

# AVICENNAS “DE ANIMA”

---

*Željko Paša*

UDK

## *Introduction*

Avicenna is one of the foremost philosophers in the Medieval Hellenistic Islamic tradition that also includes al-Farabi and His philosophical theory is a comprehensive, detailed and rationalistic account of the nature of God and Being, in which he finds a systematic place for the corporeal world, spirit, insight, and the varieties of logical thought including dialectic, rhetoric and poetry.

Central to Avicennas philosophy is his concept of reality and reasoning. Reason, in his scheme, can allow progress through various levels of understanding and can finally lead to God, the ultimate truth. He stresses the importance of gaining knowledge, and develops a theory of knowledge based on four faculties: sense perception, retention, imagination and estimation. Imagination has the principal role in intellection, as it can compare and construct images which give it access to universals. Again the ultimate object of knowledge is God, the pure intellect.

In metaphysics, Avicenna makes a distinction between essence and existence; essence considers only the nature of things, and should be considered apart from their mental and physical realization. This distinction applies to all things except God, whom Avicenna identifies as the first cause and therefore both essence and existence. He also argued that the soul is incorporeal and cannot be destroyed. The soul, in his view, is an agent with choice in this world between good and evil, which in turn leads to reward or punishment.

Reference has sometimes been made to Avicennas supposed mysticism, but this would appear to be based on a misreading by Western philosophers of parts of his work. As one of the most important practitioners of philosophy, Avicenna exercised a strong influence over both other Islamic philosophers and medieval Europe. His work was one of the main targets of s attack on Hellenistic influences in Islam. In Latin translations, his works influenced many Christian philosophers, most notably Thomas Aquinas.

The discussion of the human soul, its existence, nature, ultimate objective and eternity, occupies a highly important position in Avicennas philosophy and forms its main focus. He agreed, as did his Greek predecessors, that the soul consists of non-rational and rational parts. The non-rational part they

divided into the plant and animal souls, the rational part into the practical and the theoretical intellects. He believed that the non-rational part is linked essentially to the body. He agreed that, while the soul is in the body, its non-rational part is to manage the body, its practical intellect is to manage worldly affairs, including those of the body, and its theoretical intellect is to know the eternal aspects of the universe. He thought that the ultimate end or happiness of the soul depends on its ability to separate itself from the demands of the body and to focus on grasping the eternal aspects of the universe. All believed that the non-rational soul comes into being and unavoidably perishes and he believed that it has no beginning and no end.

In our work we will present Avicenna's teaching on the Human soul. This teaching, together with some other Islamic philosophers, makes a big influence in Islamic view and teaching on the Human soul.

### 1. *Definition of the soul*

Speaking about the soul Avicenna in his *A? wHl an-nafs*, first looks for a definition of the soul;<sup>1</sup> he concludes that the soul must be related to the body, but in the case of man it is an extrinsic mover and is not "impressed" in the body or mixed with it; if we want to call it a form, it is not like something dwelling in the body but like its governor.<sup>2</sup> In the words of *ash-Shifh*: "The soul is not impressed in the body nor does it subsist in it, but its special relationship (*ikhti? H?*) with it is after the manner of individual configuration (*haya*), which attracts the soul to look after an individual body, with an essential and special providence for it."<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere Avicenna goes as far as saying that the soul is the "form" by which the body exists and acts.<sup>4</sup>

In any case, in his essence (*anniyya*), man is not his body, but he is his soul, in spite of the fact that those who are immersed in the world of sense think otherwise.<sup>5</sup>

In *ash-Shifh*, Avicenna holds that every soul, even that of plants, is a substance (*jawhar*) and not an accident (*'ara?*); it is distinct from the body and gives it its consistence and existence. But, he says, not every substance

1 *A? wHl an-nafs*, ch. 1.

2 Cf. *RisHla fol-kalHm 'alH n-nafs an-nH? iqa, ash-Shifh*, an-nafs, maqHla 5. *fa? l 1-2*; cf. *KalimHt a? -? ufiyya*, 158-160; *RisHla fobayHn al-mu'jizHt wa-l-karHmHt wa-l-a'Hjdb*, p. 404.

3 *Ash-Shifh*, an-nafs, maqHla 5. *fa? l 2*, p. 196.

4 *Mab? ath 'an al-quwH n-nafshniyya*, ch. 2.

5 *Ar-RisHla al-a?? awiyya fol-ma'Hd*, 141-151.

is necessarily separable. Speaking of the question of intermediate forms, Avicenna holds that there is no other actual form but the soul, and that the soul of an animal is the cause of its specific animal activities, like sensation, and also of its vegetative functions.<sup>6</sup> In the case of man, vegetation, sensation and intellection do not come from three souls, but only one. Avicenna says that on this point he differs from Plato (and implicitly from al-Fḥḥḥb).<sup>7</sup>

But we should not forget that when he writes about chemistry, Avicenna attacks those who hold that in a composite the elements lose their own forms to take on the sole form of the compound. Rather, he says that earth and fire retain their own substantial forms when they are part of flesh, and only their active qualities are modified.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Relation "soul — body"

In *ar-Ruyḥ wa-t-ta'bā*, Avicenna gives further details on the relationship between the soul and the body: "Man does not have one single meaning (*ma'nḥ*), but he is composed of two substances: one is the soul and the other the body. The soul has the role of a subject, and the body, with all its members, is like the instrument which the soul uses for its different operations. The surprising thing is that the body is not an extrinsic instrument, like a sword... but the body is an instrument that the soul joins to itself by preserving its shape and using it as it needs sit."<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, in holding that the soul and the body are two distinct substances, with an accidental relationship with one another, Avicenna does not see the consequence that, if the soul is not the form of the body, the body must have another form which is not the soul.<sup>10</sup>

As for the mode of governing the body, Avicenna says that the soul acts through the intermediacy of the heart, and the heart regulates the sensitive and vegetative powers, each in its own organ, through the intermediacy of physical "spirits".<sup>11</sup>

Earlier, Qusḥ ibn-Lqḥ had postulated an "animal spirit" (*ar-r? al-? ay-awḥn*) which serves as the souls intermediary in giving life to the body, while

6 *Ash-Shifḥ*, an-nafs, maqḥla 1, fa? l 3; maqḥla 5, fa? l 7.

7 *A? wḥl an-nafs*, ch. 11.

8 *Ash-Shifḥ*: al-Kawn wa-l-fasḥd, fa? l 7.

9 *Al-fa? l alaf*, p. 274; cfr. aussi *al-'llm al-ladunā*, p. 187–188.

10 Cf. *ash-Shifḥ*, an-nafs, maqḥla 5, fa? l 4 = *A? wḥl an-nafs*, ch. 9; cfr. *An-nukat wa-l-fawḥid fo'ilm a? -? abḥā*, pp. 158–161.

11 *Ash-Shifḥ*, an-nafs, maqḥla 5, fa? l 8; *an-Nukat wa-l-fawḥid fol-'ilm a? -? abḥā*, pp. 155–156.

the "psychic spirit" (*ar-r? an-nafsḥn*) in the brain serves as an intermediary for sensation and the movement of the body.<sup>12</sup> This idea was retained by Avicenna in his *al-'ilm al-ladun*,<sup>13</sup> but in his *ar-Ruyḥ wa-t-ta'ba*,<sup>14</sup> he says that there are three spirits: a vegetative one in the liver, an animal one in the heart, and a psychic one in the brain. And he even goes as far as saying that there are three corresponding souls which are the forms of these spirits. This position, contrary to his position expressed elsewhere, raises the question of the authenticity of this work but, as we have seen, a multiplicity of substantial forms is in accord with the Avicennas dualism. The three spirits with their proper organs are found also in his *Risḥla a? -? alḥt*, where the three spirits seem to imply three souls, of which only the rational soul is immortal.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. *The senses*

Avicenna, like Aristotle, distinguishes five external senses.<sup>16</sup> But for the internal senses, he presents a slightly different scheme ŠIbn-Rushd will be more accurate: (1) the common sense (*al-mushtarak*), (2) the imagination (*al-khayyḥ/ al-mutasawwira*) which retains sensible images, (3) the estimative power (*al-mutawahhima*) which judges the particular good or evil of sensible things, (4) the estimative memory (*al-mutakhayyila*), or cogitative power (*al-mufakkira*) in the case of men, to retain what the estimative power presents, and (5) memory (*al-? ḥfi? a/ adh-dhḥkira*) which retains all sensible images and their meanings (*ma'ḥn*, whether of good or of evil) in general.<sup>17</sup> Reasoning, he observes, takes time because it uses the imagination.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of the radical distinction that Avicenna makes between the soul and the body, he holds that the exterior and interior senses serve the soul as a source of knowledge. Especially in geometry and astronomy, diagrams and graphic representations are necessary.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the senses can be

12 *Kitḥb al-farq bayn ar-r? wa-n-nafs wa-quwḥn-nafs wa-mḥhiyya an-nafs*, dans *Rasḥ'il Ibn-Saḥ*, 2, p. 88, 93.

13 P. 187-188.

14 P. 275.

15 Pp. 3-7.

16 *An-Nukat wa-l-fawḥid fo l-'ulm a? -? abḥ*, p. 152.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155; *ash-Shiḥḥ*, an-nafs, pp. 145-171; *Risḥla fo bayḥn al-mu'jizḥt wa-l-karḥmḥt wa-l-a'ḥḍ*, pp. 401-403.

18 *Ta'laḥḥt*, p. 109.

19 *A? wḥl an-nafs*, ch. 6; *Mab? ath 'an al-quwḥn-nafsḥmiyya*, ch. 8; *ash-Shiḥḥ*, an-nafs, maḥḥla 5. *fa? l 3*; *An-Nukat wa-l-fawḥid fo l-'ilm a? -? abḥ*, pp. 156-157, 161-162, 167-169; *Ta'laḥḥt*, pp. 83-84.

an obstacle to abstract reasoning, because the senses do not want to be left idle during an intense activity of the intellect.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. *The Intellects*

In *ash-Shifh* Avicenna follows al-F<sup>h</sup>h<sup>h</sup>bo in the division of intellects, with the addition of the habitual intellect.<sup>21</sup> The first, called the "material intellect" because of its resemblance to prime matter empty of all forms, is also the "passive intellect" in relationship to *intellectus agens*.<sup>22</sup> The second is *intellectus in acto* when it makes a judgement. The third is the habitual intellect which knows self-evident first principles and what derives from these principles. The fourth is the perfected or acquired (*mustafhd*) intellect. The fifth is *intellectus agens*.

The *Ris<sup>h</sup>la fo l-? udd*<sup>23</sup> and the *Ris<sup>h</sup>la fo l-'uql*<sup>24</sup> present the same five intellects, but in these treatises *intellectus in acto* precedes the acquired intellect, and there are many agent intellects which are identified with the angels. The *Ris<sup>h</sup>la fo l-hudd* goes on to explain other terms, such as "the intellect of all" (*'aql al-kull*), which can be understood as the intellect which governs the highest sphere, from which the motion of the whole universe flows, or as all the intermediate intellects; the last of these is *intellectus agens* for all human souls. Likewise, the "soul of all" (*nafs al-kull*) is all the soul of the heavenly bodies. The relationship between these souls and the corresponding intellects is the same as between our souls and *intellectus agens*. The soul Šof the moonš is the proximate cause of the existence of sub-lunar things, and it derives its existence from the intellect which corresponds to it. In this work Avicenna explains that the variant terms, "the universal soul"/ "the universal intellect" (*an-nafs al-kull*/*al-'aql al-kulli*) only mean a universal concept which includes all the heavenly souls or intellects, but elsewhere he speaks differently: The Intellect which is the first creation and which directs all creation which follows is sometimes called "the universal soul" (*an-nafs al-kullo*) or, in religious and non-philosophical language, "the universal spirit" (*ar-r' al-kullo*).<sup>25</sup>

20 *An-Nukat wa-l-faw<sup>h</sup>id fo l-'ilm a? -? ab<sup>o</sup>o*, pp. 164–165, 168–169; *Ris<sup>h</sup>la fo bay<sup>h</sup>n al-mu'jiz<sup>h</sup>t wa-l-kar<sup>h</sup>m<sup>h</sup>t wa-l-a'<sup>h</sup>jb*, p. 405.

21 *Maq<sup>h</sup>la 5, fa? l 6*, pp. 212–220.

22 *A? w<sup>h</sup>l an-nafs*, ch. 12.

23 Pp. 68–70.

24 P. 416.

25 *Ris<sup>h</sup>la ajwiba 'an 'ashar mas<sup>h</sup>il, al-masala ath-th<sup>h</sup>litha*, p. 78.

In a noteworthy passage of his *an-Nukat wa-l-fawḥid fol-'ilm a? -? abḍo*, Avicenna compares the five intellects with the elements mentioned in Qurḥn 24: 35:

“God is the light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche where there is a lamp; the lamp is inside a glass which is like a shining star. The lamp is lighted because of a blessed tree, an olive tree neither from the east nor from the west, whose oil would give light even if fire never touched it. Light upon light! God directs to his light anyone he wishes. The material intellect is the niche. The reasoning by which the habitual intellect looks for the middle term of a demonstration is the olive tree; the rapid grasp of this middle term is the oil; the habitual intellect (*'aql bi-l-malaka*), if it is weak, is the glass; if it is strong it is the holy power whose oil would give light even if no fire touched it. The acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustaḥḥid*), which actually knows first principles and what derives from them is the light upon light. When it can easily turn to intelligible things, putting itself in front of the rays of holy lights, it is *intellectus in acto* (*al-'aql bi-l-fi'l*), or the lamp. *Intellectus agens* which gives existence and knowledge to the soul is the fire.”<sup>26</sup>

The *Risḥla fo ithbḥt an-nabuwwḥt* gives a variant interpretation of this Qurḥn verse: “God is the light; the material intellect is the niche; the acquired intellect is the lamp; an intermediate state between these intellects Ši. e. the habitual intellectš is the glass. But the olive tree is the cogitative power (*al-quwwa al-fikriyya*), the interior sense that is between the intellect (the east from which the light comes) and the purely animal senses (the west where the light disappears). *Intellectus agens*, finally, is the fire.”<sup>27</sup>

In passing, we can note that in his *Tafsḥ Hya an-nr*, Avicenna makes all the images of this verse refer to Muhammad, who enlightens the world; the same holds for *Risḥla al-fi'l wa-l-infi'ḥl*.<sup>28</sup> In *al-'Ilm al-laduno* Avicenna makes the animal spirit the lamp, the heart the glass, life its brilliance, the blood the oil; sensation and movement are the light; the concupiscible is its heat, and the irascible its smoke.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, the division of the intellects in *ash-Shifḥ*, which follows *al-Fḥḥḥo*, more or less, was revised in his other works. The *Risḥla fol-? udd*<sup>30</sup> and the *Risḥla fol-'uql*<sup>31</sup> multiply *intellectus agens*, and *an-Nukat* makes an-

26 Pp. 162–163, 167.

27 Pp. 49–52.

28 P. 4.

29 P. 188.

30 Pp. 68–70.

31 P. 416.

other change. Then *A? wHl an-nafs*,<sup>32</sup> *'Uyn al-mashil*,<sup>33</sup> *'Uyn al-? ikma*<sup>34</sup> and *Rishla foithbHt an-nabuwHt*<sup>35</sup> reduce the intellects to four, just as they were presented by al-Kindi.

<i>Ash-ShifH:</i>	<i>R. fol-? udd/'uql:</i>	<i>An-Nukat:</i>	<b>The others:</b>
Material intellect	material	material	material
habitual intellect	habitual	habitual	habitual
<i>intellectus in acto</i>	in acto	acquired	in act
acquired/holy intellect	acquired	in acto	
<i>intellectus agens</i>	multiple agents	agent	agent

*The Rishla fol-'uql* clarifies that the different intellects of man (except for *intellectus agens*) are only different states (*a? wHl*) of the speculative intellect.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. *Intellectus in acto*

Although Avicenna describes knowledge of material things as a process of abstraction from the senses,<sup>37</sup> he insists that first principles, such as “the whole is greater than any of its parts” etc. cannot come from sensible experience, because they are too certain and universal; so they must come from a “divine emanation”.<sup>38</sup>

In *ash-ShifH* Avicenna explains that intelligible forms are not in the intellect when it does not actually think of them. The intellect has no habitual knowledge, but only the proximate preparation to receive forms anew from *intellectus agens*. The intellect thus prepared is “a kind of intellect in act” (*al-'aql bi-l-fi'l*), but when it actually knows it is “the acquired intellect” (*al-'aql al-mustafHd*).<sup>39</sup> Thus Avicenna adopts Aristotle's terminology of habitual knowledge, but he empties it of meaning by situating it in a neo-Platonic context where all knowledge comes by infusion from on high.

32 Ch. 2.

33 P. 21.

34 P. 37–38.

35 Pp. 43–44.

36 P. 416.

37 *A? wHl an-nafs*, ch. 3.

38 *Mab? ath 'an al-quwH n-nafshniyya*, ch. 10; cf. *an-Nukat wa-l-fawHid fol-'ilm a? -? abda*, 163–165; *ar-Rishla fo s-sa'Hda*, p. 13; *Ta'laqHt*, p. 23.

39 Pp. 212–220; cfr. *an-Nukat wa-l-fawHid fol-'ilm at-tabda*, 167.

In *an-Nukat* it is not clear whether Avicenna denies habitual knowledge, as he does in *ash-Shifh*. Nevertheless he says: "If it happens that the soul has acts of understanding in a stable way, and these acts are present by actual consideration, it is in fact in contact with *intellectus agens*."<sup>40</sup>

The intellect cannot be fully in act in this life, but after death it will, being in continual contact with *intellectus agens*.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, the human intellect in this life can know the existence of separated substances and some of their essential properties (*lawHzim*), but it cannot know their very essence (*haqaqa*), nor the essence of sensible things in this world, but only their properties and accidents.<sup>42</sup>

## 6. *Intellectus agens*

*Intellectus agens*, as with *al-FhrHba*, is not part of man, but is separated from him. But Avicenna goes much farther than *al-FhrHba*. For Avicenna, *intellectus agens* gives existence to human intellects, to all souls and (with the dispositive action of heavenly bodies)<sup>43</sup> to the four natural elements.<sup>44</sup> Thus it possesses all intelligible forms,<sup>45</sup> and impresses them in the human intellect "by a divine emanation", according to the disposition of the intellect to receive this emanation.<sup>46</sup> It is not God, because it produces multiple effects, whereas God, the One, can only produce one effect, the first created intellect.<sup>47</sup>

Above *intellectus agens* there is a whole hierarchy of other superior intellects: the souls of the heavenly bodies — since Avicenna insists that these are animated, endowed with intelligence and imagination to regulate their movement<sup>48</sup> — then intellects completely separated from matter, and above all of them the First Principle which gives existence to all.<sup>49</sup>

We should note that in his different works Avicenna identifies *intellectus agens* with different heavenly spirits:

40 *An-nukat*, p. 172

41 *Ash-Shifh*: *an-nafs*, *maqHla* 5, *fasl* 6.

42 *An-Nukat wa-l-fawHid fol-'ilm a? -? abda*, 165–166; *Ta'laqHt*, p. 34–35, 82.

43 See also *Ta'laqHt*, p. 41.

44 *'Uyn al-mashfil*, 9; *Mab'ath 'an al-quwHn-nafshniyya*, ch. 3, says that all souls (of all kinds) come »from without«.

45 *A? wHl an-nafs*, ch. 12; *Mab'ath 'an al-quwHn-nafshniyya*, ch. 10.

46 *Ibid.*, 39.

47 *An-Nukat wa-l-fawHid fol-'ilm at-tabda*, 166–167.

48 Cf., for example, *Rishla fos-sa'Hda*, pp. 13–15; *Ta'laqHt*, 62, 101–108, 128–130, 166.

49 Cf. also the opusculum *Mashfil 'an ahwHl ar-rh*.

1. Most strictly, it is the separated intellect corresponding to the lunar sphere, as the following passage says: "This tenth Šintellect, that of the sphere of the moonš the philosophers call *intellectus agens*. It is the spirit of holiness, which gives necessity to our souls and perfects them. Its relation with our souls (*kalimHt*) is like the relation of the sun to the eyes. He it is who greeted Mary saying, "I am only the messenger of your Lord, so that I may give you a pure boy" (QurHn 19: 19).<sup>50</sup>

In the *RisHla fo bayHn al-mu'jizHt wa-l-karHmHt wa-l-a'Hjdb*, Avicenna identifies this Agent Intellect with the "preserved table" (*lawh mafz*) of QurHn 85: 22.

2. Elsewhere he speaks of inspiration not only from *intellectus agens* but also from separated substances in general.<sup>51</sup> In his *RisHla az-ziyHtra wa-d-du'H* Avicenna explains that the eight separated intellects corresponding to the heavenly spheres are all called by the philosophers as agent intellects.<sup>52</sup> The *RisHla fol-'uql* identifies them with the angels.<sup>53</sup>

3. Lastly, sometimes he identifies *intellectus agens* with the first intellect, which God creates without any intermediary.<sup>54</sup>

In his *RisHla fo ithbHt an-nubuwwa*, Avicenna explains that *intellectus agens* gives first intelligible principles directly, but further knowledge comes by way or reasoning.<sup>55</sup> Yet elsewhere Avicenna gives *intellectus agens* a much wider role.

In sleep, *intellectus agens* acts directly on the human intellect, and through it acts on the imagination (*at-takhayyul*). But in wakefulness it is the opposite: *intellectus agens* acts directly on the imagination, and through it on the intellect.<sup>56</sup> Thus dreams can come from: (1) sensations that one had before sleeping, (2) from what thought of before sleeping, (3) from the psychic condition of the spirit of the brain, which depends on physical conditions, and lastly (4) from *intellectus agens*, which gives fore-knowledge of future things.<sup>57</sup> Avicenna explains that *intellectus agens* fills the universe by its operation without being mixed with it, but only watching over it by its providence.

50 *KalimHt a? -? ufiyya*, p. 165; the word *kalima* is often used in this sfic work for the human soul.

51 For example, *an-Nukat wa-l-fawH'id fol-'ilm a? -? abdq*, 167.

52 *JHmi' al-badH'i'*, p. 33; 'H? q, p. 284.

53 P. 418.

54 In *RisHla fo mHhiyya al-'ishq*, p. 26; *Ta'laqHt*, p. 100.

55 P. 44.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 167–168; *Ta'laqHt*, p. 83.

57 *Ar-Ru'yH wa-t-ta'bax*, al-fa? l hH, wH, pp. 283–288.

This is what the ancient Sḥbiens called "the Immediate Director" (*al-mud-abbir al-aqrab*), the other Greek philosophers "The Divine Infusion" (*al-fayd al-ilḥḥ*), the Syrians "the Word" (*al-kalima*), the Jews "Shakana" and "Spirit of Holiness", the Persians "Shayd Shaydḥm" (Light of Lights), the Manichaeans "the good spirits", the Arabs "the Angels" and the Divine Determination (*at-tayḍ al-ilḥḥ*), and Aristotle the "Agent Intellect".

This intellect is concerned with the welfare of the whole universe, but especially the welfare of men. The highest degree of inspiration coming from him is prophecy; after that his providence extends especially to kings and philosophers (*hukamḥ*), who direct others.<sup>58</sup>

In his *ar-Riḥla al-a?? awiyya fol-ma'ḥd*, Avicenna discusses the opinion that separated souls can act on living men for good or for evil, according to the state of these separated souls. Some people say that unpurified souls retain their interior estimative sense, by which they act on corporal beings. They also say that good souls are the *jinn*, while the bad are the *shayḥḥ*, or demons.<sup>59</sup> But we have seen above that, for Avicenna, all the senses corrupt at death, and the *jinn* are only the interior senses.

## 7. *Intellectus — anima*

If the intellect is a substance, it cannot be a power of the soul. In denying that the intellect uses an organ, Avicenna says that this power "knows by its essence".<sup>60</sup> We see the same confusion in *ar-Riḥla al-'arshiyya*, where Avicenna compares God's knowledge of himself with the soul's knowledge of itself.<sup>61</sup> In *Riḥla fos-sa'ḥda*, Avicenna argues that the intellective power is a substance distinct from the body.

The acts of this power come from it essentially, and not by something extrinsic to its essence. And anything whose act comes from it essentially and not from something extrinsic to its essence is a substance subsisting by its essence. Otherwise the intellect would be more noble than the substance and the essence.<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, he presents the rational soul as having two powers, the one speculative or cognitive which looks at the intelligible universe from

58 *Ibid.*, *fa? l jḥ*, pp. 290–294.

59 Pp. 215–223.

60 *A? wḥl an-nafs*, ch. 7; *'Uyn al-? ikma*, pp. 35, 38; *ar-Riḥla al-a?? awiyya fol-ma'ḥd*, pp. 167, 175

61 P. 8.

62 P. 12.

on high, the other practical which looks from below at what it must do in particular things.<sup>63</sup>

## 8. *Immortality*

As for the immortality of the soul, Avicenna rejects the exclusivism of al-Fārābī and, before him, of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who said that the intellect becomes immaterial by taking on intelligible forms and that ignorant souls will be annihilated. Opting for the opinion of Themistius, he simply says that the intellect of man survives death. “The soul without the body is the true man. Š. š Death is only the soul abandoning its instruments.”<sup>64</sup>

Avicenna presents two arguments to show that everyone has an immortal soul. The first is the soul's experience of its own activity as being different from that of the body. Avicenna supposes that if someone were in a void without any exterior sensation, his soul would nevertheless be conscious of itself. (He does not think here of the activity of the internal senses and the impossibility of self-consciousness without consciousness of something intelligible, normally through sensation.) Thus he concludes that the soul is a substance complete in itself, independent of the body, but which influences the body, especially by its emotions, much more than the body influences the soul.<sup>65</sup>

The second argument is that the intellect, as a receptacle of intelligible forms, should itself be immaterial and immortal.<sup>66</sup> Since it does not use the body as an organ, the intellect is independent of it and can be separated from it. This is the classic argument of Aristotle and the scholastics. The principle of this argument is that, besides our knowledge of sensible singulars, we know the essences of things in an intelligible and universal way. The intelligibility of things in our knowledge is not individualized by matter, but is spiritual. This spiritual object is the actualization of the intellect either in a habitual way (like memory) or in an actual way. But act corresponds with potency. If the act is spiritual, the potency likewise must be spiritual. The human intellect and soul are therefore spiritual and by that fact immortal.

63 *An-Nukat wa-l-fawā'id fo l-'ilm a? -? abda*, pp. 156 and 162, *Risāla fo bayān al-mu'jizāt wa-l-karāmāt wa-l-a'jīb*, p. 404, *Risāla fo l-'uql*, p. 416–417.

64 *Risāla fo l-mawt*, p. 379.

65 *Al-Ishārah*, nama 3, *fasl* 1–4; *ash-Shifā'*: an-nafs, *maqāla* 1, *fasl* 1; there is a similar argument in the opusculum *Mash'il 'an a? wā' ar-r?*.

66 *A? wā' an-nafs*, ch. 4 & 9; *Mab' ath 'an al-quwā' n-nafsiyya*, ch. 9.

A sign of that is, as Aristotle said, that the intellect does not get weak by old age, nor does it suffer by knowing what is exceedingly intelligible, as the senses suffer from objects that are too strong.<sup>67</sup> But, for Avicenna this argument has the weakness of a dualistic context, where the soul is presented as a complete substance apart from the body.<sup>68</sup>

The soul, then, although “possible” or contingent from the point of view of its existence and its temporal beginning, from the point of view of its lack of composition of form and matter in its essence it cannot cease to exist.<sup>69</sup>

### 9. *The souls origin with the body*

On the other hand, the soul has no pre-existence, because humanity is one, and can only be multiplied by matter. When elements are put in the right shape and mixture to receive the soul, the soul is created and joined to the body.<sup>70</sup> The body is necessary for the beginning of the soul, but not for its continuation in existence.<sup>71</sup>

Thus the soul was created with the body and is individuated in relation to it.<sup>72</sup> Exactly what does this individuation consist in? Avicenna rejects “the impression of the soul in the body”, and thus the “matter designated by quantity” of Thomas Aquinas. Avicenna says that this individuation should be an order or configuration (*haya*) of the soul or else a power or a spiritual accident or a combination of these. It could also be a difference in intellectual knowledge or self-knowledge, or a difference of bodily powers or other things, even though we do not know which.<sup>73</sup> In the *Ta'laqāt*, speaking of individuation (*tashakhkhu*) in general, he says that it consists in position and time.<sup>74</sup> In any case, there will be no fusion of soul into a single soul or a fusion with God.<sup>75</sup>

67 *Al-Ishḥḥ*, loc. cit.; *ar-Risḥla al-a?? awiyya fol-ma'hd*, 153–183.

68 Cf. par exemple, *ar-Risḥla fos-sa'hd*, pp. 12–13.

69 Cf. *Risḥla ilH Abo'Ubayd al-Jzjḥno. fo amr an-nafs*; *an-Nukat wa-l-fawḥ'id fol-'ilm a? -? abḥa*, p. 177–178; *Kalimḥt a? -? fiyya*, p. 166; *ar-Risḥla al-a?? awiyya fol-ma'hd*, 185–189.

70 *Ta'laqāt*, pp. 63–64, 110.

71 *Ta'laqāt*, p. 81.

72 *Ibid.*, ch. 8; *an-Nukat wa-l-fawḥ'id fol-'ilm a? -? abḥa*, p. 177–178; *Kalimḥt a? -? ufiyya*, 159; *ar-Risḥla al-a?? awiyya fol-ma'hd*, 125–133.

73 *Ash-Shifḥ*, an-nafs, maqḥla 5, *fa? l 3*; cfr. *Ta'laqāt*, 65.

74 P. 107; cfr. p. 145.

75 Cf. *Kalimḥt a? -? fiyya*, p. 178.

## 10. *Reincarnation / resurrection?*

Thus the soul cannot take on any other body but its own; this excludes the possibility of reincarnation or transmigration of souls.<sup>76</sup> As for those who hold for reincarnation, Avicenna has in mind (1) the representatives of oriental traditions (such as Hinduism) to whom he alludes in quoting "Buzurgmihir",<sup>77</sup> (2) Greek philosophers such as Plato and Pythagoras, whom he excuses, saying that they were speaking metaphorically,<sup>78</sup> (3) those who believe that the soul rejoins the body at the resurrection.<sup>79</sup> Avicenna rejects reincarnation, taking more or less the same line of argumentation that Saint Thomas would later take, but without all the latter's distinctions.

All that Avicenna says implies that after death there will be no bodily resurrection. He expresses his thought explicitly in his *Ris̄hla as-sal̄h*, where he denies the possibility of the resurrection or of the immortality of the vegetative and animal spirit (or soul), but he affirms it for the rational soul.

This will have a resurrection after death. "By death I mean separation from the body; by resurrection I mean its joining spiritual substances and its consequent reward and happiness."<sup>80</sup>

Maybe out of fear of the consequences of this position, at the end of this work Avicenna admonishes the reader not to divulge his secret, so as to keep him out of trouble.<sup>81</sup>

In his *Kalim̄h a? -? fiyya*, Avicenna quotes Qur̄hnic verses (89: 27–28; 70: 4; 54: 55; 33: 44; 22: 48; 75: 30, 12; 53: 8) to support his position that it is the soul without the body that will appear before God.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, we see in the s̄fic work, *al-'Ilm al-ladun̄*, the statement: "The rational soul... awaits its return to the body on the day of resurrection, as revelation says."<sup>83</sup> Is he here speaking metaphorically or out of consideration for his hearers? In the same work he insists that the soul is a complete substance, independent of the body.<sup>84</sup> The *Ris̄hla fol-hudd* says that it is only by revelation (*shar'*) that we know that there will be a bodily happiness,<sup>85</sup> but this treatise does not try to interpret what this happiness will be.

76 *A? w̄hl an-nafs*, ch. 10; *ash-Shif̄h*, an-nafs, maq̄hla 5, *fa? l 4*; *Kalim̄h a? -? fiyya*, p. 167; *ar-Ris̄hla al-a?? awiyya fol-ma'hd*, 99–139; *Ta'laq̄h*, pp. 65, 67.

77 P. 139.

78 Pp. 135, 207.

79 In *ar-Ris̄hla al-a?? awiyya* Ibn-S̄n̄h restricts himself to answering this third category.

80 P. 7.

81 P. 14.

82 P. 159.

83 P. 189.

84 Pp. 189–190.

85 P. 91.

The most definitive treatment of this question is in the late work, *ar-Risʿhla al-aʿ?? awiyya fo l-maʿhd*. First he rejects the opinion based on many Qurʿanic verses that man is a body having life as an accident; at death the body is reduced to dust and life disappears; the resurrection is a re-creation. In that case the raised man is not the same as the one who died, because the form of the body is not numerically the same.<sup>86</sup>

Then he rejects the most common opinion among Muslims, that the resurrection is the reunion of the soul with a reconstituted body. If we suppose, with Avicenna, the eternity of the world, that is impossible, because the whole earth would be insufficient for the formation of an infinitude of men. And if the true happiness of man is spiritual, it would be a punishment to make him go back to the body where compete happiness is impossible. Besides, what is the difference between resurrection and reincarnation, which is another impossibility? One cannot escape from this problem by saying that it is the same body with the dame matter that will be raised, because the body may have undergone mutilation; also, by the process of metabolism matter is continually and inevitably changing, and through natural cycles or by cannibalism the same matter is shared by many human bodies.<sup>87</sup>

In particular, Avicenna attacks the Christian teaching of the resurrection, because Christians hold for the resurrection of the body but reject bodily pleasures in Paradise. For Avicenna, all these pleasures promised in the Qurʿan are metaphoric descriptions of the vision of God and of the communion of angels and saints. But he is convinced that preaching bodily rewards is necessary to motivate ordinary people, and that Christian preaching lacks all moral force.<sup>88</sup>

### *Conclusion — summary*

Avicenna proposes that the soul must be an incorporeal substance because intellectual thoughts themselves are indivisible. Presumably he means that a coherent thought, involving concepts in some determinate order, cannot be had in parts by different intellects and still remain a single coherent thought. In order to be a coherent single unity, a coherent thought must be had by a single, unified intellect rather than, for example, one intellect having one part of the thought, another soul a separate part of the thought and yet a third intellect having a third distinct part of the same thought. In other words, a coherent thought is indivisible and can be present as such only to an intellect

86 Pp. 41–43, 63–65.

87 Pp. 29–31, 67–85, 107, 205.

88 Pp. 85–97; for the communion of separated souls, see p. 215.

that is similarly unified or indivisible. However, corporeal matter is divisible; therefore the indivisible intellect that is necessary for coherent thought cannot be corporeal. It must therefore be incorporeal, since those are the only two available possibilities.

For Avicenna, that the soul is incorporeal implies also that it must be immortal: the decay and destruction of the body does not affect the soul. There are basically three relations to the corporeal body that might also threaten the soul but, Avicenna proposes, none of these relations holds true of the incorporeal soul, which therefore must be immortal. If the body were a cause of the soul's existence, or if body and soul depended on each other necessarily for their existence, or if the soul logically depended on the body, then the destruction or decay of the body would determine the existence of the soul. However, the body is not a cause of the soul in any of the four senses of cause; both are substances, corporeal and incorporeal, and therefore as substances they must be independent of each other; and the body changes and decays as a result of its independent causes and substances, not because of changes in the soul, and therefore it does not follow that any change in the body, including death, must determine the existence of the soul. Even if the emergence of the human soul implies a role for the body, the role of this corporeal matter is only accidental.

To this explanation that the destruction of the body does not entail or cause the destruction of the soul, Avicenna adds an argument that the destruction of the soul cannot be caused by anything. Composite existing objects are subject to destruction; by contrast, the soul as a simple incorporeal being is not subject to destruction. Moreover, since the soul is not a compound of matter and form, it may be generated but it does not suffer the destruction that afflicts all generated things that are composed of form and matter. Similarly, even if we could identify the soul as a compound, for it to have unity that compound must itself be integrated as a unity, and the principle of this unity of the soul must be simple; and, so far as the principle involves an ontological commitment to existence, being simple and incorporeal it must therefore be indestructible.