

INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE IN IBN SĪNĀ:  
ITS DISTINCTIVE FEATURES AND PREREQUISITES\*

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"He gives hikmah to whomsoever He wishes;  
and he to whom hikmah is given, he truly has  
received abundant good." (al-Qur'ān 2: 269)

According to Ibn Sīnā, intuition (*ḥads*), which is a function of 'aql, *fiṭrah* and *khīrad*,<sup>1</sup> not only constitutes the basis of all learning, and hence a way for arriving independently at new knowledge, but serves as a means for verifying what has been studied and learned from others, since it represents direct insight into the true nature of reality as a coherent whole. This has been effectively shown in recent studies by Gutas and Marmura.<sup>2</sup> Although the importance of the theory of intuition for the understanding of Ibn Sīnā's life and thought, and the fundamental role intuition plays in his epistemology, as well as the intimate connection it has with his doctrine of prophecy, have received fairly elaborate treatment,<sup>3</sup> some questions still remain as to what distinguishes

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<sup>1</sup> That is, the rational rather than the metaphysical or mystical *mushāhadah*, *kashf*, *dhawq*, *wijdān*, etc. As for the term *ḥads* signifying 'intuition', the omission of its modifier *ṣā'ib* or *muṣīb* for the sake of brevity should always be understood, for otherwise *ḥads* would simply mean 'guess' or 'hunch'. See 'A. Badawi, "New Philosophical Text Lost in Greek and Preserved in Arabic Translations," in *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1979), 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> See Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 159-76; Michael E. Marmura, "Plotting the Course of Avicenna's Thought," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (JAOS) 111, no. 2 (April-June 1991): 336-7.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Ahmed Fouad el-Ahwany, "La théorie de la connaissance et la psychologie d'Avicenne," *La Revue du Caire* XXVII, no. 141 (1951), 23-43; Louis Gardet, *La pensée religieuse d'Avicenne* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1951); id., *La connaissance mystique chez Ibn Sīnā et ses présupposés philosophiques*

intuition from other kinds of cognition and what is so special about intuitive knowledge and, furthermore, "How is intuitive knowledge possible or what are the conditions of intuitive cognition?" The aim of the following work is to provide an analytical account of Ibn Sīnā's thought and examine his statements on this matter.

### *Characteristics of Intuitive Knowledge*

#### *1. Quickness and Givenness*

Intuition is quickness of comprehension (*sur'at al-fahm*), says Ibn Sīnā.<sup>4</sup> Unlike other kinds of cognition, intuitive knowledge is characterized as much by clarity and immediacy (*bilā wāsiṭah*)<sup>5</sup> as by suddenness and givenness (*marzūqah*).<sup>6</sup> This holds true of both intuition of the first principles as well as intuition (*tafaṭṭun*) of the middle terms.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note in this context Ibn

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(Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1952); Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958; Midway Reprint by the University of Chicago Press, 1979); Fayṣal Badir 'Awn, *Naẓariyyat al-Ma'rifah 'inda Ibn Sīnā ma'a bayān maṣādirihā wa āthārihā* (Cairo: Jāmi'at 'Ain Shams, 1978); Carmela Baffioni, "Gnoseologia e mistica nell'interpretazione avicenniana dell'intelletto agente," *Annali del Istituto Orientale Universitario di Napoli (AION)* 41 (1981): 597–622; Jean Michot, "Prophétie et divination selon Avicenne," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 83 (1985): 507–35; Sari Nuseibeh, "Al-'Aql al-Qudsi: Avicenna's Subjective Theory of Knowledge," *Studia Islamica* LXIX (1989): 39–54; Gabriel Lahood, "Avicenna's Theory of Knowledge Acquisition," in Bernardo C. Bazàn (ed.), *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Âge. Actes du IXe Congrès international de philosophie médiévale, Ottawa, du 17 au 22 aout 1992* (New York: Legas, 1995), 388–97; and Syamsuddin Arif, "Intuition and Its Role in Ibn Sīnā's Epistemology," *Al-Shajarah* 5, no. 1 (2000): 95–126.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā': al-Manṭiq: al-Burhān*, ed. A. E. Afifi (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1955), 27, hereinafter referred to as *Shifā': Manṭiq: Burhān*.

<sup>5</sup> *Shifā': Manṭiq: Burhān*, 118.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Muḥsin Bidārfār (Qumm: Intishārāt Bidār, 1993), 72–3, henceforth referred to as *Mubāḥathāt*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*, ed. A. Nūrānī (Tehran: McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies Tehran Branch, 1984), 116, hereinafter cited as *Mabda'*.

Sinā's distinction between *fahm*, defined by him as an excellent disposition of the rational faculty towards conceiving what comes to it 'from another' and *ḥads*, which he elsewhere describes as the excellent movement of this faculty for seizing the middle term by itself.<sup>8</sup> Even though he contrasts the two modes of cognition, Ibn Sīnā maintains that all the ideas and concepts constituting our knowledge ultimately come from outside of our mind, notwithstanding the facilitative role of our senses and the abstractive function of our rational faculty. For in his view, universals come about not so much as a result of our sense perception as because a certain transcendent agent called the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*) renders images, forms and ideas contained in our mind meaningful to us.<sup>9</sup> The same is true of instantaneous occurrence "in certain exceptionally powerful minds" of the middle term, which represents essential answers to the question "why" as well as solutions to problems.

That *ḥads* belongs only to a few individuals is due to the fact that people are not the same with respect to their cognitive capacity and so, Ibn Sīnā explains, they acquire knowledge through different means, some by learning and instruction, others without the help of any teacher. Since in the first case it is impossible that a person learns through an infinite process, that is, he learns something from his teacher, the latter from another teacher, who got it yet from earlier one, and so on. Ibn Sīnā asserts that in the final analysis all knowledge must have come by way of, and originated from, intuitions first received by those (*arbāb tilka al-ḥudūs*) who subsequently handed them down to their students.<sup>10</sup> He tells us that:

<sup>8</sup> *Shifā': Mantīq: Burhān*, 259. Cf. *Aḥwāl al-Nafs: Risālah fī al-Nafs wa Baqā'ihā wa Ma'ādihā li-al-Shaykh al-Ra'īs Ibn Sīnā*, ed. A. F. al-Ahwānī (Cairo: 'Īsā al-Bāb al-Ḥalabī, 1952), 122.

<sup>9</sup> *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 123.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā': al-Ṭabī'iyāt: al-Nafs*, ed. G. C. Anawati and Sa'id Zāyed (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 1975), 219–20, henceforth *Shifā': Ṭabī'iyāt: Nafs*. Cf. *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 122.

As a matter of fact, if you want the truth, [I would say that the solution to] every problem is found by means of intuition, since everybody has learnt from somebody else, but he who was the first must have never learnt it from anybody. There was, therefore, someone who did find [solutions] all by himself....Among people there are those who need a teacher for most things, completely incapable of any intuition—or even worse, they might be incapable of understanding albeit with a teacher. But there may be a person who knows most things by intuition and has a slight need for a teacher, as there may also be a person, though rarely, who can, whenever he wishes, attain the sciences from beginning to end in order of intuition without a teacher and in a very short time.<sup>11</sup>

Again, in one version of his proof for the possibility of prophecy based on the variance in people's intellectual powers and cognitive capacities, Ibn Sīnā states that in the final analysis, all knowledge "comes by way of intuition." For it is impossible for the chain of teacher and pupil to go back to infinity; it must stop with a certain first teacher whose knowledge is derived from intuition. "This [intellectually and spiritually most powerful] person would intuit something that others would learn what this one has intuited, who in turn intuit something else, and so on."<sup>12</sup> Such an unusual mode of learning is possible because, says Ibn Sīnā, when intuition takes place the intellectual world (*al-'ālam al-'aqlī*) containing intelligible ideas presents itself to the mind

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish Nāmāh-yi 'Alā'ī: Tabī'īyyāt*, ed. M. Moein and M. Meshkāt (Tehran: Anjoman-e Āthār-e Melli, 1953; repr. Tehran: Dekhoda, 1975), 142–4. English translation of the passage is adopted, with slight modifications, from Gutas, *Avicenna*, 20–4. Cf. French translation by M. Achena and H. Massé, *Avicenne: Le Livre de Science* (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1955), 88–9.

<sup>12</sup> *Mabda'*, 116.

according to the essential, rather than temporal, order of the terms of propositions and intelligibles.<sup>13</sup> Underlying this theory is indeed the assumption that most if not all human knowledge can be expressed, translated and analysed into terms and propositions. Accordingly, intuition of the intelligibles (*al-ma'qūlāt*) consists less haphazard apprehension of ideas than their comprehension whereby the ideas are arranged in logical order and connected by the middle terms which represent scientific truth and the way things are. As Gutas rightly points out, "not only do the contents of this [intuitive] knowledge correspond, one-to-one, to the ontological reality, but the progression of this knowledge also corresponds to the [syllogistic] structure of reality."<sup>14</sup>

That intuitive cognition occurs at one stroke (*daf'ah*) is declared in many places by Ibn Sīnā.<sup>15</sup> We shall indicate a relationship between his stress, on the one hand, and on the instantaneous character of intuition and his seemingly opposite view, on the other, that some preparatory activities are required in order to effect intuition in part two below. However, we must first consider how Ibn Sīnā would account for the sudden occurrence of intuition. The explanation he offers us comes by way of an illustration. Suppose, he says, you are wrestling with a difficult problem. You have been trying, though still unable, to find a solution for it from your previous knowledge or from something that you virtually know. Then in a split second the answer comes to you. On that spur of the moment you were quite sure (*mutayaqqin*) about the correctness of your answer, even though you might not have yet grasped the whole matter. However, as soon as you start

<sup>13</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 107. Gutas' translation of the relevant passage is off the mark, for he mistakenly attributes the adjectives "*al-dhātī dūna al-zamānī*" to *al-ma'qūlāt*, when in reality they refer to the word *tartīb* as indicated by their gender. See Gutas, *Avicenna*, 166.

<sup>14</sup> Gutas, *Avicenna*, 174. To this point Marmura concedes: "Hence when he [i.e. Gutas] maintains that for Avicenna the structure of reality is syllogistic, he puts it very neatly." See Marmura, *Plotting*, 337.

<sup>15</sup> See *Mubāḥathāt*, 107; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1966), 2: 369; and id., *al-Ta'liqāt*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Tehran: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1984), 141.

articulating and explaining the solution just received, its detailed points simultaneously become clear to you.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise is the case of an instructor who comes under pressure to give an answer to a difficult question posed by his students. According to Ibn Sīnā, once the instructor proceeds to stating all that which have just occurred to his mind, he simultaneously teaches himself and explains the knowledge that he had just now acquired in a simple manner instantaneously. Probably for this reason Ibn Sīnā likens intuition to receiving an unsolicited gift (*hadiyyah marzūqah*).<sup>17</sup> That intuitions do really happen should not be surprising. Intuition, he tells us, would enable a person to learn things and find solutions to all or most problems (*maṭlūbāt*) without having to endure hard work nor going through excessive book reading.<sup>18</sup> Occurring all at once or nearly so (*fī aqṣar al-azminah*), intuitive knowledge comprises all intelligibles or essentials of all things, thanks to the conjunction of the mind with the Active Intellect.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the impression received by the mind of the intelligible forms, Ibn Sīnā adds, is not passive (*lā taqlīdiyyan*). Rather, it is arranged (*'alā sabīl al-tarkīb*) and put in an order of terms of propositions which include the middle terms.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Apriority

Another quality distinguishing intuitive knowledge from other forms of cognition is apriority. Traditionally, an instance of knowledge is said to be a priori if its justification does not derive from or depend on sensory evidence, such as our knowledge of logical and mathematical truths and, to cite the nearest but often forgotten instance, the truth of our own existence. Of course, Ibn

<sup>16</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 214. Cf. Rahman, *Prophecy*, 18–9.

<sup>17</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 72–3; Marmura, *Plotting*, 336, citing the edition by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Aristū 'ind al-'Arab* (Cairo, 1947), 231.

<sup>18</sup> See *Dānish Nāmah:Ṭabī'īyyāt*, 144; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 21; *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 220.

<sup>19</sup> *Mabda'*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 116; cf. *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 220 and *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 123.

Sīnā does not employ the term 'a priori'. A close inspection of relevant passages in his works, however, does reveal and indicate his affirming the a priori character of intuitive knowledge. Consider for example, he says, this geometrical postulate: "the straight lines drawn from the centre of a circle to its circumference are always equal". Without having to see and touch the actual shape of circle and lines, Ibn Sīnā contends, we know intuitively that the proposition is true. Its truth is clear to us because its meaning comes to the mind (*hāḍir li al-dhihn*) immediately.<sup>21</sup> We do not have to use the material instrument to prove the truth of such an a priori proposition, and instead we simply use our mental compass (*firjār 'aqlī*) to do so.<sup>22</sup>

Ibn Sīnā gives another illustration for the same point, this time from arithmetics, trying to explain how the middle term is a priori. One needs only to intuit "divisibility into equal parts", provided the minor term "four" and the major term "even" are understood, in order to arrive at the conclusion "four is an even number". To put it syllogistically: every number divisible into two equal parts is an even number; four can be split into two equal parts; therefore, four is an even number. In this case, not only does the middle term present itself to the mind immediately, but the truth of the premise is a priori (*bi al-ḥiṭrah*).<sup>23</sup> That is, once we understand the propositions, we "see" that they are true—the truth being evident *ex terminis*, as soon as the terms are understood or by virtue of their meaning alone.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Shifā': Maṭīq: Burhān*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> See G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, Chap. 7, ed. and trans. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Benett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 407ff. Cf. Alice Ambrose and Morris Lazerowitz, *Fundamentals of Symbolic Logic* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 17: "A proposition is said to be true a priori if its truth can be ascertained by examination of the proposition alone or if it is deducible from propositions whose truth is so ascertained and by examination of nothing else.... Understanding the words used in expressing these propositions is sufficient for determining that they are true."

Now since a proposition is made out of concepts, it follows that one's having a priori knowledge of a true proposition presupposes and in turn requires one's having a priori concepts, i.e., concepts that have not arisen or derived from experience of sensible objects. A common view, which goes back to Plato, is that our concepts of abstract mathematical objects such as triangles and chiliagons are paradigm instances of innate concepts—universal 'forms' or ideas that we already had since the beginning of our lives.<sup>25</sup> Ibn Sinā rejects the Platonic theory of learning by 'recollection', but he does not subscribe to the Aristotelian empiricism either. For Ibn Sinā, primary concepts (*ma'qūlāt awwaliyyah*) do not owe their origin to sense data alone nor are they obtained through any logical inference (*min ghayr qiyās wa ta'allum wa iktisāb*).<sup>26</sup> These are basic notions like "the existent" (*al-mawjūd*), "being" (*wujūd*), and "the thing" (*al-shay'*), which are so general that they resist attempts to define them.<sup>27</sup> Ibn Sinā describes these concepts as rational primitives (*bidāyat al-'uqūl*), universal ideas (*ārā' 'ammīyyah*) and natural, primary cognitions (*'ulūm awwaliyyah gharīziyyah*).<sup>28</sup> It might be argued that not every proposition known a priori consists of a priori concepts. However, in the final analysis, all singular terms must ultimately be defined by means of the most general, logically undefinable primary concepts that are known a priori.

One is reminded here of modern linguisticism which holds that a proposition is known to our mind as true a priori if and only if the conventional rules of human language-use would be violated upon denying that proposition. Generally, this is the position

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<sup>25</sup> See Plato, *Meno*, ed. G. P. Goold, based on Schanz's recension, and trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1924; repr. 1990), 81.D.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Sinā, *Risālah fī al-Kalām 'alā al-Nafs al-Nāṭiqah*, in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 195; translated in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 72–8.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. G. C. Anawati and S. Zayed (part I) and M. Y. Moussa, S. Dunya and S. Zayed (part II) (Cairo: Organisation Générale des Imprimeries Gouvernementales, 1960), 30.

<sup>28</sup> *Risālah fī al-Kalām 'alā al-Nafs al-Nāṭiqah*, in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 195.



maintained by most analytic philosophers who seek to reduce the truth and meaning of (a priori) propositions to a mere linguistic consensus, saying that logical and mathematical propositions are true a priori, simply because "we never allow them to be anything else" and "we cannot abandon them without contradicting ourselves, without sinning against the rules which govern the use of language."<sup>29</sup> By contrast, Ibn Sīnā appeals to our intuitive capacity of acquiring the primary concepts independently of senses. Thus unlike reductivist linguisticism, Ibn Sīnā's conception of a priori intuitive knowledge may be stated thus: once a proposition has been understood by the mind, nothing more is needed beyond *that very understanding*—and hence no infinite regress—so as to "see" and apprehend intuitively in an optimum case that the proposition is true.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. *Non-inferentiality and Self-Evidence*

We now turn to the assertion that intuitive knowledge is non-inferential in the sense that the mind obtains it without discursive reasoning or any logical inference. The phrase Ibn Sīnā uses to indicate this quality in relation to propositions is "most known and most primary" (*a'raf wa aqdam*). This also implies that with respect to the truth of propositions, intuitive knowledge is axiomatic (*awwaliyyat al-ṣidq*),<sup>31</sup> whereas with respect to concepts it is primary (*badīhī*).<sup>32</sup> A conceptual clarification might be useful at this juncture. In Ibn Sīnā's view, a proposition is axiomatic if it has no other proposition prior to it or better known

<sup>29</sup> Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publication, 1952), 77. The thesis was modified later by W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in his *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> Contemporary debate on this subject is cast in Paul K. Moser (ed.), *A Priori Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), featuring articles by Chisholm, Stroud, Kripke, Kitcher and others.

<sup>31</sup> *Shifā':Manṭiq:Burhān*, 151. Cf. *Risālah fī al-Kalām 'alā al-Nafs al-Nāṭiqah*, in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 195.

<sup>32</sup> *Shifā':Manṭiq:Burhān*, 112. Cf. *Risālah fī al-Kalām 'alā al-Nafs al-Nāṭiqah*, in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 195.

than it is, and if it does not need an intermediary to link the subject with the predicate.<sup>33</sup> He calls propositions of this nature “the principles of sciences which are basic to reason (*fī awwal al-‘aql*)” which comprise intuitively known terms and premises.<sup>34</sup>

A closely related character of intuitive knowledge worth mentioning is immediacy in the sense of self-evidence. According to Ibn Sīnā, the primary premises or first principles of demonstrative science must be known immediately, that is, without a middle term or without the necessity of introducing a third term as the common link between the major and the minor terms.<sup>35</sup> The point here made is that unless one wants to continue to an infinite series of demonstration, one should consider a certain starting point as obvious and self-evident. A proposition is said to be self-evident (*bayyinah binafsihā*) if its truth is known from nothing other than itself, such as “the sum of two right angles is a straight line,” “the shortest distance between two points is a straight line,” and Ibn Sīnā’s favourite “the whole is greater than the part.”

Yet how does one know that a proposition is immediate and self-evident, and how could one show that? Let us consider the last proposition cited above and suppose someone asks what the meaning of a whole is, and we reply that it is that which is constituted by all the parts together. If this definition is true, then *clearly* it would follow that the whole is taken to indicate something more than any single part or, in other words, that which is greater than the part. On this analysis, a self-evident proposition is one that as soon as one knows what its constituent concepts mean, one immediately knows without proof and even without the middle term that the predicate (in this case “greater than the part”) is true of the subject (in this case “the whole”). Ibn Sīnā calls proposition of this kind *awwaliyyah ghayr dhāti awsāf*<sup>36</sup> in

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<sup>33</sup> *Shifā':Manṭiq:Burhān*, 137.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. See Arif, *Intuition and its Role*, 101–9.

<sup>36</sup> *Shifā':Manṭiq:Burhān*, 174.

which the predicate is nothing other than the essential definition of the subject (*dhātiyyat al-maḥmūlāt*).<sup>37</sup>

[The proposition whose truth is known] by means of pure reason (*'an mujarrad al-'aql*) is primary and necessary, such as "the whole is greater than the part".... Even if its acquisition may appear not so much as a result of rational intuition, the production is [actually] aided by something intrinsic or innately present in the mind (*gharīziyyan fī al-'aql ay hādīran*), that is, when it is arrived at through syllogistic reasoning in which the middle term is discovered by intuition (*mawjūd bi al-fīṭrah*) and immediately present to the mind. Thus the conclusion comprising the major and the minor terms is obtained whenever the middle term comes to the mind without being sought for.<sup>38</sup>

We have just stated that immediate propositions are self-evident, a statement which definitely needs to be qualified. For a critic might object that proposition like "the sum of two right angles is equal to a straight line" is not self-evident to everybody. For instance, if a child or unlearned person were asked what two right angles are equal, the child and the person might well answer "I don't know, and I don't even know what a right angle is." However, in this case, one could of course explain to them what one was trying to say. And as soon as the child and the person grasp the meaning, they would *simultaneously see* the truth and self-evidence of the proposition. Accordingly, the only difference between self-evident and immediate propositions is that the meaning and, therefore, the consequent truth of some of them, such as "the whole is greater than the part", is known to all, while the meaning of some others involving technical terms, such as

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 125–32.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 64.

“right angle”, is known only after one knows what the terms mean. Ibn Sīnā makes it clear that a self-evident proposition requires no explanation whatsoever such that “certitude is established (*yathbut fihi al-yaqīn*)” concerning the association of the predicate with the subject—the connection between them e.g. “has its angles equal to two right angles” and “every isosceles triangle” becomes truly necessary and what thence comes about is a ‘certain knowledge’ (*‘ilm yaqīnī*).<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. *Universality and Veridical Necessity*

Ibn Sīnā, like Aristotle, teaches that demonstrative science, which alone can give us *‘ilm yaqīnī*, must be based on necessarily and universally true propositions whose truth is known intuitively.<sup>40</sup> By ‘necessary’ (*darūriyyah*) and ‘universal’ (*kulliyah*) Ibn Sīnā means ‘always true in all possible cases.’<sup>41</sup> Indeed in his view, only universal knowledge counts as true knowledge, and accordingly, knowledge, especially when expressed in terms of a proposition, is at its best when its truth or contents are universal and necessary. For Ibn Sīnā, to say that a person has universal knowledge does not mean that he knows only universals or that he knows things only in general. On the contrary, it means that the person’s knowledge includes that of particulars, since universal knowledge is supposed to include a conclusive investigation (*nihāyat al-baḥṭh*) of things, offer the final solution to a problem (*yu’fī al-‘illah*) and explain why things or events stand as they are. In short, it presupposes knowledge about particulars, although the reverse is not true.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, universal knowledge consists in propositions that are true of all particular instances. To return now to demonstration, Ibn Sīnā demands that its universal premise be always true, for otherwise one cannot be sure whether the conclusion derived therefrom is true or not. To be sure, the universality exacted of its principal premise is this:

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 150, 174, 120, and 123.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 120, and 170.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 238–42, especially 240.

the predicate must always be true of all the subjects. However, how is this possible? That is the question.

According to Ibn Sīnā, the universality of demonstrative proposition is secured by the fact that the first principles, which are known intuitively, are and must be necessary in the sense that their truth stands across time and must be immune to change (*lā yaqa' fihā imkān taghayyur*).<sup>43</sup> It is so because in a necessary proposition the predicate is always inherent in the subject through itself (*per se*), rather than accidentally (*per accidens*), since the subject is the cause of and hence essential to that which is attributed to it.<sup>44</sup> Just consider, for instance, the logical principle that “the same thing cannot be simultaneously affirmed and denied”. The truth of this principle, apart from its being intuitively known, extends to all times and places. Such a proposition is necessary not only in the sense that it truly describes how things are now which always will be true and always has been true since the first moment at which it was true, so that to deny its truth would entail contradiction. For were it not true, then the statement such as “a triangle is a three-sided flat shape and yet has no three angles” would also be true, in which case it is absurd.

Nevertheless, ‘necessary’ can be viewed in several ways, according to Ibn Sīnā. Firstly, we can take it as ‘that which cannot be otherwise in absolute sense’ (*bi ḥasab al-wujūd al-muṭlaq bilā shart*) and, secondly, as ‘that which can never be at all’ (*bi ḥasab al-'adam al-muṭlaq*). Thirdly, ‘necessary’ may be taken in terms of either affirming or denying the existence of the predicate in the subject. This last aspect may be further analysed into five modes (*anḥā'*): that is, ‘necessary’ in the sense of being [1] all the time, eternally, like our assertion that “necessarily the Creator is one” and the Creator is not corporeal”, [2] temporarily as long as the actual subject exists e.g. “every human is necessarily a living being”, [3] temporarily as long as the concept predicated of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 154.

the substance continues to become the subject e.g. "all white things have by necessity the quality of being white (whiteness)", [4] necessarily as long as the predicate persists e.g. "all humans are necessarily capable of sitting", and [5] necessarily at some point of time e.g. "the moon must be eclipsed".<sup>45</sup>

Necessary propositions (the truth value of which is necessary) are essential to demonstration simply because without them one could not legitimately draw a necessarily true conclusion.<sup>46</sup> For the resulting conclusion of demonstration is supposed to describe a permanent state of affairs of things which cannot not be, so as to yield 'certain knowledge' that eventually constitutes science.<sup>47</sup> Of course to ensure that one will know the reason why the conclusion is true and that it is necessarily so, certain conditions must be satisfied. Not only do the major and the minor premises ought to be necessary, but the middle term should be related to both extremes necessarily. More importantly, a reliably true, scientific conclusion has to have its predicate inseparable from the subject.<sup>48</sup> Still it might be argued that one can reason from things and propositions that are probable or contingent, but the new knowledge arrived at will likewise have only the same weight and value.

You have to distinguish between [i] that which produces the *necessary* conclusion, and [ii] that which *necessarily* brings about conclusion. True, syllogism must end up with a conclusion, but it does not follow that all syllogisms produce necessary conclusion. Yet even if a syllogism does not bring necessary [knowledge], it could still be useful for at least

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 120–1. For an extensive discussion on the subject, see Alan Bäck, "Avicenna's Conception of the Modalities," *Vivarium* XXX (1992): 217–55; cf. Nicholas Rescher, *Temporal Modalities in Arabic Logic* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1967).

<sup>46</sup> *Shifā':Manṭiq:Burhān*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 152–3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 153–4.

two purposes. Firstly, it gives us knowledge about facts, though devoid of certainty and lacking causal explanation, since absolute, loose knowledge (*'ilm muṭlaq*) is different from certain, unshakeable knowledge (*'ilm yaqīnī*), for we distinguish between knowing *that* something is such-and-such and knowing *why* something is so-and-so. Secondly, it could silence an opponent and audience once they accept the premises [as true], although this is not a sound starting-point since demonstration is based not upon the opponent's admitting the premise, but rather on the truth and necessity of the proposition.<sup>49</sup>

The above passage states Ibn Sīnā's point clearly. Demonstration leading to a necessarily true, certain, conclusive knowledge about reality must proceed from some previously known, universally true propositions acquired by intuition. Accordingly, it is this intuitive knowledge that renders demonstration and science possible, given that neither induction (*istiqrā'*) nor instruction (*ta'līm*) could be the ultimate source nor the last solution to the problem of knowing the first principles, primary concepts, and the middle terms.

##### *5. Rational-Experientiality and Intrinsic Certainty*

Thus far our analysis has focused mainly on Ibn Sīnā's conception of intuitive knowledge in relation to truth-claim making propositions. Let us now turn to the subtlest form of all intuitive knowledge, namely intuition of the existence of ourselves. Indeed, as al-Attas correctly asserts, intuition does not merely refer to "the direct and immediate apprehension, by the knowing subject, of itself, of its conscious states, of other selves like itself, of an external world, of universals, of values or of rational truths." To be sure, he adds, "in its higher levels, intuition is the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 153-4.

intuition of existence itself."<sup>50</sup> Now that we have discussed elsewhere Ibn Sinā's account of self awareness and consciousness,<sup>51</sup> it remains for us to determine and elucidate further the peculiarities of intuitive self knowledge. The question to be asked is whether or not it is justified to take intuition as experiential and rational as one might do, given the fact that Ibn Sinā employs the words *shu'ūr* and *istish'ār* to describe it.<sup>52</sup> Part of the answer to this question is revealed in the following passage from Ibn Sinā's *Ta'liqāt*:

Were it because of an effect (*athar*) occurring in me that I perceive my Self, how could I perceive that the effect was ascribed to my Self unless I had already known (*'alimtu*) my Self and recognized (*'araftu*), through some sign or other, that the effect was of my Self. Still, if I presented an effect of my Self to my Self or to its organ and thus judge the effect as produced by my Self, then I should first connect the effect with my Self and thereby judge and say that it was an effect of my Self. Hence, my perception of my Self is prior, not dependent on [the perception of] the trace.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*, 11 = id., *Islam und die geistigen Grundlagen von Wissenschaft*, 11 = id., *Prolegomena*, 119.

<sup>51</sup> See Arif, *Intuition and Its Role*, 121–6. Readers may also refer to Dario Cabanelas, "Formula Avicena en sus Işarat la prueba ontologica?" *Verdad y Vida (Revista de las ciencias del espiritu. Madrid)* 9 (1951): 209–50; Parviz Morewedge, "Ibn Sinā's Concept of the Self," *The Philosophical Forum* 4, no.1 (1972): 49–73; Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context," *The Monist* 69 (1986): 383–95; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Intuition of Existence* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990); and Manuel Oyarzabal Aguinalalde, "El autoconocimiento del alma segun Avicena Latino," *Pensamiento* 47 (1991): 179–93.

<sup>52</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 226; *Mubāhathāt*, 59; Arif, *Intuition and Its Role*, 122–6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ta'liqāt*, 79 and 162.



Ibn Sīnā's argument not only purports to establish that knowledge of the Self is intuitive and direct, that is, occurring without the mediation of sensory perception of physical effects (*āthār*) such as motion and pain, but it also shows that such a knowledge, whatever one may call it—self apperception, consciousness, or awareness—, is rational-experiential in the sense that it does presuppose an active mind which is always in the state of knowing and experiencing itself.<sup>54</sup> That is why the term '*aql*' in the passage should be understood as referring not merely to intellect, but also to the mind and reason (in the modern sense of the words). In fact, that is what Ibn Sīnā means by the rational soul, that is, the mind whose function includes such acts as to abstract, infer, reason, intuit, reflect, recognize, and to understand. The above and other consonant arguments<sup>55</sup> also indicate Ibn Sīnā's insistence on the intuitive character, self-evidence and apriority of self knowledge. This is because for the rational animal, human beings, intuitive knowledge of the self is primary (*awwalī*), innate (*gharizī*), natural (*bi al-ṭab'*), instinctive (*maftūr*), essential (*dhātī*), constitutive (*muqawwim*) of the self, concomitant (*lāzim*), absolute (*'alā al-iḥlāq*), and constantly active (*bi al-fi'l dā'iman*). In sum, it is identical with the very existence and presence of the self.<sup>56</sup>

Ibn Sīnā does, however, distinguish two kinds of self knowledge: [1] knowing one's self, and [2] knowing that one is having self knowledge or knowing that one is having knowledge about something. The second is of course presupposing the first and not the other way round. This, he says, explains why it is possible that often we do not know what actually happens to our body while sleeping even though we always remain aware of ourselves.<sup>57</sup> However, when our sensory knowledge accompanies our self awareness, it is referred to as 'consciousness of con-

<sup>54</sup> See *Mubāḥathāt*, 185 where he says: "*bal nafsunā dā'imat al-shu'ūr bi wujūdhā.*"

<sup>55</sup> Namely those in *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 13, 225–6 and 347ff.

<sup>56</sup> *Ta'liqāt*, 30, 79, 147, and 160.

<sup>57</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 61.

sciousness' (*al-shu'ūr bi al-shu'ūr*),<sup>58</sup> which is none other than "certitude" (*yaqīn*), as Ibn Sīnā puts it:

Certitude is [a state whereby] you know that you have knowledge of something, and you know that you know the very fact that you know and so forth. Certitude is the key to apperception of the self (*sabīl al-idrāk li al-dhāt*), since you do know your 'self' and you know that you have that knowledge, and you know that you know *that*.<sup>59</sup>

That intuitive knowledge of the self does not originate in sense perception is expressly stated by Ibn Sīnā. For him it is impossible to hold that the way to apperception of the self (*shu'ūr bi al-dhāt*) comes about by means of sensation because the senses perceive only the external or phenomenal aspect which is not the actually apperceived self.<sup>60</sup> Puzzled by this problem, one of his students then asked what the responsible agent for self apperception is. To this Ibn Sīnā reportedly replied: "The faculty which perceives in me my individual self (*dhātī al-juz'ī*) is [my] rational soul,"<sup>61</sup> which may be likened to Descartes's thinking mind (*res cogitans*).<sup>62</sup> It is indeed tempting to argue that although the word Ibn Sīnā employs for apperception is *shu'ūr*, this by no means indicates that it is a mere feeling or belief. On the contrary,

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>59</sup> *Ta'liqāt*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 60.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 117–9.

<sup>62</sup> For more discussion, see Giuseppe Furlani, "Avicenna e il *cogito ergo sum* di Cartesio," *Islamica* 3 (1927): 53–72; E. Galindo-Aguilar, "L'homme volant d'Avicenne et le 'Cogito' de Descartes," *Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes* 21 (1958): 279–95; Roger Arnaldez, "Un précédent avicennien du 'Cogito' cartésien?" *Annales islamologiques* 11 (1972): 341–9; and Thérèse-Anne Druart, "The Soul and Body Problem: Avicenna and Descartes," in *Arabic Philosophy and the West: Continuity and Interaction*, ed. Th.-A. Druart (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1988), 27–49.

it is a rational-experiential knowledge which springs from that "reality" (*dhāt*) to which every rational being refers when they say "T".

Accordingly, intuitive self-cognition is the most certain of all knowledge, and hence it constitutes both the starting-point and foundation upon which Ibn Sīnā builds his theory of knowledge, and it is this fundamental certainty that renders our talk and the whole enterprise of epistemology logically possible. For only when we have found a firm ground to rest on and are armed with logic will we be able to arrive at true, certain, universal knowledge (*al-'ilm alladhī bi al-ḥaqīqah huwa al-yaqīn*), which Ibn Sīnā describes as "to hold an unshakeable conviction (*i'tiqād lā yumkin an yazūl*) that something is such (*anna kadhā kadhā*) and that it cannot be otherwise (*lā yumkin allā yakūn kadhā*)."<sup>63</sup> One can indeed find in Ibn Sīnā's logical writings repeated emphasis on the need for achieving complete (*tāmm*), unchanging (*dā'im*), genuine (*ḥaqīqī*), firmly grounded (*thābit*) certitude if true knowledge is to be attained.<sup>64</sup>

## II. Prerequisites of Intuitive Knowledge

We shall now investigate and discuss the response Ibn Sīnā would have put forth were he asked the following question: "How is intuition possible?"—that is, "What are the conditions necessary for intuition?" This will in turn lead us to a consideration of the possible circumstances in which intuition may occur. We shall also propose a solution to the apparent contradiction in Ibn Sīnā's theory of intuition.

### 1. Contact with the Active Intellect

According to Ibn Sīnā, knowledge is at its best when its contents are universal and necessary, that is, when it gives us a true picture of reality and explains why things stand and operate as they

<sup>63</sup> *Shifā': Manṭiq: Burhān*, 78.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 88, 90, 92, 94 and 152.

are. This is because all knowledge is by definition of its subject-matter either particular or universal.<sup>65</sup> The latter, however, is considered by him to be worthier and superior to the former for several reasons. Firstly because universal knowledge (*'ilm kul-liyy*) represents the ultimate point of scientific research for the causes behind all natural phenomena. Another reason is that universal knowledge reveals and uncovers the real nature of things to the satisfaction of the soul, that is, to the extent where certitude is obtained and no more question or doubt could arise (*sakanat al-nafs ilā ma'lūmiha*).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, whereas universal knowledge implies knowledge about and provides a basis for demonstrating the particulars, the reverse is not true.<sup>67</sup>

One may add that particular, rationally indemonstrable sensory knowledge does not really deserve the name *'ilm* because for Ibn Sīnā true knowledge is that concerning universals, be it notion or proposition, and thus belongs to reason, not senses. And since universals are intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) residing in the mind, these alone are what true knowledge should be concerned with.<sup>68</sup> By universals Ibn Sīnā seems to refer not only to abstract mental notions such as genus and species, but also the first principles or laws of thought and axioms of sciences. Two points here consequently need further elaboration: [1] how universals come about, and [2] how Ibn Sīnā accounts for the whole intellectual operation and explain the manner of knowledge acquisition.

Let us begin with the first issue. Traditionally, according to Peripatetic philosophers like al-Fārābī, universals are formed by means of sense perception, repeated memories and generalization. Initially, we perceive several similar individuals out of which we obtain 'forms' or mental images that are subsequently stored up in memory; and after this constant abstractive operation of the mind, the 'essential nature' common to all the particulars

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 241–2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 242

would emerge from those sense data.<sup>69</sup> Ibn Sīnā does not reject this theory *in toto*, but adds that

Sense perception does not give us the [first] principles of demonstration nor can it produce universal knowledge (*lā shay' minhu 'ilm bi kullīy*)...<sup>70</sup> True, we do sometimes infer universal concepts from repeated sensation, but the senses neither perceive nor acquire the universals. To be sure, it is intuitive reason (*'aql*) that seizes the pure, abstract universal concept out of recurrent particulars. Given the sense data of particulars, intuitive reason grasps intellectual concept (*ma'nā ma'qūlan*) through divine effluence (*bi ishrāq fayḍ ilāhī 'alayh*).<sup>71</sup>

Thus in Ibn Sīnā's view, universals are not concepts abstracted from the particulars of sense-experience. Rather, they are ideas (*ma'ānī*) or forms (*ṣuwar*) which we receive from, or are cast upon our mind by the Active Intellect.<sup>72</sup> That universals cannot arise from the sensory images (*ṣuwar maḥsūsāt*) is due to the fact that they simply do not lie there. Consider, says Ibn Sīnā, the universal "humanness." Being-human is an essence in which all individual human beings share; it is the essential nature common to them. However, it is 'merely by accident' (*'araḍ lahā*) that it happens to exist in this or that particular man and is thus

<sup>69</sup> See al-Fārābī, *Alfārābī's philosophische Abhandlungen*, ed. F. Dieterici (Leiden, 1890), 42–3. For Aristotle's account of universals formation, see *Posterior Analytics*, II.19.99b34.

<sup>70</sup> *Shifā'*:*Manṭiq*:*Burhān*, 249.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 250; cf. 222–3. See *Kitāb fī al-Nafs 'alā sunnat al-ikhtisār*, ed. and trans. into German by S. Landauer, "Die Psychologie des Ibn Sīnā," *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft (ZDMG)* 29 (1875): 362–3, hereafter referred to as *Landauer*; this same work, also known as *Hadiyyat al-Ra'is Abī 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abdallāh ibn Sīnā li al-Amīr Nūḥ ibn Manṣūr al-Sāmānī*, is reprinted with slight re-edition in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 147–78 under the title *Mabḥath 'an al-Quwā al-Nafsāniyyah*.

<sup>72</sup> *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 123.

multiplied in that sense. Yet, Ibn Sīnā contends, 'humanness' in itself is never multiplied and always remains a single unit. For if 'manness' were present in Zayd because it belonged to him, we could never attribute it to 'Amr and others.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, Ibn Sīnā considers 'universality' as merely an attribute later ascribed by our mind and attached to the essence 'humanness'.<sup>74</sup> Thus for him essences are not really universals. They only appear and behave as such when they are in the mind. Besides, no amount of particular instances would actually suffice to produce a universal essence which is applicable to and representative of infinite particular instances.<sup>75</sup> Ibn Sīnā therefore declares that the task of our mind is not so much to abstract universals as to merely consider and reflect upon the limited number of particulars perceptible to our senses. This activity *prepares* the mind for the reception of universal essences from the Active Intellect by means of intuition.<sup>76</sup>

As Fazlur Rahman points out, two vital considerations underlie Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of universals. The first of these is that universals do not come about merely as a result of perception, which involves the capture (*idrāk*) of qualities in particular

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<sup>73</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. Madjid Fakhry (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadidah, 1985), 208; cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology: an English Translation of kitāb al-Najāt, Book II, Chapter VI, with Historico-philosophical Notes and Textual Improvements on the Cairo Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952; repr., Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1981), 38 (Page reference is to the reprint edition), henceforth cited as *Psychology*.

<sup>74</sup> See *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 209–10. This subject is also discussed by Fazlur Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4, ed. Richard Hunt *et al.* (London: Warburg Institute, 1958), 1–16; Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Chapter on Universals in the *Isagoge* of the *Shifā'*," in *Islam: Past Influences and Present Challenge*, ed. Alford T. Welch and Pierre Cachia (Edinburgh: University Press, 1979), 34–51; and *ibid.*, "Quiddity and Universality in Avicenna," in *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 77–87.

<sup>75</sup> *Najāt*, 217; *Psychology*, 50.

<sup>76</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 208 and 218.

objects by the senses as well as the abstraction (*tajrīd*) and recognition (*ta'āqqul*) of the essential feature common to them. In other words, the operation is not reducible to our perceiving the particulars either singly or totally, nor is it simply about picking up the common nature in them, in which case it would be only a spurious kind of universal. Secondly, if our perception of individual instances and our noting their similarity were sufficient to produce universals, then acquisition of knowledge would become mechanical and would operate necessarily on its own. However, this is not the case, given the fact that we do not always know what we are supposed to or want to or could know. On these grounds Ibn Sīnā justifiably argues that the origin of human knowledge is as mysterious as it involves intuition at every stage. That is to say, of all rational cognition, more or less, it is not so much true to say "I know it" as to admit "It occurs to me."<sup>77</sup> For all ideas and forms that constitute our knowledge and understanding come from outside (*mustafādah min khārij*)<sup>78</sup>—to be sure, we receive and intuit them from the Active Intellect, which is the proximate source and form-giver (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*) whose intellectual power is essentially and permanently active. Since the whole account rests upon his doctrine of the process by which the human mind or intellect<sup>79</sup> moves from pure potentiality to the perfect state of actuality, it is imperative that we consider it in some detail.

Like his predecessors, Ibn Sīnā has come up with a theory about the human mind and its cognitive development, which may

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<sup>77</sup> See Fazlur Rahman, "Ibn Sīnā," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. M. M. Sharif (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1966), 496.

<sup>78</sup> See *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 40 and 219.

<sup>79</sup> I make no distinction between the terms 'mind,' 'reason,' 'intellect' or 'intelligence,' since they merely represent certain functions of the human soul, rather than different entities, just like the Arabic *dhīhn*, 'aql, fu'ād, qalb, and lubb in relation to *nafs* and *rūḥ*. To quote al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 122: "The term 'aql .... indicates the same reality that is denoted by the terms heart (*qalb*), spirit (*rūḥ*), and self (*nafs*). This conscious, active entity has many names such as identified by the four terms above because of its many modes in its relations with the various levels of existence."

be summarized as follows.<sup>80</sup> In the beginning, that is, at birth the human mind is a sheer potential which has yet to develop and actualize its cognitive capacity. The three stage development may be compared to one's gradual learning of how to write. Initially, Ibn Sīnā says, an infant has only an absolute or unqualified potentiality (*quwwah muṭlaqah*) for writing. However, as the child grows up and matures, he comes to know the pen and ink well and learn the art of writing, so that if he can control the basics and go on to master the art without any intermediate step (*bi lā wāsiṭah*), he is said now to have a possible or 'enabling' potentiality (*quwwah mumkinah*) for writing. Later, as he becomes adept with the writing instruments and achieves mastery in his art to the extent that he needs no training any more but can exercise his skill 'whenever he wishes' (*matā shā'a*), then he has reached the stage of perfect potentiality (*kamāl al-quwwah*).<sup>81</sup>

By the same token, the theoretical faculty (*al-quwwah al-naẓariyyah*) of our mind undergoes three evolutionary phases.<sup>82</sup> In the beginning, Ibn Sīnā tells us, the human mind was just a pure substance, existing only potentially and containing no ideas or intelligibles. At this stage, the human mind consists merely of cognitive and cogitative potentials, and is called 'material' (*'aql hayūlānī*) because it resembles the state of primary matter which is devoid of, and yet prepared to receive any form. Next, upon regular and repeated learning exercises, the mind becomes 'habit-

<sup>80</sup> For a thorough account see H. A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 83–116. Cf. Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 14–20.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 39; *Ishārāt*, 2: 388; *Najāt*, 204; also *Psychology*, 33–4. On this point Ibn Sīnā marks his divergence from Aristotle's theory in *De Anima* III.v.430a.10–14 although the latter too differentiates three senses of potentiality and actuality in *ibid.* II.v.417a.22–b2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibn Sīnā distinguishes between the theoretical faculty of the human rational soul, which is concerned with contemplation of the intelligibles, and the practical faculty (*al-quwwah al-'amalīyyah*) whose function it is to deliberate about action and deduce principles of morality and art. See *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 37–8; *Najāt*, 202–3; *Psychology*, 20; *Ishārāt*, 2:388. Cf. Aristotle's contrast between speculative and practical thinking (*το νοεῖν καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν*) in the *De Anima* III.iii. 427a.19–20.



ual' ('*aql bi al-malakah*), which marks the possession of primary intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt ūlā*) only, consisting of basic concepts or primary notions, universals as well as basic rational truths or laws of thought such as "the whole is greater than the part" and "things equal to the same thing are equal to each other." The final stage is when the mind fully actualizes its potentiality and possesses a perfect capacity (*quwwah kamāliyyah*) in which it can do various intellectual operations on its own. Ibn Sīnā calls this an 'intellect in action' ('*aql bi al-fi'l*), which is the result of the perfection of mental aptitude through proper training and constant learning. In addition to acquiring primary intelligibles, an intellect in action, Ibn Sīnā tells us, is possessed of secondary intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt thāniyyah*), that is, ideas that serve as the foundation for posterior knowledge.<sup>83</sup> Only when the actualization and perfection is accomplished does the human mind qualify for receiving the 'forms' or knowledge that flow from the creative Active Intelligence. This is the phase of 'acquired intellect' ('*aql mustafād*)<sup>84</sup> where intelligible forms are present and imprinted

<sup>83</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 37–8; *Najāṭ*, 202–3. Just what Ibn Sīnā exactly means by the terms 'primary' and 'secondary' intelligibles is a moot point. For my part, however, al-Jurjānī's interpretation seems to be the most plausible. According to him, *ma'qūlāt ūlā* are universal concepts which correspond to the realities in the external world, e.g. 'man', 'animal' etc., whereas *ma'qūlāt thāniyyah* refer to those which have no corresponding realities outside our mind, i.e., concept of concepts, such as 'genus', 'species', etc. See al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'rīfāt*, ed. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakīm al-Qādī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1991), entries nos. 1670 and 1671.

<sup>84</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 39–40; *Najāṭ*, 204–5; *Ishārāt*, 2:389–91. I propose that it be translated as 'acquired intellection' instead of the commonly accepted but rather puzzling 'acquired' intellect, taking '*aql*' as gerund in the sense of *ta'aqqul*, thereby removing the ambiguity inherent in the notion. This reading is supported by a passage in "Ein neuer Text zur Seelenlehre Avicennas" (*al-Nukat wa al-Fawā'id fī al-'Ilm al-Ṭabī'ī: fī al-Nufūs*), ed. Wilhelm Kutsch, in *Avicenna Commemorative Volume* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1956), 172. Fazlur Rahman in his *Psychology*, 89 has noted that Ibn Sīnā's "habitual intellect" and "acquired intellect" exactly correspond to Alexander's  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \kappa\alpha\theta' \epsilon\acute{\xi}\tau\upsilon$  and  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \kappa\alpha\tau' \acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha\nu$  in the latter's *De Anima liber cum Mantissa* (in *Supplementum Aristotelicum*, 2: 1, Berlin, 1887) 85.25ff.

onto the human mind by and during its contact with the Active Intelligence.<sup>85</sup> It is at this stage of absolute, perfect capacity where the mind becomes constantly active and independent of sense perception and imagination that intuition occurs. Thus, on Ibn Sīnā's account, the mental development culminates in the possession of prowess which renders cognition of everything possible.

It is important to note that Ibn Sīnā's theory of mental development is very much connected with his doctrine of emanation (*fayḍ*). In his cosmological scheme, the Active Intelligence stands low in the hierarchy of the incorporeal intelligences governing the universe. Although it cannot fully imitate intelligences above it nor can it eternally emanate the body and soul of a celestial sphere, it is nevertheless the emanating cause of the matter and of the soul of beings of the sublunar world, as well as the agent responsible for the actualization of the human mind.<sup>86</sup> That is to say, the Active Intelligence emanates a human soul endowed with the potentiality for thought upon its receiving a portion of matter, thereby bringing the human 'material mind' into existence, and onto the subsequent stages of actualization. In order to perform its functions, the Active Intelligence must therefore be always actual, for were it potential, Ibn Sīnā argues, then we would have an infinite regress. Owing to its role in the process of actualization, it is termed, in relation to the potential mind, the 'agent', just as the material mind which is acted upon is termed the 'passive' one (*al-munfa'il*) in relation to the former.<sup>87</sup>

Clearly then, on Ibn Sīnā's account, learning is the process by means of which one develops one's mental ability and apti-

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<sup>85</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 40; *Najāt*, 203-1; *Psychology*, 33; *Ishārāt*, 2:391-2; *Ishārāt* 3:674 and 3:701-2. Ibn Sīnā uses both the words 'imprint' (*tartasim*) and 'carve' (*yantaqish*) figuratively to describe the occurrence. See "Ein neuer Text zur Seelenlehre Avicennas," 166-7 and *Mubāḥathāt*, 200.

<sup>86</sup> *Shifā':Ilāhiyyāt*, 388-9 and 406-9, also *ibid.*, 142-3; *Najāt*, 314; *Ishārāt*, 3:659-61. Cf. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 76.

<sup>87</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 208; *Najāt*, 231; *Psychology*, 69.

tude in order to be prepared for perceiving ideas and receiving forms from the Active Intelligence above. Indeed, the human mind cannot obtain intelligibles from below, that is, from the perceptual apparatus of the animal soul, since the latter perceives only empirically apprehended sensibles and thus can do no more than bringing particulars (*juz' iyyāt*) to the mind or rational soul.<sup>88</sup> As Ibn Sīnā describes, the relationship of the supernal Intelligence to the potential human mind is like that of the sun to our vision. Just as the sun by its own nature is 'actually' and continually shining and by the light it sheds renders visible what is otherwise not actually perceivable, so also does this Active Intelligence render every idea intelligible to our minds.<sup>89</sup> With this view Ibn Sīnā appears at first glance to play down the active role of our mind in cognition and understanding and seems to undermine the need for sense perception in scientific discoveries. However, this is not true, for what he is trying to say is that we must combine, or rather aid, empiricism with intuition—that is, by 'staying tuned' in order to intuit ideas from the Active Intelligence. Indeed, given the fact that it assumes the most significant role of bestowing the intelligibles and universal concepts upon our minds, and being construed as the proximate effective agent and source of 'the principles of abstract intellectual concepts' (*mabādi' al-ṣuwar al-'aqliyyah al-mujarradah*)<sup>90</sup> it is no wonder if the Active Intelligence has been identified with the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī*), also known in Islamic tradition as an epithet of the Archangel Jibrīl.<sup>91</sup> It is apparently for this reason Ibn Sīnā describes intuition as a divine effluence (*fayḍ ilāhī*).<sup>92</sup>

To the question of how one receives the intelligible forms, Ibn Sīnā explains that they come to our mind in either one of these two ways. First, we may intuit them through divine effusion

<sup>88</sup> *Najāt*, 220, *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyyāt:Nafs*, 196.

<sup>89</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyyāt:Nafs*, 208; *Najāt*, 231; *Psychology*, 69.

<sup>90</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyyāt:Nafs*, 208 and 215.

<sup>91</sup> See al-Qur'ān 2:87 and 26:192–3.

<sup>92</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 107 and 200.

(*ilhām ilāhī*) “as is the case with the primary concepts” which come to us “without any process of learning nor dependence on the senses.” Second, they may be obtained through syllogism (*qiyās*) or discursive reasoning by which intelligible concepts are learned step by step in a detailed and methodical fashion, until all the data are comprehended as meaningful, interrelated parts of a unified whole.<sup>93</sup> One could interpret this, as Goodman did, to mean that the “pure concepts necessary to the workings of a syllogism are reached abductively, by examination of the ideas we must have had available to make our reasoning rigorous.”<sup>94</sup> However, even those *ma‘qūlāt badhiyyah*, Ibn Sīnā insists, can be reached by a few exceptionally alert minds, i.e., those possessing strong intuitive power, without having recourse to syllogism or any other rational procedure. Such a case would not be impossible if the human mind has established conjunction or contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the universal Active Intelligence.<sup>95</sup>

Ibn Sīnā warns us, however, not to confuse or mistake union (*ittiḥād*) for contact. On this point he insists and refutes the doctrine attributed to al-Kindī, which teaches that the soul acquires the intelligibles by coming into union with the Active Intellect or with part of it.<sup>96</sup> For if the soul become united with the entire Active Intellect, Ibn Sīnā argues, it would immediately contain everything possessed by the latter and would know everything that the Active Intellect knows. Moreover, it would also follow that simply by knowing a single intelligible, the human mind would at once know all the intelligibles and be ignorant of nothing, which is not true as it never happens<sup>97</sup> nor is it possible for the human mind to unite with a part of the Active

<sup>93</sup> Landauer, 361. English translation of the relevant passages in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 16–19 and 161. Cf. *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 123.

<sup>94</sup> Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (London: Routledge, 1992), 147.

<sup>95</sup> *Ishārāt*, 701; Landauer, 364–5.

<sup>96</sup> See *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyyah*, ed. M. Abū Rīdah (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1950), 356.

<sup>97</sup> 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Aristū 'ind al-'Arab* (Cairo, 1947; repr. Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1978), 92–3. Cf. *Shifā':Tabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 212–3.

Intellect, since immaterial entities and incorporeal beings like intellect are by no means divisible and have no parts. Therefore, Ibn Sīnā concludes, acquisition of intelligibles results from mere contact and having 'traces' (*athar*) of the Active Intellect.<sup>98</sup>

Interestingly, however, Ibn Sīnā explains that even a momentary contact with the Active Intellect is sufficient to effect the flowing into fully actualized human minds, in an instantaneous but comprehensive fashion, of the intelligible ideas necessary for our thought to start with. The nature of this contact is comparable, as noted earlier, to the relation the sun has with our eyes.<sup>99</sup> An analogy may illustrate this point better. The Active Intellect, being transcendent up there, functions more or less like a satellite continuously telecasting all possible intelligible ideas directly to human minds which work in the same way television sets operate. Nevertheless, these ideas intuited by the mind and received from the Active Intellect, Ibn Sīnā remarks, just come and go (*yajūz an yakhlūwa*).<sup>100</sup> They do not remain in the mind the way sense data are conserved in memory. For the intelligible forms would stay in the mind only when they are actually being intellected, since universals, in his view, are remembered only *per accidens*.<sup>101</sup> As a matter of fact, the ordinary human mind, says Ibn Sīnā, is like a mirror upon which there is a succession of ideas reflected from the Active Intellect.<sup>102</sup> This does not mean, however, that the ideas once acquired, because they soon leave, have to be re-learned all over again when they are recalled. For by initial apprehension, the mind would have acquired the skill for establishing contact with the Active Intellect, thereby gaining intuitive access to the ideas. For in retrieving them one needs only to use that mental skill (*malakat al-ittiṣāl*) he already has.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Badawī, *Ariṣṭū*, 93.

<sup>99</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 208–9 and 218; *Najāt*, 206.

<sup>100</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 39.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 169 and 217. See also *Burhān*, 222–3.

<sup>102</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 217.

<sup>103</sup> *Ishārāt*, 2:401.

In other words, as soon as the contact is established, the rational faculty of the mind would automatically intuit the ideas immediately and independently of the other faculties, even if one lose all the sensory apparatus.<sup>104</sup> Referring to the analogy of mirror, Ibn Sīnā says that prior to intuitive contact and acquisition of knowledge, our mental mirror was or might be rusty, but when we rethink, contemplate and concentrate, the mirror is polished and all that we have to do is just direct it to the sun in order to reflect the light.<sup>105</sup> Speaking in Aristotelian terms, Ibn Sīnā elsewhere calls the universal Intellect responsible for the occurrence of intuitive cognition, the efficient, active cause (*'illah fā'iliyyah*), while the particular human mind the receptive, passive cause (*'illah qābilah*).<sup>106</sup> The question that may now be raised is whether and how one can gain a permanently facile access to that hypostatic repertoire of intelligibles. This leads us to considering Ibn Sīnā's emphasis on the need for cogitation and reflection as well as spiritual purification that would constitute mental preparation (*isti'dād*) which is a necessary condition and pre-requisite for intuitive cognition.

## 2. Cogitation and Reflection

At first glance, Ibn Sīnā's theory of intuition seems to be incoherent when it comes to this point. For on the one hand, he tells us that intuition is an immediate cognition, non-inferential knowledge without any preceding effort and search. Yet on the other, Ibn Sīnā indicates that intuition will not occur to anybody haphazardly nor is it the same for everyone. This apparent contradiction would be solved if we take a closer look at his other statements. Intuitions, says Ibn Sīnā, may vary from one individual to another, so that it is possible that a person attains intuition by himself and syllogisms be constructed in his mind without the help of a teacher. The same is true of their receptivity to intuition,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 2:402.

<sup>105</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 217.

<sup>106</sup> *Ishārāt*, 2:402.

whether in terms of number or of speed, so that some people may have a greater number of intuition of middle terms, and certain individuals may intuit faster than others do.<sup>107</sup> Behind such a variety (*tafāwut*) lies the correlative degree of individual potentiality (*isti'dād*). That is to say, intuition may either increase or decrease in accordance with the quality of an individual's mental preparation.

Among the preparatory activities needed to effect intuition are cogitation (*afkār*) and reflection (*ta'ammulāt*). As noted above, this seems to be at odds with immediacy and spontaneity characteristic of intuition. One resolution of this contradiction is suggested in the *Mubāḥathāt*. There Ibn Sīnā speaks about intuition in its strongest form (*al-ḥads al-bāligh*), which comes about without its object being sought after and without reflection.<sup>108</sup> He also speaks of lesser forms of intuition where the intelligibles are sought and attained with difficulty, that is, following cogitation and reflection. Ibn Sīnā tells us that he himself underwent such an experience.<sup>109</sup> However, since reflection sometimes fails to bring about intuition immediately, people sometimes give up on it, so to speak, to have it unexpectedly occur to them.<sup>110</sup> Usually the cogitative faculty must labor and get acquainted with rational principles in order to establish contact or conjoin with the Active Intelligence *vis-à-vis* a given thought, whereupon the mind can re-establish the contact so as to apprehend the incoming middle terms without having recourse to cogitation once again. To be sure, cogitation consists not so much in bringing about the desired result as in exercising the mind and reflecting upon the innate ideas (*ma'ānī*) with the help of imagination.<sup>111</sup> In Ibn

<sup>107</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'iyāt:Nafs*, 220; *Najāt*, 206; and Gutas, *Avicenna*, 162. Rahman in *Psychology*, 36 curiously reads *al-ḥaqq* for *al-ḥads* and hence translates: "... a man may find the 'truth' within himself ...." (*an yaqa'a li al-insān fī nafsīhi al-ḥaqq*).

<sup>108</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 72.

<sup>109</sup> W. Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sīnā* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1974), 28–9; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 27–8.

<sup>110</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 72.

<sup>111</sup> *Ishārāt*, 368.

Sinā's words, "cogitations and reflections are but movement, i.e. mental exercises that are meant to prepare the soul for receiving [divine] emanation in such a way that the middle terms are presented [to the mind] by which they reach conclusion."<sup>112</sup> Thus for him cogitation represents an attempt to establish a perfect disposition (*isti'dād tāmm*) to achieve conjunction with the Active Intellect.<sup>113</sup>

In this context it would be helpful to recall Ibn Sinā's distinction between two phases of knowledge, namely, [1] simple cognition (*'ilm basīf*), when the intelligibles flow from the Active Intellect not in an organized form, and [2] cogitative cognition (*'ilm fikrī*) when the effluence is completed and the ideas are meaningfully classified and logically structured.<sup>114</sup> In light of this distinction, it seems warranted to say that in the first phase cogitation serves to separate, combine, and arrange into meaningful wholes the sensible forms stored up within the imaginative faculty and present its handiwork to the mind, thereby preparing the latter for intuition. Once cogitation has conditioned the mind to act and operate properly, the mind no longer needs recourse to cogitation everytime a problem confronts, for all it has to do is just to stay tuned to the epistemic 'waves' cast by the Active Intellect and 'intuit' them whenever it wishes (*kāna lahā an tattaṣil matā shā'at*).<sup>115</sup> Notwithstanding its important role, therefore, cogitation can be partly or wholly dispensed with because some people, Ibn Sinā tells us, may indeed reach such a level of consummate intuition that they almost have no need of cogitation in most of what they learn.<sup>116</sup>

As noted above, the discrepancy could also be resolved if we take into account the doctrine of classification of human intuitive power. In many a place Ibn Sinā maintains that with regard to hitting right upon the mark, human minds are not the same but

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<sup>112</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 208.

<sup>113</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 198.

<sup>114</sup> *Shifā':Ṭabī'īyyāt:Nafs*, 215.

<sup>115</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 198.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.



vary in terms of capacity and intensity. For this reason they can be divided into three classes (*tabaqāt*). The highest among them are individuals to whom the middle terms appear instantaneously in such a way that they can easily find the solution to a problem. This could also happen to them when their long and repeated contemplation come to no avail. Ibn Sīnā repeatedly argues that the various degrees of people's cognitive powers are not infinite; whereas the weakest minds are totally incapable of intuition no matter how hard they might try, the best minds can intuit all the middle terms in the shortest time and are ever-ready to receive all intelligibles cast by the Active Intellect. To the next group belong individuals of mediocre capacity, who need a bit of cogitation and frequent imaginative reflection before they can understand or find solution. The majority of people, however, come under the third group, which includes those who are not able to apprehend anything on their own, or cannot make maximum use of their rational power and therefore are in need of a teacher.<sup>117</sup> In short, while it is true that cogitation may further develop and upgrade one's mental capacity for intuition, it does not necessarily follow that without cogitation intuition is impossible nor does it contradict Ibn Sīnā's very statement that intuition is given and spontaneous.

### 3. *Purification of the Mind and Soul*

In addition to mental exercises such as cogitation and reflection, there is still another requirement of intuition to be fulfilled, namely mental purification and spiritual cleansing. As noted earlier, although he affirms that intuition is attainable without any acquisitive effort (*bilā kasb*), Ibn Sīnā explicitly asserts that intuition will occur only to a pure mind and clean soul. That is to say, the more chaste a person, the greater the chance and access he has to intuition. Like Galen, Ibn Sīnā assumes that a strong correlation exists between the different degrees of acumen in people and

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 72-3. Cf. *Mabda'*, 116 and *Risālah fī Ithbāt al-Nubuwwah*, ed. M. E. Marmura (Beirut: Dār al-Nahr, 1968), 45-7.

their body temperaments.<sup>118</sup> For him the cognitive power of the soul corresponds to the humoral temperament (*mizāj*) of the body, so that the closer one's temperament is to a balanced state (*aqrab ilā al-i'tidāl*), the more is he predisposed (*akthar isti'dādan*), not only to developing excellent traits both in his knowledge and his works, but also to receive divine effluence and intuition.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, says Ibn Sīnā, "there might be a person whose soul has been rendered so powerful (*mu'ayyad al-nafs*) through extreme purity (*li shiddat al-ṣafā'*) and intense contact with intellectual principles that he becomes ablaze with intuition."<sup>120</sup> The question which naturally arises then is *why* and *how* the soul should be purified.

Let us start with answering the first question. According to Ibn Sīnā, human beings are privileged, for unlike the rest of living creatures, they alone are endowed with a unique faculty that is highly capable of reasoning and abstract cognition. Ibn Sīnā calls it the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) and describes it as a substance (*jawhar*) imprinted neither in the body nor in any other corporeal entity, which subsists in itself and by nature yearns after perfection, despite its association with the body so long as the person is alive.<sup>121</sup> In the course of time, however, the body diverts it and overwhelms it, causing it to forget its true love (*shawq*) and quest for perfection and drawing it to lowly plea-

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<sup>118</sup> *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 197; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 75–6. The possible Galenic influence is discussed in D. Gutas, s.v. "Avicenna" (V. Mysticism), *Encyclopædia Iranica* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), 3: 80, citing *Galenī Scripta Minora*, ed. I. Müller (Leipzig, 1891), 2: 79 and H. H. Biesterfeldt, "Kitāb fī anna Quwā al-Nafs...", *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 40, 4: 43. According to F. M. Cornford, "Mysticism and Science in Pythagorean Tradition," *Classical Quarterly* 16 (1922): 145, however, the doctrine that the good state of the body (health, strength, beauty) is the proportioned mixture or temperament of the physical opposites (hot and cold, wet and dry, etc.) is traceable to Alcmaeon, *Fragmenta*, 4 and Plato, *Symposium*, 186D.

<sup>119</sup> *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 197; also in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 75–6.

<sup>120</sup> *Najāṭ*; 206; *Psychology*, 36; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 162.

<sup>121</sup> *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 195; also in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 72–4.

tures.<sup>122</sup> Attachment to the body and preoccupation with satisfying its needs and desire often eventually hinder the complete reception by the rational soul of the divine effluence and prevents the occurrence of intuition.<sup>123</sup> This is part of the reason why mental purification is necessary.

Ibn Sīnā also offers another explanation. The soul, he asserts, notwithstanding its intrinsic unity (*waḥdah*), is somehow divisible into three parts, each of which being distinguished by its own specific role, function, and inclination: [1] the vegetative soul, which comprises the faculties of reproduction, growth, and nourishment; [2] the animal soul, which is the agent behind voluntary movement and sensory perception of particulars; and [3] the rational soul, which is responsible for such mental operations as cogitation and reasoning, including inference and decision making, problem solving, as well as perceiving universal concepts and principles.<sup>124</sup> Each one of those three parts, according to Ibn Sīnā, resides in a particular organ of the body: the vegetative in the liver, the animal in the heart, and the rational in the brain.<sup>125</sup> Unlike the rational, however, the vegetative and the animal soul are so intimately attached to the body that they will perish when a person dies, whereas the rational soul survives and will, upon leaving the body, remain as it was. However, contrary to what some people might think, there is actually a bliss in disguise following the soul's departure from the body, for as Ibn Sīnā affirms:

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<sup>122</sup> *Najāt*, 330 and 332. Cf. *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 136–7 and *Risālah fī Māhiyyat al-Ṣalāh*, in *Rasā'il Ibn Sīnā* (Qumm: Intishārāt Baydār, n.d.), 303 and *Risālah fī al-'Ishq*, also in the *Rasā'il*, 383.

<sup>123</sup> *Risālah fī al-Kalām 'alā al-Nafs al-Nāṭiqah*, in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 198; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 76.

<sup>124</sup> *Najāt*, 197.

<sup>125</sup> *Mi'rāj Nāmah*, ed. N. Māyel Heravī (Mashhad: The Islamic Research Foundation, 1986), 81, cited in the English translation of it by Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 113.

When the association of the soul with the body is severed through death .... when the separation occurs after the soul has acquired excellent qualities, both theoretical as well as practical, and now that the obstacle, which used to prevent [the soul's] reception of the divine effluence in its totality, has vanished—namely, its association and preoccupation with the body, then the person<sup>126</sup> will receive the divine effluence and see whatever was hidden from it prior to the separation and there will come about it an affinity with the pure intelligences which are the causes of beings, since all the truths and realities are revealed (*idh al-ḥaqā'iq kulluhā munkashifah*) to those intelligences.<sup>127</sup>

It seems that part of the reason why Ibn Sīnā emphasizes the need for purification of the soul and sets it as a necessary condition for intuition is the undeniable fact that both the vegetative and the animal soul, by nature after bodily pleasure and satisfaction, lean less towards good and more to evil and vice and are likely to even blindfold and drag the rational soul along the satanic path. However, intuition containing the truths, as he repeatedly asserts, will occur only to a highly strong, extremely pure, constantly tuned, and well-prepared soul.

Let us turn now to the question of *how* one should purify the soul. Ibn Sīnā suggests two practical ways of purifying the soul. One is purification through knowledge of God (*'ilm bi Allāh*) as well as works for God (*'amal li Allāh*), which consists of [1] the soul being purged of vile and wicked qualities of char-

<sup>126</sup> Not "the soul", as Gutas has put it (see *Avicenna*, 77), thinking that the masculine pronoun implicit in the verb *yaqbalu* here "could refer, strictly speaking, to *jins* or *jawhar*" and that "the meaning, however, is clear." Gutas fails to notice that the subject to which the pronoun refers is *al-insān*, as indeed mentioned in the beginning of the paragraph (the first line in Ahwānī's edition).

<sup>127</sup> *Risālah fī al-Kalām 'alā al-Nafs al-Nāṭiqah*, in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 198; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 76–7.

acter, [2] giving up blameworthy traits as well as evil and offensive habits by following reason and abiding by religious law, and [3] adopting good habits, assuming praiseworthy traits, excellent and pleasing qualities of character. This can be accomplished, Ibn Sīnā further explains, by methods mentioned in books on ethics and, of course, by assiduous and unflinching performance of religious duties, both legal and traditional (*sunnah*) as well as ritual and social observances. All these practices, he adds, when done properly and continually, are beneficial not only in subjugating the evil-inciting soul (*nafs ammārah bi al-sū'*), but also in transforming it into the rational, tranquil soul (*nafs muṭma'innah*).<sup>128</sup> In short, all undertakings prescribed above will effectively make the pleasure-seeking faculties of the soul—namely, the appetitive and the irascible—eventually subservient to the rational soul.

As for the other means of spiritual purification Ibn Sīnā proposes the practice of prayer. In a short treatise entitled *fi Māhiyyat al-Ṣalāh*, he explicates the significance of prayer and the correlative influence that he firmly believes to exist between prayer and intuition of middle terms. According to Ibn Sīnā, to pray means to worship (*ta'abbud*) and to know the First Cause. For worship leads to knowledge and awareness of God's absolute and necessary existence. During prayer, the mind is seized of His Being with a pure heart, a spirit undefiled and a soul wholly and sincerely devoted to Him. In fact, not only is it an effective measure of communication with the divine, but prayer actually elevates the human soul and brings it into a close affinity to the celestial substances<sup>129</sup>—a view consonant with Ibn Sīnā's emanative epistemology.

<sup>128</sup> *Risālah fi al-Kalām 'alā al-Nafs al-Nāṭiqah*, in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, 197; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 74–5.

<sup>129</sup> *Risālah fi Māhiyyat al-Ṣalāh*, in *Traité mystiques d'Avicenne*, ed. and trans. M. August F. Mehren (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1889–1899; repr. Amsterdam: APA-Philo Press, 1979), 3rd Fasc., II.a, 28–43 (Arabic text) and 16–24 (French translation); also in *Rasā'il*, 303–4. English translation in Arthur J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology* (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1979), 55–6.

Having distinguished between an outward, physical prayer and an inward, spiritual prayer, Ibn Sinā asserts that after all the truth of prayer lies with the latter.<sup>130</sup> For in inward prayer a person is contemplating God with a pure heart and a spirit cleansed of all devilish desires; it is the path of pure thought with which alone is the intellect concerned. It is through such a prayer that the Active Intellect becomes readily accessible, such that the rational soul has only “to wait for the unveiling of truths and to reflect with complete intuition and pure mind (*bi ḥadsih al-tāmm wa dhihniḥ al-ṣāfi*) upon the perception of subtle ideas and to read with the eye of inner vision the tablet of Divine Mystery.”<sup>131</sup> This is by all means possible provided the rational soul has subdued the lower souls and relieved the person from worldly preoccupations. To sum up, the inward prayer serves not only to purify the soul but also to facilitate the divine effluence and pouring of intuitions.

When the soul has reached a sublime stage, and has acquired the excellent [sacred] faculty, and is separated from the body, it attains whatever it attains there, where all distractions are vanished, [even] faster than intuition [so that] the intellectual world presents itself to the soul according to the order of the terms of propositions and according to the essential order of the intelligibles, not the temporal one; and this takes place all at once. [If] there is need for reflection [in this world], [it is] because the soul is in a turbid condition or because it has had little training and is impotent to attain the divine effluence or

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<sup>130</sup> Fazlur Rahman points out similar distinction outlined in Plotinus' *Enneads* IV.4.26ff between an external verbal prayer and an inner, spiritual prayer of ecstasis, as well as in Porphyry as reported by Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* X, 9. See Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 80–1.

<sup>131</sup> *Māhiyyat al-Ṣalāh*, 302; Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology*, 53.

because of distractions. Were it not for all this, the soul would rise, leaving everything behind, to the end of truth.<sup>132</sup>

One might wonder how a philosopher as rational as Ibn Sīnā could turn out to be religious and could include prayer in his epistemic scheme. The answer is given however in his telling autobiography: "Whenever I encountered an insoluble problem and could not discover the middle term of the syllogism [at issue], I would visit the mosque frequently and worship, praying humbly to the Originator of everything until He opened the door of the mystery and made the difficult easy to me."<sup>133</sup> This confession not only shows the important role Ibn Sīnā accords to prayer, but it also suggests some significant connection he believes which exists between inner prayer and intuitive knowledge. Needless to say, far from being a nominal Muslim, Ibn Sīnā must have realized that ultimately all knowledge comes from God "who teaches man what he knows not" and "who gives *ḥikmah* whomsoever He will," and who anyone seeking the truth and eager to know the realities should turn to.

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<sup>132</sup> *Mubāḥathāt*, 107; cf. 254. Translation adopted from Gutas, *Avicenna*, 166.

<sup>133</sup> Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sīnā*, 28–9.