AVICENNA'S AND MULLĀ ṢADRĀ'S ARGUMENTS FOR IMMATERIALITY OF THE SOUL FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF PHYSICALISM

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Abstract

I seek to explicate the ways in which the soul is deemed immaterial in two main strands of Islamic philosophy, and then consider some arguments for the immateriality of the soul. To do so, I will first overview Avicenna's theory of the spiritual incipience (*al-ḥudūth al-rūḥānī*) of the soul and his version of substance dualism. I will then discuss Mullā Ṣadrā's view of the physical incipience (*al-ḥudūth al-jismānī*) of the soul and how the soul emerges and develops towards immateriality on his account.

I will then overview and discuss five of the most important arguments presented by these two great Muslim philosophers in favor of the immateriality of the soul. To do so, I will also point out some of the main contemporary physicalistic views of the nature of mind and mental states. I will then argue that arguments for the immateriality of the soul — dealt with here — do not indeed target or challenge any significant versions of contemporary physicalism. Moreover, these arguments involve conflations of epistemological or ontological issues.

Introduction

Islamic psychology or the study of the psyche began with substance dualism as maintained by al-Fārābī and Avicenna (or Ibn Sīnā) and was then developed into Mullā Ṣadrā's two-stage monism. Since the

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philosophies of Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā are the two main philosophical strands of the Islamic world and attracted many followers and advocates, I will briefly consider the views of these two Muslim philosophers about the emergence of the soul and its nature, as well as some of the chief arguments for the immateriality of the soul.

The two philosophers provide different accounts of the incipience (that is, the state of coming to exist) and immateriality of the soul although they both agree that the soul is immaterial (albeit in different ways or to varying extents). Thus, many of the arguments already presented by Avicenna in favor of the immateriality of the soul were later deployed by Mullā Ṣadrā with modifications or supplementations. The major part of Islamic psychology consists of arguments for the immateriality of the soul, which have been frequently discussed. In this paper, however, I will adopt a new approach to show that these arguments can be challenged for different reasons, and in many cases, they essentially fail to serve as arguments against contemporary physicalistic views of the mind.

1. Avicenna's View of the Spiritual Incipience of the Soul

For Avicenna, the soul is a substance distinct from the bodily substance. In general, the soul does two kinds of actions: in relation to the body, it controls and manipulates the body, and in relation to its own essence, it perceives intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*, or universal concepts). In Avicenna's view, the two kinds of actions are mutually exclusive. That is to say, whenever the soul is engaged in one kind of action, it will be distracted from the other, and thus, it is extremely difficult for the soul to do both actions at the same time.[1]

Avicenna draws an analogy between the human soul's manipulation of the body and a sea captain's manipulation of the ship, although he admits that the analogy does not hold in all respects. For one thing, the

1. H. Avicenna, *Al-Shifā'; Al-Ṭabī'īyyāt* [*The book of Healing*; *Natural Sciences*], 3 voll., Ayatollah al-Mar'ashi Library, Qom 1404 AH, vol. 2: The section on Psychology, p. 195.

soul is, in itself, abstract or detached from space. The common parlance that «the soul is *in* the body» is grounded in the fact that the soul's control, stimulations, cognitions, and the rest of its faculties are specific to this particular body; the soul came to exist when the body came to exist, and the relation or attachment between them holds as long as the body continues to exist. When the body decays, the substance of the soul will survive as detached and immaterial.[2]

Avicenna's belief in the spiritual incipience of the soul was grounded in problems arising from the rival view, that is, the eternity (*qidam*) of the soul—the view that souls existed before their attachment to the body. One main problem Avicenna and his followers — like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī[3] — detected in the theory of the spiritual eternity of the soul was that if immaterial souls existed before their attachment to bodies, then each of these souls must be distinct from others. However, what would be the ground of such distinction? Their distinction would be grounded either in their quiddity and its necessary or essential concomitants, or in its accidental properties. The former is impossible, because human souls are of the same kind; hence, they are the same with respect to their quiddity and its necessary concomitants. The latter is also problematic because the incipience of accidental properties of a soul hinges on a divisible matter or attachment to a body; that is, dis-

2. IDEM, *al-Mabda' wa l-Ma'ād* [*The Origin and the Resurrection*], Mu'assese-ye Muṭāli'āt-e Eslāmī, Tehran 1363 SH, p. 105.

3. AL-RĀZĪ, Fakhr al-Dīn Muhammad (b. *c.* 1149–d. 1210) was one of the most important philosophers and theologians of the post-classical period of Islam, that is, the period after al-Ghazali (d. 1111). In philosophy, Fakhr al-Dīn rearranged the structure of the philosophical *summa* in the Islamic East and thus also the curriculum of philosophical studies. His work completes the process of integrating the discourse of Aristotelian philosophy (*falsafa*) into Muslim rationalist theology (*kalam*), a process that began with the works of Avicenna.

Fakhr al-Din's works were widely studied, particularly during the 13th and 14th centuries. His commentaries on Ibn Sina's works, in which he often keeps a critical distance to *falsafa*, became the subject of super-commentaries that are among the most influential texts in Arabic philosophy and Islamic theology.

See F. GRIFFEL, *Fakhr al-Din al-Razi*, 2015, in *Oxford Bibliographies*, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0214.xml.

tinction among souls can only occur in virtue of space, time, and properties such as color and size. Such accidental properties do not exist prior to the attachment of the soul to a particular body, and thus, they cannot ground distinction among multiple souls prior to such attachment.[4]

Moreover, Avicenna explains that an immaterial soul is abstract or detached from matter and material accidents prior to its attachment to a particular body, and the fact that the soul comes to possess accidents that are not necessitated by its quiddity implies a prior potentiality or disposition within the soul for having such accidents. This prior potentiality or disposition can exist only in something that is essentially a pure potentiality, which is nothing but a *bodily matter*. Thus, the assumption of the existence of the soul prior to the existence of the body leads to the former's attachment to, and concomitance with, the latter.[5]

These are problems that led Avicenna to reject the Platonic view of the eternity of the soul, and given his reasons for the immateriality of the soul, he was led to the view of the spiritual incipience thereof. However, the latter view was subjected to serious objections by Avicenna's critics, in particular, Khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī[6] and Mullā Ṣadrā. One such objection, raised by Mullā Ṣadrā, is that if the concomitance of a soul and a body is deemed accidental, rather than essential, then this would conflict with the idea that the soul is the «form» of the body. For Avicenna and his followers specify that the soul is a perfective form

4. F. Al-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqīyyah fī 'Ilm al-Ilāhīyyat wa l-Ṭabī'īyyāt* [*Eastern Studies in Theology and Natural Sciences*], 2 voll., Bidār Publications, Qom 1370 SH, vol. 2, pp. 390–391.

5. Avicenna, *al-Mabda' wa l-Ma'ād*, p. 310.

6. Al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad, was born in 1201 in Khorasan. Philosopher, theologian, and author of about 150 works, he was considered a «third master», after Aristotle and al-Fārābī. His studies included Arabic, logic, metaphysics, mathematics, medicine, law, religion, and natural sciences. Ṭūsī established in Maragha the largest astronomical observatory of the times. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī is considered one of the most important figures of Islamic thinking. He was one of the most prolific scholars of the thirteenth century, and left his mark on most literary and scientific disciplines. See Panzeca, *ad v.* «Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī», in H. Lagerlund *et alii* (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, Springer, Dordrecht 2006.

for a natural organic body, holding that the combination of the soul and the body results in a new kind (or species), and since such a combination cannot result from two entities that do not bear a causal relation to one another, the soul and the body should have a necessary concomitance, such as a hylomorphic (or form-matter) relation.[7]

In his account of how the soul comes to exist, Avicenna rejects all four kinds of causal relations (efficient causation, material causation, formal causation, and teleological causation) between the body and the soul. He ultimately identifies the mode of the relation between the body and the incipience of the soul in terms of the body being a 'condition' for the incipience of the immaterial soul as brought about by an immaterial efficient cause (that is, the Active Intellect, *al-'aql al-fa'āāl*). He takes the condition to be a requirement for the soul's incipience so that he may not be faced with the problem of the nonexistence of what is conditioned (i.e. the soul) in case the condition (i.e. the body) becomes nonexistent. For otherwise, it would conflict with the survival of the soul after the destruction of the body. In Avicenna's view, this condition can serve as the soul's means for the acquisition of perfections. As a result of this condition, the soul will find a penchant to manipulate the body, but it cannot serve as a condition whose nonexistence leads to the nonexistence of what is conditioned.[8]

Mullā Ṣadrā objects, however, to such a formulation of the relation between the soul and the body: if the soul is a perfective form and a primary perfection for the body, then it must be the determinant, and constitutive of the essence, of the new kind resulting from the soul and the body. How, then, can the causal relation between the two be ruled out? He goes on to say that the existence of a single entity that has potentiality, and is, nonetheless, a condition for the incipience of something immaterial does not make any sense. For the immaterial entity is, for Peripatetic philosophers, a substance which is in its essence de-

7. M. Mullā Sadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah fī l-Asfār al-'Aqlīyyah al-Arba'ah* [*The Transcendent Wisdom in the Four Intellectual Journeys*], 9 voll., Maktabat al-Muṣṭafawī, Qom 1368 SH, vol. 8, p. 382.

8. Al-Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqīyyah fī 'Ilm al-Ilāhīyyat wa l-Ṭabī'īyyāt* , vol. 2, p. 400.

tached from, and not in need of, the matter.[9] Basically, it should be noted that detachment from matter is essential for an immaterial detached substance, and an essential entity is not accidentally acquired, just as it can never go away. Now if the immateriality or detachment from matter is, as Avicenna maintains, essential for the detached substance of the soul, then how can it disappear because of something accidental (i.e. the relation with the body)?

Another serious objection levelled by Khwājah Naṣīr al-Ṭūsī, at the theory of the spiritual incipience of the soul is that if the material body managed to occasion the emergence of an immaterial soul in one way or another, then why could it not occasion its disappearance? In a letter he wrote to Khusrowshāhī, another philosopher of his time, al-Ṭūsī asks: why do Avicenna and his followers acknowledge the incipience of the human soul, and yet refuse to acknowledge the possibility of its destruction? If they characterize the body as a vehicle for the possibility of the soul's existence, then why do they not conceive it as a vehicle for the possibility of the soul's nonexistence? And if the immateriality of the soul is the reason why the body cannot be a vehicle for the possibility of the soul's nonexistence (so that the possibility of its nonexistence after its incipience is ruled out), then why is the same immateriality not deemed a reason for the view that the body cannot be a vehicle for the existence of the soul, in which case the very incipience of the soul is ruled out? In short, for al-Ṭūsī, there is no difference in the equality of both relations — that of the possibility of existence and that of the possibility of nonexistence.[10]

Drawing on his principle of the primacy of existence (aṣālat al-wujūd), Mullā Ṣadrā highlights the above objection as follows: it does not help to say that if A is the condition for the incipience of B in such a way that B does not need A in its existence, then it will be impossible for the nonexistence of A to result in the nonexistence of B. This is because the incipience of something is nothing but its particular way of

9. Mullā Sadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah fī l-Asfār al-'Aqlīyyah al-Arba'ah*, vol. 8, p. 385.

10. N. Al-Tūsī, *Ajwibat al-Masā'il al-Naṣīrīyyah* [*Answers to Nasiri Questions*], Humanities Research Center, Tehran 1383 SH, p. 266.

existence; that is, incipience is not an attribute additional or accidental to something's existence, and so, a condition for incipience will not be something other than a condition for existence. To the contrary, a condition for incipience is also a condition for existence, and thus, the nonexistence of the condition (the body) results in the nonexistence of what is conditioned (the soul).[11]

2. Mullā Ṣadrā's View of the Physical Incipience of the Soul

Mullā Ṣadrā established the primacy of existence as the foundation of his philosophical system, and in this framework, he viewed the soul as being of physical incipience — that the soul begins as a physical entity. While he rejects any discrimination of souls in terms of accidental properties they have acquired via bodies, he introduces 'modes of existence' as distinctive features of the souls after death. For, in his view, souls as forms of bodies have a material mode of existence, and prior to their incipience, matter plays a role as preparatory for its incipience and its attachment to the body. When an individual instance of the quiddity comes to exist based on such material preparatory ground, the destruction of such ground does not disrupt its survival and changes only its 'mode of existence' from a controlling attached existence to a perfectly detached existence.[12] Obviously, this picture of the human soul is at odds with Avicenna's. According to Avicenna's version of dualism, the immateriality of the soul is full or perfect at the very time of its incipience, the soul starting out as a detached intellect (*al-'aql al-mufāriq*). However, such status or degree is acquired by the soul, on the Sadraean account, only after a substantial motion (*al-ḥarakat al-jawharīyyah*) and the acquisition of existential perfections in the afterlife.

In fact, on Mullā Ṣadrā's account, the relation of the soul to the body, or the attachment between them, is not analogous to that between an

11. Mullā Sadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah fī l-Asfār al-'Aqlīyyah al-Arba'ah*, vol. 8, p. 384.

12. Idem, *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbīyyah fī l-Manāhij al-Sulūkīyyah* [*The Lordly Evidence in Methods of Spiritual Journey*], al-Markaz al-Jāmi'ī li-l-Nashr, Mashhad 1360 SH, p. 222.

owner and a house or a sea captain and the ship, which are destructible or revocable. Instead, the «soul-hood» of the soul (that is, its attachment to, and control of, the body) is, just like the «matter-hood» of the matter or the 'form-hood' of the form, a necessary concomitant of its essence, arising from its mode of existence. Thus, as long as the soul is a soul, it has an attached existence, and once it arrives at perfection in its existence and develops into a detached intellect, its mode of existence will also change.[13] Mullā Ṣadrā strongly emphasizes union in kind, as in the definition of the soul as the form of a natural body. Thus, their combination gives rise to a «natural kind» with a material dimension. The main point in his view is that, instead of a (dualistic) understanding of the soul and the body as two distinct substances, he conceives of them in terms of a single substance with an existential union which has a material and an immaterial aspect.

Mīr Sayyid Sharīf 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī,[14] has objected to Avicenna's version of dualism to the effect that a real combination between an actually immaterial entity and an actually material entity does not make sense. In his commentaries on *Ḥikmat al-'Ayn*, he points out that the soul and the body falls under a separate genera (one under immaterial substances and the other under material substances), and thus, no real combination between them is possible.

In response to the objection, Mullā Ṣadrā emphasizes that the soul is not purely immaterial from the outset, namely, at the time of its incipience. To the contrary, since it is the form of a natural body and constitutes a material kind, it has a material incipience; hence, a material existence. An immaterial entity which essentially involves a manipulative and controlling attachment to the matter is neither purely immaterial nor purely material. Thus, the mode of the existence of a soul is neither totally detached from the matter and its features, as in purely immaterial entities, nor entirely at the level of the matter, as in purely

13. MULLĀ SADRĀ, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah fī l-Asfār al-'Aqlīyyah al-Arba'ah*, vol. 8, p. 373.

14. AL-JURJĀNĪ, Ali ibn Muhammad (al-Sayyid al-Sharif), the author of more than 50 books, was a Persian grammarian, philosopher and linguist during the 14th and early 15th century.

See V. DONZEL, *Islamic Desk Reference*, Brill, Leiden: 1994, p. 192.

material entities. Instead, according to him, the mode of its existence is a particular one, and thus, it is essential for the soul to be attached to, and to control, the body (since this is part of its mode of existence), rather than accidental to it. In Avicenna's view, however, the attachment to the body, and manipulations therein were deemed accidental to the detached essence of the soul. Mullā Sadrā emphasizes that if we take these features to be accidental, it will seriously come into conflict with the view or definition of the soul as the «form» of a natural body and their «union in kind».

Mullā Ṣadrā maintains that the soul, as long as it exists as a soul, is essentially imperfect and in need of a body as its vehicle or instrument for the acquisition of its existential perfections that helps it in its substantial motion from potentiality to actuality.[15] Thus, contrary to Avicenna's view, he characterizes the body as a material cause of the soul, and thus, believes that an essential attachment holds between the two. However, in his own terms, Avicenna's view implies that the relation between a detached immaterial soul and a material body is just like the relation between a piece of stone and a human person (which involves no necessary or essential link). Mullā Ṣadrā emphasizes that the instrumentality of the body for the soul is not analogous to, say, the instrumentality of a saw for a carpenter or a ship for a sea captain as they can be deployed or put aside whenever their owners wish.[16]

As pointed out, during the soul's connection to a body, Mullā Ṣadrā characterizes it as a simple immaterial (that is, above matter) entity in an intermediary state between purely material and purely immaterial entities. On this view, the zygote undergoes certain changes, whereby it develops from a vegetative form to an animate form. Thus, the embryo comes to have a low degree of immateriality by having features of an animate life. Then, its developments continue, and with its existential expansion (*al-si'at al-wujūdīyyah*), it develops a rational human soul, coming to have features of human life. This course of developments is the substantial motion of the soul. The rational soul with its features of a human life enjoys the immateriality peculiar to the existence of a soul,

15. Ivi, vol. 9, p. 116.

16. See: Ivi, vol. 8, pp. 383–384.

as distinct from both purely material substances and purely immaterial substances, as a third category in Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy.

3. An Overview and Critique of Arguments for the Immateriality of the Soul

Despite the major difference between Avicenna's philosophy and Mullā Ṣadrā's Transcendent Wisdom (*al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah*) over the mode of the incipience of the soul and its mode of immateriality, they both subscribe to the immateriality of the human soul in their own ways. Accordingly, they present arguments for the immateriality of the soul, some of which I overview and criticize in what follows.

3.1. *The first argument*

Earlier formulations of the argument were offered by Avicenna in the psychology part of his *Book of Healing* (*Kitāb al-Shifā'*) and Fakhr al-Rāzī in his *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqīyya* for immateriality of the 'human' soul. Mullā Ṣadrā presents the same argument, with slight modifications, for immateriality of the «animal» soul. Here is the argument:

The animal (as well as the human) body undergoes quantitative changes throughout its life. Now if the soul were a material form inherent (or «imprinted» [*munṭabi'ah*]) in the body, then it had to change with changes in the body. Nevertheless, the identity of the person remains the same throughout life. Therefore, the soul is over and above the body or any material changes. It should be noted that the soul has its own substantial motion or change, but its identity is preserved in terms of its own continuity, and the individuation of the body, despite all its changes, is sustained via the individuation of the soul.

Although it is rather difficult to establish «personal identity» in the case of non-human animals, such identity seems obvious and intuitive in the case of human beings. Contemporary physicalists respond to such arguments in terms of the organic unity and continuity of human and animal bodies across time (from birth to death). When they say mind is identical with body, as Kim has mentioned, they do not mean that mind is identical with a «time slice» of body; but with a four-di-

mensional object — a three-dimensional object stretched along the temporal dimension — which has different material constituents at different times. In any case, it is a clearly delineated system with a substantial unity.[17]

Proponents of the immateriality of the soul explain the organic character of the body in terms of its existential connection to a soul. Thus, once the soul departs from its body (at the time of death), the organic character of the body collapses. Physicalists can, in turn, provide a biological account of the organic nature of the body and why it collapses at the time of death in terms of the functions of neural systems, blood circulation, and the like. Thus, the above argument does not seem to be cogent enough to support the immateriality of the soul.

3.2. *The second argument*

Frequent observations and experiences indicate that animals seek pleasure and avoid pain. Thus, they must have knowledge or awareness of their pleasure and pain, and such knowledge implies their knowledge of their own selves or essences. For knowledge of one's pleasure is not possible without knowledge of oneself — this is an instance of the following principle: in cases of «genitive constructions», such as *Hasan's book* (or *the book of Hasan*) — where «book» is called the construction's «head» and «Hasan» is called its «modifier» — it is impossible to have knowledge of the whole construction without having knowledge of the modifier.

An animal's self-knowledge is, however, the same as the presence of the known thing to it, and an entity with self-knowledge or self-cognition has an existence for itself (*wujūd li-nafsih*). Thus, the animal soul will have an existence for itself, which is distinct from immanence or inherence in the matter (existence for a matter or existence for another [*wujūd li-ghayrih*]). Therefore, whatever has self-knowledge is detached from matter and location.

Moreover, an animal's self-knowledge is not gained through senses or reasoning. For in this case, self-knowledge would disappear had there

17. J. Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, Westview Press, New York 2010[3], p. 26.

been no senses or reasoning. On the other hand, part of the animal's self-knowledge (such as knowledge of its own body) which is gained via senses will no longer be sustained, absent any senses. Accordingly, difference in types of knowledge implies a difference in types of objects of knowledge.[18]

To assess this argument, we should first note that the argument ignores a real distinction between *epistemological* and *ontological* implications, where the latter do not necessarily follow from the former. If it is really the case that humans or animals cannot have awareness of their bodies without having sensory perceptions, whereas they might have awareness of their own selves even without such perceptions, then this fact can at best imply an epistemological distinction between one's body and one's self. However, from this distinction one cannot infer an ontological distinction between the two.

In addition to the conflation between epistemology and ontology, the assumption that matter cannot possess cognition or consciousness has been seriously challenged by physicalists, and so, it cannot be taken for granted without any argument. In recent decades, there have been vast attempts at offering physicalistic theories on conscious states, which are still in process, and some of them do not even address the identical approach, to be targeted by traditional objections against the possibility of physical consciousness. So, the above argument can't bypass easily the rejection of physical consciousness.

What is more, one can obtain knowledge of one's body and knowledge of one's self are via two different modalities: respectively, «perception» and «introspection» where the former disappears in the absence of senses, unlike the latter. The argument draws on the type-difference of the two cases of knowledge to conclude that their objects are also type-different. However, it is possible to have knowledge of one and the same entity through two different modalities. Obviously, the conditions in which knowledge is obtained through a visual perceptual modality is different from those in which it is obtained through an introspective modality, but this is not sufficient to establish the difference in what is known in these two ways.

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18. See Mullā Sadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah fī l-Asfār al-'Aqlīyyah al-Arba'ah*, vol. 8, pp. 42–44.

Finally, in the first part of the argument, the existence of the soul for itself is allegedly established by an appeal to the presence of the known to the knower, which is in turn based on the soul's immateriality — but this is question-begging. In fact, the conclusion of the argument is already presumed in its premises. Moreover, the argument draws on the assumption that the materiality of the soul would amount to its immanence or inherence in matter (as an existence for another) to argue against its materiality. However, contemporary physicalists do not construe a material mind as an existence for another. Instead, in many cases, they construe it as an existence for itself, although it is material.

3.3. *The third argument*

This is the «flying man» argument first presented by Avicenna in favor of the immateriality of the human soul. The argument asks us to imagine that a human being is created all at once without any bodily senses. Suppose that he is located in a void, and thus, he has no perception of sensory qualities. Moreover, his body members, such as his fingers, are so distant from one another that he has no tactile sensation. Notwithstanding this, he can still perceive his own essence, while he is ignorant of all his exterior and interior body parts. And it is obvious that what is perceived is different from what is left unnoticed. Therefore, his identity is different from his body parts taken together.[19]

Mullā Ṣadrā has extended the argument from human beings to non-human animals, but it is objectionable. In his commentaries on al-Asfār, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī[20] writes: «it is not implausible to reject this argument, particularly with respect to non-human animals».[21] Ṭabāṭabā'ī

19. See AVICENNA, *Al-Shifā'; Al-Ṭabī'īyyāt*, vol. 2, p. 13.

20. ṬABĀTABĀ'Ī, Muhammad Husayn (1902–1981) was one of the most prominent thinkers of contemporary Shia Islam. He is commonly known as Allamah Tabataba'i and was a philosopher, a prolific writer, and an inspiring teacher to his students who devoted much of his life to Islamic studies. His written books number forty-four titles overall; three of which are collections of his articles.

For more information, see: H. ALGAR, *Allamah Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Philosopher, Exegete and Gnostic*, in «Journal of Islamic Studies», 17/3 2006, pp. 326–351.

21. M. ṬABĀTABĀ'Ī, commentaries on *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah fī l-Asfār al-Arba'ah*

may have as well pointed out the weakness of the argument — even in the case of human beings — because it involves an extension of an epistemic distinction to an ontological distinction. For, as Avicenna himself says, what is established for a flying man (that is, essence or soul) is distinct from what is not established (that is, the body and its parts). However, he immediately concludes that «such a person can understand that the existence of his soul is different from the existence of his body».[22] This is where the epistemological-ontological confusion takes place, which is similar to the objection raised by analytic philosophers to Descartes's argument in which he accounted for the epistemic distinction between the mind and the body in terms of their ontological distinction.

One might suggest that the «flying man» argument refers to intellectual knowledge by presence (in human beings) and estimative knowledge by presence (in non-human animals). Such knowledge is obtained in the depths of the soul, and if something additional to the essence of the immaterial soul were involved in obtaining such knowledge, then it had to be evident within that knowledge by presence, but this is not the case. Therefore, self-knowledge is not a bodily property.

Such a response is, at this stage of our dialectic, question-begging. Physicalists, often, deny the immateriality or distinctness of the soul altogether, and so, they would not admit knowledge by presence as part of the issue. As they see things, self-knowledge in the flying man is supplied via a physical or bodily structure, and the assumption that such knowledge is knowledge by presence or a direct intuition by an immaterial soul will undermine the course of the argument. For example, according to the mind-body identity theory, a certain conscious mental state — such as self-cognition or self-knowledge — is exactly the same as, or identical to, a certain neural state in the brain. Now how could the identity theory be undermined if the flying man does not see his body but cognizes his own self? Proponents of such a physicalistic view — and there are many of them — can easily respond: the flying man still

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[*The Transcendent Wisdom in the Four Journeys*], 9 voll., Dar Ihya' al-Turath, Beirut 1981, vol. 8, p. 44.

22. Avicenna, *Al-Shifā'; Al-Ṭabī'īyyāt*, vol. 2, p. 13.

has his neural connections in place, and the particular neural state, to which self-cognition is identical, is there in his head. It is only that he is not aware of his body and his brain. Nevertheless, his lack of knowledge of such neural states and their identity with his mental states does not challenge their existence and does not prove anything beyond neural states. Such a response can also be provided by proponents of some other widely advocated physicalistic views about consciousness, such as representationalism.

In a footnote to an edited version of Avicenna's *Book of Healing*, there is a possible objection to the flying man argument and a reply to it:

> If it is objected that the locus of consciousness is the humor itself, then it should be replied that the humor can only perceive in a passive way, and a passive humor that has changed without having preserved the state preceding its encounter with the sensible entity is different from the soul that did not become passive and has received the sensible.[23]

According to Avicenna's view, the humor is a combination of the four elements (water, fire, earth, and air) in a particular proportion to a moderate extent such that the conflicts among these elements do not lead to the collapse of the combination. Thus, the humor should be understood as equivalent to a material composition. The elements of such composition and the mechanism of how it is formed were, of course, rejected following advances in the empirical sciences and the repudiation of the belief in the four elements. However, the humor can be more generally conceived of as a material composition to which the soul is attached.

Notwithstanding this, the above objection suggests that mental states and properties (such as consciousness or awareness) belong to this material composition, not to the immaterial soul. In principle, if the humor is the locus of self-consciousness or self-awareness, then even if one were, just like the flying man, in a condition in which he does not perceive any sensory qualities, including his own body, self-awareness or self-knowledge would still occur in the humor as its locus, and so, such self-knowledge does not imply the existence of an immaterial soul. For

23. M. Nā'ījī, *Sharḥ-e Nafs-e Shifā'* [*Elaboration of the Soul Section of the Book of Healing*], Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute, Qom 1388 SH, p. 56.

if there is no immaterial soul, self-knowledge would still turn out to be knowledge of the sensible body, even if in certain conditions, such as the flying man scenario, one could only have internal knowledge thereof, rather than knowledge of the body's sensory qualities.

In response to the problem, the above commentator adopts the following strategy: the humor — as a material composition — changes and undergoes a passive state in the process of its knowledge of the sensibles (such as knowledge of the body), while the immaterial soul knows the sensibles (including its own body) without undergoing any changes. Therefore, the humor prior to knowledge of the body is different from the humor after knowledge of the body. However, in the flying man example, a self-constancy or invariability is intuitively perceived after knowledge of the sensory qualities of the body; that is, when conditions change and knowledge of such qualities is obtained, the self as perceived prior to such knowledge of the body and the self as perceived thereafter are the same.

However, a physicalist can point out a number of drawbacks in this response. First, if the immaterial soul is denied, then self-knowledge will be reduced to knowledge of the sensible body. Now such knowledge is once obtained through an introspective modality (prior to seeing or otherwise sensing the body) and once again through visual or other sorts of perceptual modalities (subsequent to seeing or otherwise sensing the body). When the object of perception in both cases is the same (that is, the sensible body) and it is only the perceptual modality that changes, then it is not obvious how the above response can be thought to work. What the response amounts to is that, in knowledge of the sensible body, the humor undergoes changes and passive states. However, prior to seeing or otherwise sensing the body, for example in a flying man scenario, knowledge of the sensible body is obtained through an introspective modality. What reason is there to think that when the modality changes, the humor will still remain passive?

Moreover, even if we concede that the humor changes — despite the change of the modality — many physicalists have acknowledged and theorized multiple realization. That is, one mental state can be realized in the form of multiple physical or neural states. For example, one strategy adopted by mind-brain identity theorists is to reduce a certain men-

tal state to a «certain type» of a physical or neural structure, instead of reducing it to a 'certain token' of such structure.

Some other physicalists advocating theories other than mind-body identity theories, such as the mind's supervenience on the body or versions of functionalist theories can *a fortiori* account for multiple realizability and overcome the above objection. They can say that even if the humor (as a material composition that serves as the locus of self-cognition) changes, this would amount to a change in the physical or neural base of the mental state in question, while one and the same mental state (such as self-knowledge) can still be realized by two different neurophysiological states.

3.4. *The fourth argument*

The main idea behind this argument, which was appealed to in different Islamic philosophical books, is that human beings can grasp universal concepts that do not involve material characteristics and accidents, and there is a general principle to the effect that such concepts, which are abstract from material accidents, can only be possessed by an immaterial entity.

In the *Book of Healing* and volume 8 of *al-Asfār al-Arba'ah* [*The Four Journeys*], the case for the second premise of the argument (that is, the general principle) is made as follows: if there is a universal concept that is immanent or inherent in a physical object, then it must inhere either in an indivisible part thereof (that is, a classical mathematical notion of a point) or in a divisible part. If it inheres in a point, then the point is either essentially individuated as distinct from a line or it is not. However, it has been elaborately argued for in these books that a point is not distinct or separate from the line (that is, it is the end of the line and is dependent thereon). Therefore, whatever inheres in a point is indeed inherent in a line. Thus, we will only need to proceed with the following assumption: inherence in a divisible physical object. In this case, the abstract universal concept should be infinitely divisible in virtue of the divisibility of its locus, because the existence of an indivisible part is impossible. However, it is impossible for an abstract universal concept to be divisible. So, an intelligible form, or a universal concept, cannot inhere in a physical object, such as a human body.

This argument has been challenged within the paradigm of Islamic philosophy; for example, by an analysis of the universal concept. Here I will consider it from the viewpoint of contemporary physicalists. As evident, the argument assumes that the rejection of the immateriality of the soul is tantamount to the belief in the inherence or immanence of the contents of mental states in the brain, with no alternative being imaginable.

The assumption might be in place given earlier materialist views of the past centuries, against which the argument is indeed presented. However, contemporary physicalism about mental states — particularly, intentional states such as beliefs and thoughts that are about things — has widely acknowledged externalism. In a nutshell, externalism is the view that intentional content — as a whole or at least as part of its base — supervenes on external objects and properties, and thus, no intentional state is realized by the brain in fully internal terms. In metaphysics of properties in contemporary analytic philosophy, extrinsic properties are contrasted to intrinsic properties, and properties such as knowing or believing or thinking are said to be conceivable as extrinsic properties. For example, a significant number of *externalists* explain knowledge of a content in terms of a certain mode of representing that content, and thus, the content will also be defined externally; hence, it will not be in the brain either fully or at all. Externalism was first propounded by Hilary Putnam in 1975 with respect to natural kind terms and was then generalized by Tyler Burge in 1979 and 1982 to contents of intentional states.[24] Today externalism is endorsed by the majority of analytic philosophers.

Moreover, since the last decade of the twentieth century, externalist or wide intentionalist views of phenomenal states[25] such as perception (visual, auditory, or tactile perceptions of colors, shapes, sounds, and the like), bodily sensations (such as pain, itching, and orgasm), and

24. See H. Putnam, *The Meaning of Meaning*, in K. Gunderson (ed.), *Language, mind, and knowledge*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1975. Also T. Burge, *Other Bodies*, in A. Woodfield (ed.), *Thought and Object: Essays on Intentionality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1982, pp. 97–120.

25. Mental states with phenomenal properties; that is, there is something it is like to experience them.

emotions (such as anger and happiness) were proposed and are widely advocated by well-known physicalists. The view known as representationalism accounts for contents of phenomenal states in externalist terms, with no requirement of it being inherent in the brain.

In fact, the strategy adopted by Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā in this and other similar arguments was to reject the rival view in order to establish their favorable theory. Thus, they first reject the view that concepts or ideas are inherent or imprinted in the brain and then conclude that the mind or soul (that grasps such concepts or ideas) must be immaterial. The strategy seems plausible only if all other alternatives are rejected. Regardless of how one can imagine all possible versions of physicalism, these arguments as presented by Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā only target one physicalist alternative at best, which is the mind-brain identity theory, without taking other alternatives into consideration.

One might say that physicalistic views are concerned with particularized, rather than universal, properties, whereas the above argument concerns universal concepts. So, physicalistic views of universal concepts may as well be similar to the views of Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā. Before I address universal properties in the views of contemporary physicalists, I should first note that all intentional contents — either particularized or universal — are accounted for in Islamic philosophy in terms of their presence to the soul. Thus, if an argument just like the above argument is reformulated in terms of knowledge or grasp of particular forms, it will ignore contemporary externalist versions of physicalism and will not be really aimed at this view. As explained before, for externalists, intentional contents are not inherent or imprinted in the brain, and knowledge, belief, or thought occur as representations (or functions) of contents that are determined by external properties.

Universal concepts are not regarded by major contemporary physicalists as detached from matter. Very few contemporary analytic philosophers believe in Platonic universals, whereas many of them adhere to other views about the metaphysics of universals, such as the view that claims about universals are indeed distorted ways of talking about linguistic phrases, or the theory of tropes according to which all properties, even those that appear to be about universals, are indeed

particularized.[26] Thus, according to views adopted by many contemporary physicalists about universals, there is no difference, with respect to the issue at hand, between knowledge, belief, and thought about a universal concept, on the one hand, and knowledge, belief, and thought about a particularized concept, on the other, since they both refer to particular properties. Therefore, the above remarks about externalism concerning the content of intentional states apply, by the same token, to universal contents too. So, according to these contemporary philosophers, contents involving universal concepts or properties are determined externally (and not merely by the brain), and knowledge of such contents exists as a representation (or function) of such externalist contents. Thus, Avicenna's argument does not address, let alone reject, such views.

Another important point is that mind-brain identity theorists do not say that grasped concepts or forms are imprinted in the brain. Instead, they say that the *mental state* of grasping a concept, C, or a form, F, is identical to a *neural state*, N. The identity of the mental state of grasping universal concepts of HUMAN or UNITY, or the *mental state* of visually perceiving a mountain or a sea to certain *neural states* does not obviously amount to these concepts or ideas being imprinted in neural networks. The point is not that intentional *contents* are identical to neural states; it is the identification of an intentional mental state, M, to a neural state, N. It is safe to say that any argument to the effect that it is impossible for such intentional states to be imprinted or inherent in the neural network is a misunderstanding in the first place, adopting a wrong strategy. Such an argument is ineffective not only against externalist physicalist views but also against internalist physicalist views.

The above remarks also apply *mutatis mutandis* to a number of other arguments presented by Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā for the soul's immateriality. For they all appeal to the impossibility of known forms imprinting in brain cells or sensitive organs in order to show that knowledge or cognition is only possible for an immaterial soul. By the same token, the problem with the well-known argument from the «im-

26. See M. LOUX, *Metaphysics; A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge, Oxford 2006, ch. 1 & 2.

possibility of the large being imprinted in the small» (*inṭibā' al-kabīr fī l-ṣaghīr*) becomes obvious.

3.5. *The fifth argument*

In the psychology section (*Kitāb al-Nafs*) of his *Book of Healing*, Avicenna presents this argument as his fourth argument for the immateriality of the soul. In a nutshell, the argument is that something with multiple parts possesses a unity in its entirety that cannot be divided. That is, while even particular objects, such as the desk or the chair in my office, have numerous parts and, unlike intelligibles, are not simple, they have a unity in that they are whole and separate objects on their own. Now the question arises of how this unified object can, with respect to its unity, exist in a divisible locus. In other words, the human brain—as the locus for the immanence of forms—has different and divisible parts. Now if forms of particular objects, such as particular desks and chairs, are to be imprinted in the brain of a perceiver, then how will their unity be imprinted? Avicenna concludes that the perceiver of the forms of particular objects must be immaterial.[27]

In his consideration of objections to the previous argument (from universal concepts), Mullā Ṣadrā deals with the following objection: one counter-example to the argument may well be the attribute of unity, because it is, on the one hand, simple and indivisible, and an attribute of physical objects, on the other, which amounts to the inherence of the property of unity in these objects. As a consequence, the unity which consists in simplicity and indivisibility inheres in divisible physical objects.

In response to the objection, Mullā Ṣadrā says that although, the unity of immaterial entities is indivisible, the unity of physical objects is not. The unity of such objects is continuous or is even nothing over and above physical continuity or extension, and since the existence of a physical object is divisible, its unity is also divisible. It should be noted here, nevertheless, that the unity of physical objects is not, unlike the divisibility of their accidental qualities, divisible in virtue of the divis-

27. AVICENNA, *Al-Shifā'; Al-Ṭabī'īyyāt*, vol. 2, p. 192.

ibility of the objects themselves; it is the same as such divisibility (whereas a quality such as color is divisible only in virtue of the physical object). The upshot is that the unity of physical objects is not only accidentally divisible but also essentially so. The unity of physical objects, therefore, is different from that of the soul.[28] This response by Mullā Ṣadrā can indeed be seen as a response to the above argument as well.

Moreover, as explained before, many physicalists since the last decades of the twentieth century believe in externalism about contents of intentional states (such as beliefs and thoughts) and even those of sensory perceptions. Thus, the above argument cannot be seen as directed against contemporary physicalist views, because it assumes that the rejection of the immateriality of the soul amounts to the view that perceived forms are inherent in the brain.

Conclusion

Based on the above remarks, although Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā — as founders of the two main strands in Islamic philosophy — believe in the immateriality of the soul, their accounts of how the soul comes to exist (or its incipience) and the sense in which it is immaterial are very different. Avicenna talks about substance dualism and the spiritual incipience of the soul, assigning distinct or even conflicting functions or tasks to each of the soul and the body, where engagement in one type of activity might prevent the soul from engagement in the other. However, Mullā Ṣadrā talks about a version of substance monism that accommodates different degrees (a material and an immaterial degree) of existence. Moreover, he provides a physical account of the incipience of the soul, which gradually arrives at immateriality or detachment from the matter in the course of its substantial motion. However, the soul is, for Mullā Ṣadrā, the form of a natural body that constitutes a material kind. Thus, for him, the soul is in an intermediary state between purely material and purely immaterial entities.

However, since both Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā believe in the immateriality of the soul in one way or another, they have offered arguments

28. See Mullā Sadrā, *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'ālīyah fī l-Asfār al-'Aqlīyyah al-Arba'ah*, vol. 8, pp. 266–267.

to establish its immateriality simpliciter. In this paper, I have overviewed and examined some of the most important and best-known arguments they have presented. As we have seen, considered from the viewpoint of modern philosophy, these arguments seem to suffer from serious problems. Some of them — such as the argument from animal self-knowledge and the flying man argument — confuse between epistemological and ontological aspects, in addition to other specific problems of their own. Others — such as the argument from the indivisibility of universal concepts, the argument from the «impossibility of the larger being imprinted in the small», and the argument from the indivisibility of the unity of objects — cannot indeed be thought as directed at recent externalist physicalist views, and thus, they cannot present a challenge for them. Even with respect to internalist physicalist theories — particularly, the mind-brain identity theory — we have shown that the purpose of arguments that try to reject the imprinting of contents of intentional states in the brain is entirely different from what proponents of the identity of mental states with neural states want to establish, and thus, these arguments cannot be presented against these theories.

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