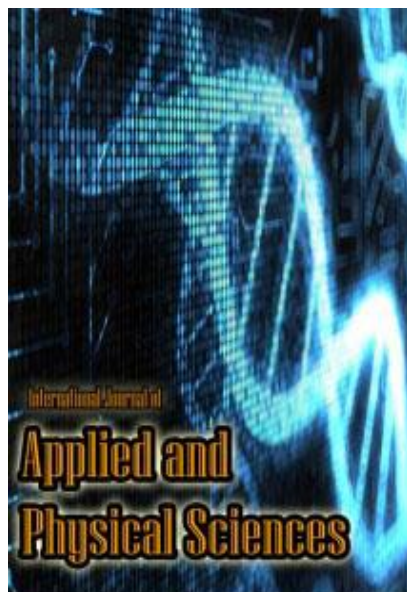


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YAHYA IBN 'ADI ON PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Keywords:

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Abstract. Among Christian scholars who especially distinguished themselves in the 10th/11th century Islamic Baghdad were Yahya Ibn 'Adi (d.974), Ibn Zur'ah (d.1008), Ibn al-Khammar (d.1017) and Abu 'Ali al-Samh (d.1027). Some of these Christian translators were no longer relying on the Caliphs or other patrons of learning, but often found their own means of living which in turn prolonged their own academic interest. Consequently, some of them were no mere translators any more, but genuine scholars. The chief architect among them was Yahya Ibn 'Adi. He was not only the leader of his group but was also dubbed as the best Christian translator, logician and theologian of his times. This is justified, in addition, by his ample productivity in those fields of enquiry. A considerable number of such works have evidently been used by contemporary and later writers, and have also reached us today. Hence we consider that it is in these aspects that his distinctive contributions to scholarship lie, and therefore he deserves more serious study. Thus, this qualitative study which applies conceptual content analysis method, seeks to make an analytical study of Yahya Ibn 'Adi's theory of psychotherapy as reflected in his major work on ethics, Tahdhib al-Akhlaq (The Refinement of Character).

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INTRODUCTION

Yahya's name as given by his biographers, contemporaries and attested by his own testimony is Abu Zakariyya' Yahya Ibn 'Adi Ibn Hamid Ibn Zakariyya' al-Takriti al-Mantiqi. See [1, pp. 327-328], [2, 297-298], [3, p. 264], [4, p. 361]. He received the name Yahya (John) at birth. Later on when he became a father and head of his family, he was given, as customary among the Arabs, the surname taken from one of his sons, "Abu Zakariyya' (father of Zakariyya)"; the addition of his ancestors' names to his own, "Yahya Ibn 'Adi (father) Ibn Hamid (grandfather) Ibn Zakariyya' (great grandfather)", is also necessary not only for exactness, but also for avoiding any possible confusion with those of similar name; his nick-name "al-Mantiqi" (the logician), is beyond doubt, awarded to him for his skill at dialectic [3, p. 264], [4, p. 261], [5, vol. 1, p. 235], while his ethnic name, al-Takriti" (the man from Takrit), indicates his home town.

Yahya was born in Takrit (the northern frontier district of 'Iraq) in 893 A.D. of Jacobite or Monophysite Christian parentage. Takrit, the old metropolis of the East, was situated on the right bank of the Tigris, about 100 miles north of Baghdad and almost equidistant from Mawsil. [6, p. 104], [7, pp. 56-57]. As to Yahya's early life and education, biographers leave us ignorant. Nevertheless, we know that, probably after completing his early education in Takrit, Yahya went to Baghdad to continue his studies and pursue his interest sometime between 910 and 915 A.D., when he was aged around 17 to 21. From the epithet "nazil

Baghdad" (resident of Baghdad) which is often attached to both his life and career, it may be gathered that he had spent most of his academic life in Baghdad, and become a distinguished scholar at the important centres of learning [4, p. 361], [8, p. 170]. Thus, Yahya seems to have been one of the distinctive scholars at the time, as with many other intellectuals who had received the same title.

Yahya was a prolific copyist of manuscripts and also a keen lover of books, who constantly replenish his book supply for the benefit of his customers as well as for his friends and pupils. Nevertheless, he was not simply a slavish copier, but very often he revised and rectified many of the existing versions and, more importantly, he prepared numerous translations of Greek works mostly from Syriac into Arabic since he knew no Greek [9, p. 38]. Not surprisingly therefore, his contemporary biographer, [3, pp. 252-253; 3, pp. 238-303], depended on him as a bibliographical source and utilised the catalogue of his books when writing the section on "ancient philosophy" in his well-known book al-Fihrist. Another piece of information again furnished by Ibn al-Nadim (d. 990), that Yahya was distressed by the discovery that the works he had diligently sought for, had already been sold, while still others had been burnt. This confirms his position as an avid collector of books. The fact that he was also designated as a "translator" by [10, vol. 1, p. 37], is of course justified by his expertise in such a field in addition to his copious productivity in translation.

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Following the death of his master, Matta b. Yunus in 940, and with the absence of another master of him, al-Farabi (d. 950), who had left Baghdad long before, specifically to travel to study in Syria and Egypt and set himself up at the court of Sayf al-Dawla (d.967) of Aleppo in 942, Yahya became the new leader of philosophical studies in Baghdad. He was now in his late 40s and exercised a truly intellectual sovereignty for the next three decades at the centre; the intellectuals of the new generation, comprising Muslims, Christians, Jews and others alike joined his majlis (school) [6, pp. 55-56], [11, pp. 103-206]. Among his celebrated Muslims disciples were al-Sijistani (d. 1001), 'Isa b. 'Ali (d. 1001), Muhammad al-Badihi (d. 990), and Abu- Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. 1023). The Christians were, namely, Ibn Zur'a (d. 1008), Ibn al-Khammar (d. 1017), and Abu 'Ali al-Samh (d. 1027). There was also a Jew, Wahab b. Thaqif al-Rumi; and a Sabian, Abu Ishaq al-Sabi' [10, vol. 1, pp. 31-41]; [11, pp. 103-285].

Al-Tawhidi (d. 1023), who was a pupil of Yahya as well as a member of the group, tells us that most of his colleagues were prominent in the majlis set up by Yahya, who was also the ustadh (master) of the school. This is attested as well by the reminiscences of two contemporary biographers, [3, p. 264], who considers Yahya as the leader among his associates and unique in his time; and [12, p. 122], who portrays Yahya as the chief authority of philosophy, particularly logic, during the period. Thus, we notice the continual use of the Alexandrian title, "Head (scholarches / ra'is) of the school" in the tenth/eleventh century Baghdad, and the succession of Abu Bishr Matta b. Yunus (d. 940), al-Farabi (d. 950), Yahya Ibn 'Adi (d. 974), and Abu Salayman al-Sijistani (d. 1001), as head of the school.

YAHYA AND PLATO'S TRICHOTOMY OF THE SOUL

[13, p. 417]; and [14, vol. 32, pp. 221, 222, 240] are both probably right in believing that most of the Arab writers on ethics, based their ethical reflections on Plato's trichotomy of the soul: the rational, the spirited and the appetitive [21, pp. 125-128, pp. 206-224]; [22, pp. 97-100]. According to Plato the rational is the faculty in virtue of which we reflect on the good and the bad and with which we make up our minds and take decisions accordingly. The spirited is the source of our moral sentiments such as anger, pugnacity, ambition, love and honour; and the appetitive is the faculty that concerns our biological appetites such as the request for food, drink, sexual intercourse and other desires.

In the *Timaeus*, [21, pp. 97-100] assigns these three partitions of the soul to different components of the human body: the rational to the head (brain) the spirited to the breast (heart) and the appetitive to the belly (liver); while in the *Republic*, [22, pp. 218,219,221] insists that "the reason (i.e., the rational) ought to rule having the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole, and the spirit ought to obey and support it". When the rational and the spirited souls have been properly trained and well educated,

continues Plato, "they must be put in charge of the appetitive which forms the greater part of each man's make-up and is naturally insatiable". Therefore, Plato, and indeed, his student and successor Aristotle urged that the truly virtuous wise man is he who puts the irrational parts of his soul - the spirited and the appetitive - under the command of his reason. So that concludes Plato, he "attains self-mastery and order and lives on good terms with himself". Or as [23, p. 981] has defined him, the truly virtuous wise man, is he who "lives with reference to the ruling principle (i.e., the rational) and with reference to the formed habit and the activity of the ruling principle, as the slave must live with reference to that of the master".

Plato was known to the Arabs as Aflatun, while his original writings, for example, the *Republic*, the *Laws* and the *Timaeus* were known as *Kitab al-Siyasa*, *al-Nawamis*, and *Timawas* respectively. His biography, often furnished with his literary activities, is preserved in many Arabic books that deal particularly with the history of philosophy, such as those of [24], [29], [3], [4], and many others. Although not a single Arabic version of Platonic dialogues has reached us today, there is evidence that the Arabs translated, probably on rare occasions in full, the *Republic*, the *Laws*, the *Timaeus* and even the *Sophist*. Besides, they also knew the commentary works on the Platonic corpus such as those of Olympiodorus on the *Sophist*, Proclus on the *Phaedo* and possibly Proclus's other commentaries on the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*, Plutarch's work on the *Timaeus* and perhaps Galen's *Synopsis of the Platonic Dialogues*. Every so often the Arabs, mostly the Christians, also translated these commentary works into Arabic. Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (d. 874), for instance, translated Proclus's commentary on the *Timaeus*; his son, Ishaq (d. 911) translated Olympiodorus's commentary on the *Sophist*, while part of Proclus's commentary on the *Phaedo* translated by Ibn Zur'a (d. 1008) [13, pp. 387-422]; [14, pp. 236-252]; and [25, pp. 14-45].

Yet others, mostly the Muslims, such men as al-Razi (d. 925), al-Farabi (d. 950) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), in addition, developed their own independent studies on some of the important Platonic dialogues at their disposal. Al-Razi, for example, wrote a commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* [26, pp. 10-11], al-Farabi prepared his own summary of the first nine books of Plato's *Laws*, but omitted Book X that deals with Religion, while Ibn Rushd, in his turn, wrote a commentary on the *Republic* [27].

Through the information supplied by a contemporary biographer and a close friend of Yahya, [3, pp. 245-246], we know that most of the above-mentioned Platonic dialogues were known to Yahya, in spite of his making no reference to either Plato or his works in his *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*. In fact, almost all of the Platonic corpus, including Plutarch's work *On the Production of the Soul* in the *Timaeus*, the *Theaetetus*, translated by Olympiodorus, the *Sophistes* translated by Ishaq Ibn Hunayn (d. 911), a copy of the *Crito* and perhaps the *Cratylus*, were read by

Ibn al-Nadim from the manuscript (khatt) of Yahya. That Yahya also possessed and accordingly corrected an earlier translation of the *Timaeus* and made another Arabic version of the *Laws* (al-Nawamis) apart from that of Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (d. 874), is also verified by early Arabic sources including Ibn al-Nadim (d. 990) and al-Qifti (d. 1248).

Now turning back to Yahya's theory of psychotherapy, it is true that Plato's tripartition of the soul was fully acceptable to him. Yet, Plato's and Aristotle's ideas of the perfectly virtuous happy man as he who lives exclusively under the rule of his reason, who practises his virtues, or that is to say, as a moral man in action, had again been approved by Yahya. However, being a scholar who was himself physician, Plato's and Aristotle's views were considered basically as no more than the starting point of his own investigations. Naturally therefore, Yahya's main concerns were never resolved with the acceptance of the Platonic trichotomy of the soul, nor with the identification of the so-called self-controlled man, but extended to the exploration of the practical ways of how to control such a soul and to associate with society so that that ideal man may be realised, a matter wherein Plato and Aristotle are lacking. It is in this respect that Yahya can be said to have made distinctive contributions to knowledge in general and to moral philosophy in particular. [13] and [14] studies omitted these aspects, while at the same time accepting the significance of Yahya's works.

THE SOUL AND ITS EFFECTS ON CHARACTER

Like his predecessors; [15, p. 26, 38], [16, p. 105] and [17, p. 35], [28, pp. 73-74] also accepts Plato's trichotomy of the soul: the rational, the irascible and the concupiscent, as the basis of his ethics. But if Plato, [20, pp. 38-39], [17, p. 35], [18, p. 15], [19, p. 43], and others, all assign these three souls to the different components of the human body, to the brain, the heart and the liver respectively, Yahya connects none of them to any of these bodily organs, nor does he make any attempt to discuss the problem of the immortality of the rational soul after the death of man, or of its migration from one body to another, as did [21, pp. 440,443,448]; [20, pp. 121,127,128] and others.

It appears, then, that Yahya's chief interest was not very much in the identification of the true nature of these souls, but more in their relations with people's characters - or in how these three souls affect the formation of man's character. For [28, pp. 73-74] strongly maintains that every character is based on them. Thus, he writes:

"The soul is the principal cause of people's diversities in character. It has three faculties, which are considered also as three souls. They are the concupiscent, the irascible and the rational. All characters proceed from these faculties: some are the product of only one of them, others are of two, and still others are of all of these three faculties".

This reasoning is evidently a mixture of Plato's idea of the tripartition of the soul with that of Galen on the interaction

between character and the Platonic trichotomy of the soul. At the beginning of his *Kitab al-Akhlaq* for instance [15, p. 26] writes, "I have explained this in the book that I wrote on *The Views of Hippocrates and Plato*, and I have shown there that man possesses something that is responsible for thought, something that is responsible for anger and a third thing that is responsible for desire". In this book, *Kitab al-Akhlaq*, [15, p. 26] continues, I shall call "that which is responsible for thought 'the rational soul' and 'the cogitative soul', whether it be a separate soul, a part or a faculty; I shall call that which is responsible for anger 'the irascible soul' or 'the animal soul' and that which is responsible for desire 'the concupiscent soul' or 'the vegetative soul' ". Then, in the middle of his second chapter, [15, pp. 38-39] refers again to that Platonic tripartition of the soul, but this time within the context of their connections with men's characters. Here are his words:

"Understanding resides only in the rational soul, and is a faculty that perceives agreement and disagreement in all things. This soul inclines towards the beautiful (i.e., virtue). The irascible soul is the seat of anger, which is why it is so called, it inclines towards conquest. The concupiscent soul has a faculty by which the body is nourished; it inclines towards pleasures. These make up the fundamentals of character. The difference between the various types of character is caused only by a greater or lesser degree of inclination in each of these souls, according to the extent of its natural strength".

A blend of mainly Plato's and Galen's ideas is again obvious when [28, pp. 74, 76, 79] speaks about the natural inclinations and appetites of the different powers of these souls. The rational, says Yahya, is the source of reflection, understanding, memory, discernment and judgement; the irascible is the source of anger, emotion, bravery and love of domination; and the concupiscent is the source of all desires and bodily pleasures. Therefore, the self-controlled man is seen by Yahya, and indeed by his predecessors, Plato, Aristotle and Galen, as he who succeeds in bringing both the irascible and the concupiscent parts of his soul under the command of the rational; or as he whose anger and desires are in constant obedience to his reason. It follows, therefore, that Yahya's scheme of psychotherapy must also consist in such ways: one is in the knowledge of the natural inclinations of the different faculties of the soul, as well as of their effects on character; the other lies in the process of rectifying the irascible and the concupiscent by strengthening and habituating the eminent activities of the rational, for the latter is the basis and the essential instrument for the process of self-control and the art of character training [28, pp. 73-82,105,109,117,119).

YAHYA'S THEORY OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

We shall now expound how Yahya develops his methods of psychotherapy in the light of the above two ways. It is worth noting that even though such courses mostly appear in the

form of brief counsels and simple examples and advice, they are yet lively and significant and, hence, deserve to be noted, for most of them are not to be found in the earlier works on ethics, particularly in those of Plato, Aristotle and Galen [30].

As in Galen, the concupiscent soul, writes [28, pp. 74-75], is common to man and animals. It is, as Plato and [15, p. 45] have said, the basis of all desires and bodily pleasures such as the agitation for food, drink, sexual intercourse, and their like. This soul is very imperious. It truly enslaves anyone who fails to control it, reduces him to brute level, and makes him very difficult to educate. In this objectionable state, he gradually loses his dignity and develops his madness. With a kind of disgust, he avoids the society of the learned and virtuous people, preferring the company of degraded men like himself and their licentious company. Such a person will surely end up in crime and other sorts of depravation and immorality, having no hesitation to use unlawful means like stealing other people's property, so as to satisfy his lustful desires, for most of them are possible only by means of wealth, money, power and other similar things. Such a man should also be discarded, continues Yahya, as the worst of men. The rulers, then, have the mission of correcting and removing him from his deadly contact with the rest of society, particularly the young. For their souls are easily vulnerable to influence, and naturally attracted towards pleasure.

On how to restrain the power of the concupiscent soul, [28, pp. 74, 76, 109-111], advises that one should always bear in mind, especially at the very moment of desire, that one has intended to subdue one's concupiscent soul. Repetition of such acts soon makes a man master of all his passions; he should seek the association of men of virtue: ascetics, monks, hermits, religious leaders, and the learned, whose acquaintance will influence him beneficially; he should study the books on ethics, politics and the history of the virtuous, the ascetics and famous people; he should rule out the use of wine, and if that is impossible, then moderation should be observed, yet with people commending respect. An intoxicant strengthens his concupiscent soul, excites his passions, leading him to immorality. Man is able to prevent himself from evil deeds by the help of the rational soul, i.e., reason. But when he becomes intoxicated, he loses this controlling power, the rational, acting irrationally like animals, for the irrational powers, the concupiscent and the irascible, are shared by both man and animals.

He who intends to conquer the concupiscent Soul, [28, pp. 112-113, 125-128], goes on, should not attend concerts too frequently, especially, if the artists are young and women. Songs and music have tremendous powers to stimulate passions - and even more so when expressed by an attractive young woman, attracting the listener with numerous impressions which are so impossible to reject. He should uphold moderation in eating and drinking, and learn to share his food with others. He should bear in mind that the goal of taking food is not to be excellent in so doing, but to avoid pains of hunger as well as to supply the body

with its necessities of life; and such a person should always be aware of the fact and make it the creed of his heart that immorality, intemperance and greediness are evils and disgraceful, while his soul rejects them, yearning for moderateness and frugality and, in fact, quite capable of fleeing such defects.

On the relations of the second soul, the irascible, to man's character, and on how it affects the development of the latter, [28, pp. 76-78], agrees with Galen that the soul, like the concupiscent, is shared by both man and other animals. It is, as in the view of both Plato and Galen, the source of anger, arrogance, bravery and love of conquest and domination, more violent than the concupiscent soul. If man allows himself to be overcome by the irascible, he will certainly lose his gentleness and dignity, projecting his anger, fierce hatreds, vengeful wishes and other weakness. If he continues in this state of shame, there will, indeed, be no distinction between him and a savage beast, who hurls himself on his enemy. Sometimes, in his inability to assault his opponent, he turns his rage against his own relatives, friends and even himself; cursing himself, slapping his face, and utters foolish words. Further, he who submits himself to the irascible soul will have a strong love of influence, power and domination over others. At times when incapable of achieving such goals through legitimate means, he will have no hesitation in employing dirty tricks such as possessing influential things such as wealth, money and position through illegal means, attacking people, and even end up in killing his challenger.

As to how to control the irascible power, [28, pp. 114-117, pp. 132-133], insists that one should take a lesson from the outrageous behaviour of foolish people when they are in anger, assaulting their rivals, relatives, friends, servants and even their own selves. In this way, he will win over his own anger and restrain its rashness towards revenge and punishment; he should know in his heart that anyone who submits to anger descends to the level of savage beasts, which act without knowledge and consideration. If he is confronted by such a person, he should abstain promptly from him. Let him suppose that he is facing a common animal and respond only just as he would to a dog barking in the way; and when stimulated to vengeance over those who insult him, he should imagine himself in the offender's place and think of what proper punishment he would consider just if he was culpable himself. The other's faults will at once be seen in their true objectivity; a feeling of moderation and forgiveness will arise in his soul, and lead him soon to be the master of his anger.

Such a person should avoid drunkenness, for it agitates the irascible soul much more cruelly than it does the concupiscent, throwing him into trouble: abusing and assaulting his associates with whom he sympathised just prior to his drunkenness; he should consult and use his reason in all his actions and activities, reflecting upon it before undertaking any of them; and he should seek the company of the virtuous, the men of

knowledge, the men who win over their angers, and others similar to them.

In contrast to the concupiscent and the irascible souls, the rational is the faculty by which man becomes human, distinguishing himself from the animal, for the rational is peculiar only to man, while the concupiscent and the irascible are shared by both man and animals. Corresponding again to both Plato and Galen, Yahya also holds that the rational soul is the principle of reflection, understands, memory, discernment and judgement, constituting the proper grandeur of the soul. Thanks to it, beauty is admired, the good approved, the evil blamed, and the concupiscent and the irascible powers are brought under control [28, pp. 71-79].

The rational soul has both virtues and vices. Examples of the former are, the acquisition of the sciences and arts, impelling man to abstain from vices and stimulating him towards kindness, goodwill, tranquillity, temperance and other excellencies. Examples of the latter are deceit, cheating, trickery, envy, hypocrisy and others. Hence, he whose rational soul is strong becomes virtuous; he whose rational soul is weak becomes vicious; whereas he whose rational soul is in the intermediate state, becomes neither good nor bad but inclined towards both conditions, for he possesses both good and bad. Most peoples, claim [28, pp. 79-82], fall in this last group.

Again like Plato and Galen, [28, pp. 79-82,105,109,117,119] also holds that the rational soul is the basic prerequisite of the art of character training. But he deviates from the former two when he claims that this soul has both virtues and vices, whereas in Plato and Galen, the rational soul is rather by nature good and noble, and hence, possesses no vice. Consequently, ethics or moral philosophy, as seen by Yahya, also lies in the process of strengthening the virtuous aspects of the rational soul, developing and habituating them, so that man may be able to use it to restrain the other parts of his soul, namely, the concupiscent and the irascible.

But the question is how this rational power can be developed and strengthened. [28, pp. 79,117-122] reply is that since the rational soul is naturally inclined towards science and morality, and becomes strong by the acquisition of these things, he who wishes to make his rational soul strong should, therefore, fulfil its noble desires by acquiring the rational sciences (*al-‘ulum al-‘aqliyyah*): perhaps including mathematics, natural science and metaphysics, and by studying books on ethics, politics and other subjects of practical science. This will not only consolidate his will, determination and power of thought, but also will enable him to repress his passions, refine his character, and master his anger and desire; and such a one should also associate with the men of knowledge, especially with those who are well-grounded in the rational sciences, i.e. mathematicians, theologians,

physicians and others, following and habituating their characters and examples.

For him who is not able to take up the study of the rational sciences, for a legitimate reason, he should still reflect upon his power of thought, i.e., reason, using his common sense. Indeed, a little reflection is enough to teach us the great difference between good and evil, right and wrong. Passions, pleasures, anger, envy, deceit and such like, leave only shame and lifelong remorse, while virtue is without regret, producing lasting joy. Besides, he who has determined to refine his character should never be content with less than the highest level of virtue, for if he is satisfied with only a small portion of it, he will stay at a less honourable level than the goal envisaged, never reaching his perfection and complete happiness.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is true that Yahya based his theory of psychotherapy on Plato's tripartition of the soul. And it is also true that this is only accepted as a starting point of his own investigation, for he modified and refined such Platonic ideas especially through the ways of Galen and others. That is to say, Yahya's conception of the tripartition of the human soul is not very different from those of Plato and Galen. The only difference is that Yahya has discussed the relation of these three souls with man's character in much greater detail, matters which Plato and Galen have only outlined. In point of fact, Yahya even goes far beyond Plato, Aristotle and Galen, particularly, in giving a lively programme of how man may carry out his plan of self-control, curbing each power of his inner self: the concupiscent, the irascible and the rational. Since most of his generous ideas, wise counsels and colourful examples are not to be found in the ethical thought of either Plato, Aristotle or Galen they should, in all probability, be regarded as Yahya's own contribution to philosophy, particularly ethics.

Our research, therefore, cannot agree with modern scholars such as [14, p. 165], who claims that Yahya's *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq* is based "entirely on a lost Greek treatise". Leaving aside the fact that neither the author nor the name of such a treatise was mentioned by Walzer, we are convinced nevertheless, that if that lost Greek work had reached us, it probably could go no further than of Plato and Aristotle, or perhaps appear as no more than a synthesis of both. For they represent the highest advance in morals that we have got from this time. Moreover, since Yahya's reliance on the works of Plato, Aristotle, Galen and others is evident, it is not to be supposed, therefore, that he could have depended "entirely" on such an unknown document, though the likelihood that he might also use it as one of his sources, or perhaps one of his important sources, is not "entirely" ruled out.

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–This article does not have any appendix–