction and superiority over other nationalities, and there is no nationality “that has all the qualities of perfection and a nationality devoid of them, as days are cycles, the wheel of development is driven in every era by a nation or a people, then this leadership is transferred to another nation or another people” (Fouad Masum 1998, 314).

4- Ignorance is the root of problems: The Ikhwan carried the burdens and confusion of the Abbasid Empire in the fourth century AH, as well as the burdens of backwardness, fanaticism, and sectarian conflict. As a first step, they attempted to address the symptoms that resulted from these problems. They did not stop there, but rather attempted to discover the causes that produced these problems. After investigating and examining the phenomena, they found that their causes were four: bad deeds, corrupt opinions, bad morals, and the accumulation of ignorance. However, a careful examination of these phenomena led them to conclude that the four causes were due to only one cause: ignorance. “And know that the bad deeds of (people) are due to the corrupt opinions they held before investigating the truth of things, and that their corrupt opinions have become entrenched in their consciences due to the bad morals they have been accustomed to since childhood, and that their morals have been imprinted on their souls due to the accumulated ignorance that initially overwhelmed them.” (Fouad Masum 1998, 317)

In addition to all this, studies indicate that the Brethren of Purity developed what constitutes a philosophical vision for interpreting history. We mention its most important principles in the following points:

A - Human Dispositions and Their Purpose: When God Almighty created man, He provided him with three types of dispositions in order to transform his abilities and align with the purpose of his existence. He supported himself “first with the spiritual powers of all the planets in astronomy, so that it would be possible for him to accept all morals and learn all sciences, literature, mathematics, knowledge and politics, then he mixed the mixtures in it, so that he would be prepared to display all the amazing deeds and crafts” (Saeb Abdul Hamid, 247). It is known that the desired goal of all this is the possibility of man resembling the Creator in his capacity as His vicegerent on Earth and occupying His vast and far-reaching world. God also prescribed for man the legal commandments and philosophical mathematics, because man is "a soul and a body endowed with the spiritual, mental, and physical powers to perform his role in developing the world, over which his Creator has entrusted him, and to do so in accordance with the divine policy indicated by the divine commandments, with the goal of the afterlife" (Sa'ib Abdul Hamid, 247).

B - The reason for the differences in people's morals and orientations: Some books indicate that the Brethren of Purity and the Friends of Loyalty attribute this matter to four reasons, one of which is the primary reason, with the rest branching off from it: "The first is the difference in the composition of their bodies and the temperament of their compositions; the second is the soil of their countries and the difference in their identities; the third is their upbringing according to the religions of their fathers, teachers, and educators; and the fourth is the requirements of the astrological rulings on the circumstances of their births and the places where their sperm were conceived. This last reason is the origin, and the rest are branches of it" (Sa'ib Abdul Hamid, 248). The explanation for this is that the nature of countries is dependent on their air, and that this air influences, in one way or another, the temperaments of the people. This difference, as the Ikhwan wa Khilān al-Wafaa (Brothers and Friends of Loyalty) asserts, leads to the distinction and variation of the morals, character, customs, language, opinions, and doctrines of its people. The Ikhwan al-Safa also asserts that the planets' long orbits cause their rays to differ over all parts of the Earth and the airs of countries. This leads to differences in the succession of night and day and the seasons of the year, whether by increase or decrease, or by moderation or equality.

C- Causes of events in the universe: The Brethren of Purity and the Loyal Friends affirm that all events that occur in the universe are subject to the rotation of the universe, and that there are long and short cycles. “Whatever events are quick in origin, short in duration, and quick to decay, that is due to a quick, short-lived movement in the universe, and a quick resumption. And whatever events are slow in origin, long-lasting, and slow to decay, that is due to a slow, long-lived movement, and a resumption” (Saeb Abdul Hamid, 249). Based on this, the cycles and conjunctions become the cause of events in the universe and in turn become a source for projecting events onto beings.

As a detailed explanation of the sequential influence of the planets on everything that happens in the universe, the Ikhwan al-Safa and Khilan al-Wafa focus, for example, on a particular movement of Mars during its phases, which manifests maturity and growth in minerals, plants, and all animals. "States appear in some nations, and the power of some sultans increases. Even if this is accompanied by some corruption resulting from wars and the demise of some states, there is still little good in the world due to this movement. A similar effect occurs with some of the movements of Saturn, while other planets have different influences. Some of them herald destruction, corruption, the demise of states and kingdoms, and frequent wars, and so on" (Sa'ib Abdul Hamid, 251).

The Theory of the Civilizational Cycle: The Ikhwan al-Safa assert that every being in the universe undergoes four distinct stages: the beginning of existence; its increase, growth, and ascent to its end; its cessation, decline, and deficiency; and its destruction and nonexistence. This succession is explained by the theory of phases, spheres, and conjunctions. All events occurring in the world of creation and corruption are dependent on the rotation of the heavens and result from the movements of the planets and their paths in the zodiac, and their conjunctions with one another. Some cycles and conjunctions are long and some are short. Events that arise quickly, last briefly, and decay quickly result from a rapid, short-lived, and imminent movement in the heavens. Events that arise slowly, persist for a long time, and decay slowly result from a slow, long-lived, and distant movement (Sa'ib Abd al-Hamid, n.d., 249). This is because every element in the heavens has a circular motion, and this motion passes through four states: "A rise from the perihelion, an ascent to the apogee, a descent from the apogee, and finally a descent to the perihelion. States and kingdoms also adhere to this law, passing through these four cycles in succession until they are destroyed, and a new state emerges in its original cycle, or in another place. All of this is conditioned by the rulings of conjunctions" (Sa'ib Abd al-Hamid, n.d., 251). Based on the theory of roles, the Brethren of Purity established a standard for predicting the future in history. One of the advantages of this analysis is that it makes the process of prediction, as we have explained, easy and even completely clear. Through their sense of humor, they were able to anticipate "the demise of the state that persecuted philosophy and forced them to conceal themselves, for whatever reason." According to this theory, they predicted its imminent demise... It appears from this that the Brethren of Purity and the Friends of Loyalty deduced the time of the end of the Abbasid state from the correlations that indicate the transfer of state and kingdom from one nation to another, or from one country to another, or from one household to another. (Sa'ib Abdul Hamid, 252)

The Brethren of Purity did not stop at this astrological interpretation, but also indicated that the cyclical succession is an alternation between the state of the people of good and the state of the people of evil. This is based on and analogous to the alternation of night and day, and the alternation of heat and cold. Whenever one disappears, the other takes its place. Sometimes the state and power belong to the people of good, and at other times the power belongs to the people of evil. It is worth noting in this context that the cyclical theory "in explaining the emergence and disappearance of civilizations is one of the ancient theories that reappeared at the hands of the Brethren of Purity and was advocated by many modern European philosophers, including Vico, Charles Frederic Crews, and finally Spengler. However, the difference occurred in the representation and in the interpretation, which is the most important element that gives this theory its value, and without which it does not exceed the level of general observation of historical phenomena" (Saeb Abdel Hamid, 254).

***The City of the Brethren of Purity:** The Brethren of Purity drew up a meticulous plan for their ideal city, the first foundation of which was based on piety, that is, faith. A society in which faith is absent is a disintegrated, collapsing, and inevitably doomed. It is self-evident, indeed essential, that every society or nation have a leader or caliph entrusted with the task of maintaining security and stability within society. Since these qualities are only found in prophets, and with the aim of blocking those who covet power, the Ikhwan al-Safa proposed the formation of a council or body to be entrusted with the management of the virtuous city. This council "is the highest authority in the city, and its mission is not only political or administrative, but also religious, philosophical, and moral" (Fouad Masum, 322). It is worth noting here the great similarity between the virtuous city of the Ikhwan al-Safa and Plato's Republic. Both conceive of virtue as knowledge, the means of human advancement, progress, and happiness. They also share the role of education in consolidating the city's structure, as well as the role of the state as an educational institution working to prepare a righteous citizen and a just ruler with special qualifications who have attained the highest levels of knowledge and morality. If we were to compare the Ikhwan al-Safa and al-Farabi, we would conclude that they were greatly influenced by al-Farabi, particularly in their beliefs about the virtuous city. There is also a point that must be considered when comparing the Ikhwan with Al-Farabi. Al-Farabi neglected the means to build his city, despite Plato's interest in it. The Ikhwan, on the

other hand, understood its importance and its effective role in building, maintaining, and growing the city. That means is education. (Fuad Masum, 32)

From all of the above, we conclude that the Ikhwan al-Safa's goal in establishing their virtuous city was to prepare humanity psychologically, intellectually, morally, and socially to achieve a happy spiritual life. This is especially true since the Abbasid Caliphate at that time was marked by sectarian, political, and economic conflicts. Perhaps this is what led researchers to consider the Epistles of the Ikhwan al-Safa the first work "to analyze and critique the prevailing conditions in the Islamic world, to diagnose the problems of the era, and to propose solutions. The Ikhwan did not side with the authorities that had lost their legitimacy, nor did they appease them. Nor did they flee from reality. Rather, they confronted it and decided to save the Islamic world from the bloody conflict between several families vying for power. This conflict and these wars between them drag the Islamic world into tragedies and disasters (Saeb Abdul Hamid, 329).

The Concept of the Nation According to the Brethren of Purity: It can be said that the nation is a group of people who have gained recognition and are distinguished by specific characteristics and features in terms of form, whether it relates to individuals or groups. In other words, the social and cultural characteristics of the group itself have crystallized. Religious unity can sometimes be considered a criterion for defining the nation, while at other times, the nation may "include individuals belonging to different religions. Whether religion is considered an element of the nation's formation depends on the role it plays in the shared interests of the group comprising the nation, such that if the interests of a particular group adhering to a particular religion conflict with the interests of another group adhering to a different religion, religion plays a prominent role in defining the nation. This role is diminished or negligible if the shared interests of a group adhering to different religions compel it to form a single nation in confrontation with other nations or groups" (Muhammad Farid Hijab, 1982, 321). The Ikhwan al-Safa, when defining the concept of the nation, state that each nation has unique characteristics and attributes. Based on this understanding, they stipulated a set of elements for the formation of a nation, the most important of which are **undoubtedly**:

- Unity of language
- Unity of character
- Similarity of morals
- Unity of location
- Places
- Similarity of colors
- Similarity of bodily composition
- Shared customs and traditions (Muhammad Farid Hijab, 1982, 322).

Despite the many definitions of the nation that emerged after the era of the Ikhwan al-Safa, it is noticeable that they were, in reality, nothing more than an expansion or modification of this definition. Some definitions focused on one element and adhered to it, neglecting other elements.

As for religion, "as an element in defining the concept of the nation," the Ikhwan's position on this issue may seem ambiguous due to their particular view of religion. They believe that religion is one, but it is the laws of the prophets that differ according to the people of each era and what is appropriate for them, one nation after another... In other places in the Epistles, they believe that Each of these laws agrees in its purpose and intent with the philosophical and philosophical sciences. That is, the differences between these laws are superficial, while their origins all agree and point toward a single direction and goal: the refinement and reform of the human soul, its deliverance from the hell of the cosmic world and corruption, and its delivery to Paradise and the bliss of its inhabitants (Muhammad Farid Hijab, 1982). An objective analysis of this viewpoint finds that the Brethren of Purity did not intend, through the question of religion, to attempt to find an interpretation consistent with their goals as a political group seeking to form a coalition of various religions and sects led by a single person who

would issue commands, prohibitions, and various rulings. Rather, the meaning of religion within the group transcends this meaning entirely.

Conclusion: From all this, we conclude that the Ikhwan al-Safa were a philosophical and tolerant group that sought to purify the Sharia through rationality, philosophy, and wisdom, thereby refuting the heretical, atheistic, and blasphemous statements that pursued them. This is because they did not abolish the Sharia, but rather sought to cleanse it of theology. The most important contribution the Ikhwan al-Safa made in the field of philosophy was their comprehensive views on the succession of nations, kingdoms, and civilizations, even though they focused on the state of the people of goodness and its beginnings, composed of a people of scholars and wise men who agreed on a single opinion, a single doctrine, and a single religion. They summarized their theory of interpreting history in the theory of the cycle of civilizations, whose ideas were consistent and sequential, and whose philosophical interpretations were also explicit and clear in terms of both their premises and applications. This is in addition to an important point that appeared in the philosophical thought of the Brethren of Purity, which is represented by the adherence to that old idea of Plato and Aristotle based on making morals after the minds the mediators in creation, occurrence and management, on the one hand, and on the other hand we find that the Brethren of Purity applied that idea to the historical process to arrive at the theory that Hegel later summarized as “reason governs history.”

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