



## Dualist Afterlives: Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā

Jari Kaukua<sup>1</sup>

Received: 2021/03/01

Accepted: 2021/05/16

### Abstract

Subscribing to the principles of logically valid reasoning and parsimony of presuppositions in the framework of a religion that hinges on a revealed eschatological message, the medieval Islamic philosophers were bound to interpret the Qur'ānic account of the afterlife in ways that may have compromised at least some of its literal meanings. However, to what extent precisely do these interpretations go against the grain of Revelation has to be determined separately in each particular case. Wholesale statements regarding the alleged coherence or incoherence of general types of philosophical theories with Revelation risk neglecting important variations between theories, and thereby rendering us blind to the scope of possibilities in the concepts involved. From this perspective, I will consider the eschatological implications of the psychological theories of Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā, who both subscribe to a dualistic view of human being and consequently claim that the afterlife does not concern one's body. Two questions will then emerge as especially central to dualistic accounts of the afterlife. (1) How do we make sense of the kind of first-personality that must be an irreducible constituent of existence in the hereafter, provided that the latter fulfills the eschatological promise given in the Revelation? (2) How do we account for the emphatically sensual descriptions of the hereafter in the Revelation? In the light of these two questions, I will argue that Avicenna's dualism ends up with a rather narrow conception of the

---

1. Academy of Finland and University of Jyväskylä, Finland      jari.kaukua@jyu.fi

\* Kaukua, J. (2021). The Dualist Afterlives: Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā, *Journal of Theosophia Islamica*, 1(1), pp. 56-80.      DOI: 10.22081/jti.2021.60334.1002

afterlife is bound to remain exclusively intellectual. Thus, with regard to the second question Avicenna seems forced to interpret the Revelation in almost exclusively metaphorical terms. On the other hand, while following Avicenna in the first question, Mullā Ṣadrā conceives of the separate existence of the human soul in much broader terms than his predecessor a conception of human afterlife that is rich in terms of experiential content, and thereby potentially more coherent with the revealed account.

**Keyword**

Avicenna, Mullā Ṣadrā, Dualist Afterlives.



## Introduction

As is well known, the Qur'ān contains vivid descriptions of the afterlife promised to the believers. For but one instance, the *Sura* of the Mountain (Ṭūr) reveals that “[t]hose who were mindful of God are in Gardens and in bliss, rejoicing in their Lord’s gifts: He has saved them from the torment of the Blaze, ‘Eat and drink with healthy enjoyment as a reward for what you have done.’ They are comfortably seated on couches arranged in rows; We pair them with beautiful-eyed maidens; We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith—We do not deny them any of the rewards for their deeds: each person is in pledge for his own deeds—We provide them with any fruit or meat they desire.” (Q 52:17-22)<sup>1</sup>

If we read such passages literally, the Qur'ān describes the pleasures of the afterlife in terms that seem to require embodiment of the human subjects for whom those pleasures are proper. How can one enjoy the fruits and the flesh without the corporeal means of tasting them and becoming satisfied of them? How could one enjoy the company of the beautiful-eyed maidens or of one’s own offspring, if one were deprived of the access to their presence provided by the cognitive means of one’s body, that is, sight, touch, hearing, and so forth? At first glance, therefore, the Qur'ān seems to paint a picture of an afterlife in which the faithful are embodied individuals, in much the same fashion as we tend to perceive each other in our everyday interaction.

Texts such as this have always been something of a nuisance for thinkers of an explicitly intellectual bent. Most obviously they are a

---

1. All citations of the Qur'ān are to the English translation in Abdel Haleem, 2010. Cf. 37:41-49; 38:50-52; 44:51-56; 56:17-26, 35-38; 76:19-22.

problem for those interpreters who propose a substance dualist account of human being, coupled as it often is with a derogatory view of the body and the idea that death amounts to liberation from corporeality. If we take human being to consist in an immaterial substance, which does have an instrumental or accidental relation to a body but is not essentially dependent on one, then we seem bound to interpret the Qur'ānic descriptions of the afterlife as metaphorical or allegorical accounts, which are intended to refer to pleasures of an entirely different, intellectual sort.

However, in the following paper I would like to argue that such wholesale assumptions about Islamic substance dualists may be a little too hasty. On the contrary, we have reason to believe that Islamic philosophers, most of whom endorsed some form of dualism, had at their disposal a considerably vaster conceptual space, quite allowing for variations with regard to the question of in what exactly the immaterial human being consists and what it can include. In order to show this, I will look at the theories of two famous dualists, Avicenna (d. 1037 CE) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1635/6 CE). By no means do I want to claim that they exhaust the available options, but I do think that they represent two rather far-removed positions, one with a very narrow, the other with a much more inclusive understanding of immaterial human existence.

Instead of the explicit comments Avicenna or Mullā Ṣadrā make on specific Qur'ānic verses, I will take my cue from their psychological theories of human beings, and then consider the consequences of those theories for their respective notions of eschatology. While a full-fledged account of our topic would require more extensive textual basis, the restricted approach is justified for two reasons. First, in the case of Avicenna, the systematic

psychological theory he presents in his main works, such as *al-Shifā'* and *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, as well as in the compendia of discussions appended to them,<sup>1</sup> represents his most considered thinking, and against this background the haphazard eschatological remarks that he makes in passing, and that do not sit well with his psychology, seem little more than cases of *ad hoc* invention.<sup>2</sup> Second, in the case of Mullā Ṣadrā, the systematic account he gives in *al-Aṣfār* and other philosophical works seems to be corroborated in his commentary to the Qur'ān.

I will begin with a discussion of Avicenna's psychology with a view to the question of what exactly the existence of the immaterial human substance consists in. Once this is clear, we will briefly consider what kind of afterlife we can legitimately expect for such a substance. I will then move on to discuss Mullā Ṣadrā, highlighting first the similarities between him and Avicenna as well as his reliance on Avicenna's theory of human subjectivity. The common ground between the two thinkers settled, I will conclude with an account of the way in which Ṣadrā departs from Avicenna, and of the consequences of this departure for his account of the afterlife.

---

1. Here I mean chiefly *al-Ta'īqāt* and *al-Mubāḥathāt*. I share Dimitri Gutas' view, 2014, pp. 159-164, that these texts should be read as compendia of Avicenna's answers to questions posed by his interlocutors, collected discursively during the period of time following the composition of the *Shifā'*. For the *Mubāḥathāt*, this was demonstrated by D. C. Reisman, 2002.

2. I refer to the theory that there is an imaginary afterlife by means of a pneumatic body or the celestial spheres in store for those believers who have not acquired a sufficient level of knowledge. To my knowledge, Avicenna never explicitly commits to this view. Cf., however, J. R. Michot, 1986, which not only introduces the problematic texts but also argues for the possibility of imaginary afterlife in the broader framework of Avicenna's philosophy.

## 1. Avicenna

Despite his endorsement of substance dualism, Avicenna latches on to the Peripatetic tradition in his theory of the individuation of concrete entities. According to this traditional view, a necessary condition of individuation is matter, which provides the sublunary entity with the possibility of acquiring its unique spatiotemporal co-ordinates. Without these co-ordinates, none of the entity's properties is guaranteed to be exclusively proper to it. Other properties of a human being, such as being of a certain skin complexion, of a certain height and weight, of a certain age, and so forth, are individual only because they exist in a certain location at a certain time, namely at the place and time inhabited by the human body. All is well and good as far as orthodox Aristotelian doctrine is concerned<sup>1</sup> (Avicenna, 1952, I.12, p. 70). But a dualist is left with a dilemma concerning the individuation of the immaterial soul: how to account for human individuality, when matter, the necessary condition of individuation, is by definition excluded from the account?

Avicenna tackles the problem in chapter V.3 of the psychological section of *al-Shifā'*. He first considers the possibility that the immaterial human substance is individuated through its relation to the body. However, since the human substance is immaterial, and since immateriality entails immortality – there being no substrate for the possibility of the corruption of the immaterial entity – the human substance must continue to exist at the corruption of the body to which it is related. This is a problem for the thesis that the individuation of the

---

1. For further discussion, see D. Black, 2012, pp. 255-281; and F. Benevich, *Individuation and Identity in Islamic Philosophy after Avicenna: Bahmanyār (d. 1066) and Suhrawardī (d. 1191)*, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

human substance is due to its relation to the body, for the relation will cease at the non-existence of one of the relata, and this will compromise the afterlife individuality of the immaterial human substance. Thus, Avicenna qualifies his thesis by saying that the individuality of the human substance is due to characteristics (*hay'āt*) of and in the immaterial substance that are generated by but do not subsist through its relation to the body. He proceeds to give a preliminary list of such characteristics, including moral, emotional, and cognitive dispositions, as well as each human being's unique awareness of herself, but then leaves the matter at that (Avicenna, 1959, V.3, pp. 223-227).

Whether Avicenna considered the case settled or not, it is clear that his account in *Shifā': Nafs* V.3 seems unsatisfactory in light of the earlier discussion in I.12 of *Shifā': Madkhal*, for in that book properties like the acquired dispositions were explicitly argued to be insufficient for individuation in the absence of the unique spatiotemporal co-ordinates afforded by matter. Perhaps Avicenna perceived this discrepancy, indeed one would expect that it was brought to his attention by one of his more insightful interlocutors, for in the late *Ta'līqāt* we find a much more central role assigned to self-awareness:

Self-awareness(*shu 'ūr bi'l-dhāt*)<sup>1</sup> (see Adamson and Beneviseh, 2018, pp.

- 
1. The term *dhāt* is a translator's nightmare. Primarily, it is the feminine form of *dhū*, which refers to the possessor of anything, for instance the possessor of attributes. Its technical use by the *falāsifa* for the essence of a thing, the subject for other attributes the thing may have, is easy to infer from this basic meaning. However, *dhāt* also functions prominently in perfectly commonplace reflexive structures, such as in our passage, where its rough English equivalent is 'self'. The translation of the present passage is made particularly difficult by the fact that Avicenna seems to rely on both meanings of *dhāt*: self-awareness is simultaneously awareness of one's substantial essence. For an interpretation of a similar passage that favours 'essence' over 'self' as a translation of *dhāt*, I have criticised a similar interpretation at some length in J. Kaukua, 2015, pp. 37-42.

147-164) is essential to the soul, it is not acquired from outside. It is as if when the self (*dhāt*) comes to be, awareness comes to be with it. [...]

Self-awareness is the soul in act, and its awareness of itself is continuous. [...]

Our awareness of ourselves is our very existence. [...]

Self-awareness is innate to the self. It is the very existence of the self, and we do not need anything external by means of which we would grasp the self (Avicenna, 2013, §§883-889, pp. 481-484).

In the *Ta'liqāt*, self-awareness, one of the features in the list of individuating characteristics in *Shifā': Nafs* V.3, has become the very existence of the individual instantiation of the human essence. Within the confines of this paper we cannot consider the question about the exact inference that led Avicenna to this identification. But we do have to ask why he thinks self-awareness is immune to the dilemma concerning individuation. This question must be approached by looking at Avicenna's description of the phenomenon: what does he mean by self-awareness?

The background to the claim that the self-awareness of the immaterial human substance is constant is probably the traditional idea that intellection consists of an identity between the intellect and its object.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in this abstract sense intellection is always self-intellection. But while this claim may seem relatively straightforward in the case of absolutely immaterial intellects, those that have no relation whatsoever to material bodies, it is not so obvious concerning human intellect. First of all, human intellects are unique in that their first perfection is temporally distinct from their second perfection. In the beginning of their existence, human intellects are mere

---

1. This idea was already formulated by Aristotle in *De an.* III.5, 430a20-25(n.d.).



potentialities for actual intellection, which must be acquired through a laborious process of learning. Thus, if self-awareness is a constant feature of human existence, and if at the beginning of that existence there is nothing to be intellectually aware of, the traditional thesis about all intellection being self-intellection does not go very far in making sense of Avicenna's theory of self-awareness, for the kind of constant self-awareness he has introduced is something we should have regardless of whether we have learned anything at all.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Avicenna explicitly rejects the identity of the subject and object of intellection in the case of the human intellect, while allowing its possibility for God's intellection<sup>2</sup> (Avicenna, 1959, V.6, pp. 239-240). Thus, although the traditional thesis may have been instrumental for Avicenna's arrival at his claim that self-awareness is the existence of the immaterial human essence, it cannot be what he means by self-awareness. This is tentatively corroborated by a brief remark in the *Mubāḥathāt*: "It may be that 'intellection' [in the sense of that] which grasps the intelligibles is not applicable to the purity of complete self-awareness, but is subsequent to it. That is worth thinking about" (Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt* §373, 209; A. Badawī, (1947), pp. 118-239).

But if self-awareness is not actual intellection of one's essence in the same sense as we have actual intellection of other things, what is it? The answer to this question can be found in the scattered remarks Avicenna makes on the phenomenon in the various arguments that rely on it. Let us consider two texts, the first from *Shifā' Nafs*, the second from *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*.

---

1. Note that in the aforementioned *locus classicus*, Aristotle explicitly distinguishes between the identity of subject and object in *actual* intellection as something that does not hold in a subject that has merely the potency for intellection.

2. For God's intellection, see Avicenna, 2005, VIII.6, pp. 284-290.

Now, if someone said that you do not know that [the I] is a soul (*nafs*), I would say that I always know it according to the sense in which I call it a soul.<sup>1</sup> I might not know it as designated by the word ‘soul’, but when I understand what [it is that] I refer to as a soul, I understand that it is that thing and that it is that which uses motive and cognitive instruments. I am ignorant of [the I as designated by the word ‘soul’] for only as long as I do not understand the meaning of ‘soul’. This is not the case with the heart or the brain, for I may understand the meaning of ‘heart’ and ‘brain’ but not know [the I]. If I mean by ‘soul’ that it is the thing which is the origin of those motions and cognitions that belong to me and that end in this whole, I know that either it is really me or it is me as using this body. It is as if I now was not able to distinguish the awareness of me pure and simple (*al-shu‘ūr bi-anâ mufradan*) from [its] being mixed with the awareness that it [i.e. the I] uses the body and is associated with the body (Avicenna, 1959, V.7, pp. 256-257).

This passage is from a context in which Avicenna has to argue for the applicability of the common experience of being an I, a first-personal subject and agent, to make sense of the soul in psychology. The point he makes is that once we realise that the soul is precisely the entity that is responsible for the acts and passions one experiences oneself to enact and undergo, the identification of our first-personal I with the soul is but a matter of naming. Interesting for our concern, however, is precisely this reference to an isolated phenomenon of

---

1. This is a reference to *Shifā’ Nafs* I.1, where Avicenna has defined ‘soul’ in relational terms: it refers to the efficient principle that animates the living body *insofar as* it is the principle of life. He purposefully excludes from the soul’s definition the question of what the entity that acts as a soul is in itself, in order to fit all the different types of soul (vegetative, animal, human, and celestial) under the same definition.

first-personality, to being an I responsible for one's actions and subject to the passions one undergoes.

Now, compare this idea with that brought forth in the following passage from the *Ishārāt*:

Perhaps you say: I can only affirm myself by means of my act.

[Avicenna's answer:] If you have affirmed your act as an act in the absolute sense, it is necessary that you affirm an agent of it in the absolute sense, not in a particular sense. [This agent] is your very self. If you have affirmed [your act] as your act, you do not affirm yourself by means of it. On the contrary, your self is part of the concept of your act insofar as it is *your* act. The part is affirmed in the conception preceding it and is not made any less by being with it but not by means of it. Thus, your self is not affirmed by means of [your act] (Avicenna, (1892), *namat* 3, p. 120 (emphasis added)).

Here we find Avicenna defending his theory of self-awareness as a constant constituent of what it is to be human. Earlier in the *Ishārāt* he has presented a version of his famous thought experiment of the floating man, by means of which he argues that self-awareness is prior to and independent of any actually acquired intellection. In the present passage, he explicitly refutes what we can call a reflection theory of self-awareness,<sup>1</sup> that is, the claim that self-awareness first takes place when one reflects upon a prior act or a prior experience of

---

1. I am using this term in full awareness of its use in contemporary German philosophy of mind. The argument here has striking parallels to those put forth by the so-called Heidelberg school of philosophers, initiated by the work of Dieter Henrich. Interestingly, much of the material these philosophers apply to reject reflective, or higher-order, theories of self-awareness is derived from post-Kantian German idealism, especially from Fichte. For a seminal text, see D. Henrich, (1970), Bd 1, pp. 257-284.

one's own. Avicenna's argument is that unless one is already aware of the first-order act or experience as one's own, no non-arbitrary criteria can be given for its recognition as belonging to the reflecting subject. If there is no "mineness" in the first-order act, it is an "anonymous" act, or an act in the absolute sense, which cannot be attributed to me with any more justification than to any other person.

The point of relevance for our concern is that just as in the earlier text, Avicenna again refers to the bare fact of first-personality in his use of self-awareness. Thus, without belabouring the point at any greater length,<sup>1</sup> I would like to make the simple claim that this first-personality, in the sense of being an I, is what Avicenna means by self-awareness. Thus, the individual existence of each human essence consists in being a first-personal subject of experience, with a singular and exclusive perspective to whatever one acts upon or is passive towards. This first-personality is not a characteristic that can be shared with other entities, but rather a primitive fact of immaterial existence, analogous to the spatiotemporal co-ordinates that are responsible for the individuation of material entities. All further attributes of immaterial human substances are individuated by this first-personality, by being stamped as *my* perceptions, *my* emotions, *my* character traits, *my* acts – by always existing in the framework of a singular self-awareness.

To finally address our eschatological concern, it is important that Avicenna considers this self-awareness to be really distinct from all the experiential attributes it may come to receive. This is clear from such passages as the floating man, or from his comparison of our relation to our bodies and all their entailments to the clothes that we

---

1. For an extended discussion, cf. Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, chs 3-4.

wear, the point being that it is simply due to our becoming accustomed to our bodies and their effect upon us that we consider them parts of ourselves (Avicenna, 1959, I.1, p. 16; Avicenna, 1959, V.7, p. 255).

In reality, the body is a garment that we will eventually undress of, and thus really distinct from us. Thus, our self-awareness, our true existence, is disembodied, not just in the sense that it subsists independently of the body, but in the sense that it will ultimately have nothing that is due to the body present to it. When in death we leave the body, we thereby leave all perceptual content of experience, including all that the soul's internal senses are responsible for, because the function of these faculties always requires a respective corporeal organ<sup>1</sup> (Avicenna, 1959, I.5, pp. 39-45). Our life in the hereafter will only consist in our self-aware existence at the degree of second perfection that we have reached during our sojourn in this world. In other words, there will be content to our afterlife, and our first-personality will be a perspective *to* something, at least in case we have acquired some knowledge to contemplate, but this content will be exclusively intellectual.

Thus, the Avicennian conception of the afterlife, in spite of its denying embodiment any role whatsoever, is capable of guaranteeing a genuine individuality or personality to the human subject. The afterlife will in each case be uniquely mine in exactly the same sense as this life is. Nevertheless, Avicenna will be bound to interpret the kind of Qur'ānic passages we started with as metaphorical or allegorical, since he has no means to give the human subjects any

---

1. All cognitive faculties with the sole exception of the intellect belong to the so-called animal soul, which is "the first perfection of a natural body possessed of organs in terms of perceiving particulars and moving by volition" (emphasis added).

sensible experiences in the afterlife. Even imaginal representations will be excluded given that there is no brain in which the images could be retained and synthesised to form the experience of a beatific perceptual state. It is true that Avicenna elsewhere refers to the possibility of human imaginative faculties functioning by means of the celestial bodies (Avicenna, 1984, III.15, pp. 114-115; Avicenna, 1969, VI, pp. 222-224; Avicenna, 2005, IX.7.25, p. 356), but these texts are problematic in the light of Avicenna's broader theoretical commitments. First of all, in his psychology, Avicenna is adamant that each human soul has a unique relation to its body (1 Avicenna, 1959, V.3, pp. 224-225), and a capacity to connect to another body after death obviously violates this doctrine. By the same token, if the departed human soul could entertain mental images by means of the celestial body, one body would be governed by two souls, a position which Avicenna explicitly refutes in his argument against transmigration (Avicenna, 1959, V.4, p. 234). Secondly, the celestial bodies are simple, which raises the question of how they can function as instruments for many departed souls, each of which will presumably have its own peculiar imaginative content in the afterlife. Third, Avicenna explicitly states that celestial motion does not take place for the sake of "generated things" (Avicenna, 2005, IX.3.4-5, 319), and it is hard to think of an instrument not functioning for the sake of an objective extraneous to itself. Therefore, I am strongly tempted to consider the passages that introduce the idea of an imaginative afterlife as little more than ad hoc attempts to please the readers that were reluctant to accept an allegorical interpretation of the Qur'ānic passages, and especially one with so dire consequences for those sincere believers whose intellectual capacities have remained in a state of underdevelopment.

## 2. Mullā Ṣadrā

It is evident that Mullā Ṣadrā found Avicenna's description of self-

awareness of great theoretical potential in his *Aṣfār*. Let us consider just two passages as examples of this general tendency. First, we can find a faithful rendering of the Avicennian argument against reflection theories of self-awareness.

No one can say: my knowledge of myself is due to a medium, which is my act, and I gain information of myself from my act. This is not possible, [irrespective of] whether I gain information of myself from an absolute act or from an act which originates from myself to myself. If I gain information from an absolute act, the absolute act only requires an absolute agent, and only an absolute agent can be established by means of it, not an agent that would be me. If I gain information of myself through my own act, I can only know my act once I already know myself. Thus, if I can only know myself once I know myself, a vicious circle results, and that is false. This indicates, therefore, that a human being's knowledge of himself is not by means of his act<sup>1</sup> (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001–2005, vols. 9, II.4, III,505-506).

Ṣadrā clearly makes the Avicennian point that self-awareness cannot be reduced to reflection upon a state of first-order awareness of other things, for this would either render completely arbitrary the recognition of the first-order state as one's own, or it would result in a vicious circle where we have to suppose the *explanandum* in the *explanans*. As a result, Ṣadrā maintains that we have to admit self-awareness as a primitive constituent of our experience. He also follows Avicenna in conceiving of this primitive type of self-awareness as first-personality, a point that by his time was a firm part of the tradition, and had been further solidified by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī's (d. 1191 CE) distinction between 'I' and 'it' as respectively

---

1. This edition is henceforth referred to as *Aṣfār*, followed by chapter number, and volume and page number.

the subjective and objective constituents of all experience, together with the introduction of the term *anāʾīyya* or “I-ness” for the prior.<sup>1</sup>

That Ṣadrā also subscribed to the Avicennian identification of self-awareness with the individual existence of the self-aware human being is evident from passages like the following:

Hylic souls are distinguished from each other by appendices that occur to them because of matter, for when souls come about, they are corporeal, and they are to be judged as material forms and natures that are multiple because of corporeal distinctions. Then results the individuation of each of them by an individual existence which is their very awareness of themselves, and that persists firmly while [undergoing] a kind of existential renewal. Thus, the distinction between [souls] certainly remains eternally even if existential diversity occurs to each of them because of their substantiation from the beginning of their being until the end of their substantial perfection (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001-2005, IV.7.2, VIII.395).

As can be seen from this passage, Ṣadrā’s account of the individuation of human being curiously combines the two Avicennian phases in *Shifāʾ: Nafs* V.3 and the *Taʾlīqāt*. In the beginning of its existence, each human soul is a material form. At this level, it is individuated by the particular characteristics due to it because of matter, which are ultimately individuated by the unique spatiotemporal co-ordinates that matter affords. However, once human being becomes aware of itself, that is, when the kind of first-personal cognitive perspective we have just discussed emerges, it ascends to a distinct level of existence which Ṣadrā calls mental (*dhihnī*). On this level,

---

1. Cf., for example, Ṣadrā, 2001-2005, III.1.3.1, VI.150, with Suhrawardī, 1999, II.1.5, pp. 115-116.



human being is individuated by its unique self-awareness, just as we saw Avicenna argue. Self-awareness will account for the individuality of human being from here on for the rest of its existence, the hereafter included.

Minor differences aside, so far the Ṣadrīan account seems remarkably close to the Avicennian. However, there is one all-important difference. Ṣadrā's firm adherence to a broad and robust concept of cognitive unity, that is, the idea that the subject and object of cognition are identical, or really indistinguishable interdependent parts of a single whole,<sup>1</sup> leads him to reject Avicenna's claim that self-awareness is really distinct from the objective aspect of experience. Although he does recognise genuine argumentative power in such Avicennian arguments as the floating man,<sup>2</sup> they are only useful as aids in an analysis of the different interdependent constituents of mental existence. No real distinction between the self-aware subject and the objects of its experience can be inferred on their basis (Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001-2005, IV.2.3, VIII.48-53). In reality, human existence is always qualified by its objective content, it is a single structured whole of that content as first-personally apprehended at a certain level of cognition, either perceptually, imaginally, or intellectually. This is evident from the following passage:

When being a knower and being known is realised between

- 
1. For a study of this principle in Ṣadrā, see I. Kalin, 2010.
  2. Interestingly, Ṣadrā recasts the argument as valid of all animals (see *Asfār* IV.2.2, VIII.48). This is a logical consequence of his view that all cognition, not just intellection but also the most elementary levels of perception, requires immateriality, the mode of existence of which is self-awareness. Interestingly, he even considers the question of whether plants have a faint apprehension of their surroundings and thereby of themselves, arriving at a hesitant affirmative, e.g. in *Asfār* IV.4.2, VIII.192.

two things, there is no doubt an essential connection between them with regard to existence, and so a unifying connection or an existential bond of one knowing the other is realised between the two things. [...] That connection requires the occurrence of one of them to the other and its being revealed to [the other]. It may take place between the very essence of what is known and the essence of the knower, like in the soul's knowledge of itself, its attributes, its faculties, and the forms established on the tablets of its awareness, and it may be between a form which occurs from what is known and is additional to its essence and the essence of the knower, like in the soul's knowledge of what is external to itself and to the self of its faculties and its awareness, and it is called 'occurrent knowledge' (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuṣūlī*)<sup>1</sup> or 'newly acquired knowledge' (*al-ʿilm al-ḥādīth*). What is really known is also here the form that is present (*al-ḥādīr*), not what is extraneous to it. When it is said of the external thing that it is known, this is in a secondary sense (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001-2005, III.1.3.1, VI.154-155).

Now, we should pay special attention to the end of the passage. It is not particularly odd to claim cognitive identity between the subject and object of self-knowledge. But Ṣadrā here explicitly maintains that cognitive identity is true even when we perceive things we believe to be external to us and radically different from ourselves. The point is that in this kind of cognition, which Ṣadrā here calls "occurrent" or "newly acquired", the intentional supposition of an

1. In later Islamic philosophy, the term *ḥuṣūlī* is the counterpart to *ḥuḍūrī*, or "presential" knowledge, which denotes the first type of unity Ṣadrā has just described. The distinction is between immediate phenomenal content and its supposed intentional reference. I have discussed the emergence of the distinction in Suhrawardī in Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy*, ch. 6.1. For a more extensive study of presential knowledge, see M. Ha'iri Yazdi, 1992.

extra-mental object is an addition to the immediate experience of the phenomenal object. The phenomenal object is a constituent of the very same act of existence as myself, the subject that is aware of the object. If I suppose it to exist extra-mentally independent of my cognition of it, I perform a conceptual operation on the immediate act of experienced existence, an operation similar to that by means of which I assume myself to be distinct from whatever objects I am first-personally aware of. Elsewhere, Şadrā characterises such assumptions as based on custom or habit (Mullā Şadrā, 2001-2005, I.9.2.6, III.521), which I take to denote the fact that we are rarely aware of making these assumptions, and we seldom have any reason to pause and consider their legitimacy. This, however, does not change the fact that the extra-mentality and independence of the object are not given in the act of existence I am primarily and immediately aware of, any more than my own distinctness of the object is.

The thesis of cognitive identity ultimately amounts to the claim that each of us is always an act of existence with a first-personal internal structure, an 'I' aware of an 'it'. This is an evident departure from the Avicennian idea that the 'self' unique to each of us is a static perspective that remains independent of and immune to any changes brought about by what it is a perspective to. But what are the eschatological consequences of this difference? First of all, we must pay attention to the fact that according to Şadrā, mental existence is completely independent of the body. This means that, just as in Avicenna, each human being subsists as self-awareness, whether or not she is connected to her body. But unlike Avicenna, Şadrā thinks that the existential content of mental existence, or all the qualifications our self-awareness receives, is not caused by the body but by the supernal principle of our existence through a process of emanation. External corporeal circumstances may be necessary conditions, or

accidental causes, for perception, but even so the actual existence of the phenomenal object of perception *as it is experienced* is caused by that higher principle. When it comes to imagination and intellection, this independence from external corporeal circumstances is complete, and the extra-mental object is no longer even a necessary condition. Thus, Ṣadrā can account for an embodied existence independent of the material body, the form of which the soul was before ascending to the level of mental existence. Distinct from corporeality in the sense of a form's existence in matter, this purely mental embodiment is the *experience* of inhabiting a body, and it entails the presence to our awareness of other entities with spatiotemporal co-ordinates, entities which we experience in a certain spatial relation to our embodied selves. In other words, we can be aware of perfectly ordinary perceptual objects even when we lack any relation to our erstwhile material bodies. Moreover, all the sense modalities remain as imaginal possibilities in this disembodied state. Therefore, Ṣadrā can incorporate a literal interpretation of the Qur'ānic descriptions of the afterlife in his systematic metaphysics, only the kind of objects described in the Revelation will exist imaginally, not perceptually. Yet they need not be any less real as phenomenal objects of experience.

The question remains, however, whether Ṣadrā thinks imaginal existence is proper to human perfection, the reward for which the beatific existence in the hereafter is. If intellection is the summit of our aspirations, shouldn't the afterlife consist of intellectual contemplation rather than imaginal experience of concrete phenomenal objects? If that is the case, Ṣadrā will end up with a similar account of the afterlife as Avicenna, though for a different reason. In his reading of Ṣadrīan eschatology, Christian Jambet insists that imagination is required in all cases in the hereafter as well (Jambet, 2008, pp. 73-110). This is because Ṣadrā seems to have proposed a quasi-Lockean theory

about personal identity, according to which our personal history determines our present awareness through imagination. Suppose, for instance, that I have developed a profound fondness for chocolate. As a consequence, when I pass by a chocolaterie on the street, its offerings will appear quite different to me than they would if I were averse to or ignorant of the substance. Since Ṣadrā's conception of the human self is considerably broader than that of Avicenna, this is of crucial importance for his conception of the hereafter: if the perspective to whatever one is aware of in the Garden is supposed to be unique to oneself, then one's personal history must determine that perspective. Thus, even if our main activity in the afterlife were the contemplation of God, we would still contemplate Him as creatures determined by their unique personal histories. The kind of narrow first-personality Avicenna proposed cannot accommodate this more robust uniqueness of our perspective, and Ṣadrā would perhaps say that this is symptomatic of its being based on the ultimately unwarranted supposition of the separability of the self from its experiential content.

Thus, although Ṣadrā's adherence to substance dualism is every bit as firm as Avicenna's, his broader and more robust conception of our selfhood allows him to incorporate a literal interpretation of the Qur'ān's sensual descriptions of the afterlife, and even makes such descriptions appropriate from a purely systematic point of view. If we value adherence to the apparent meaning of the Scripture, we can therefore say that there is an important difference between the respective dualisms of Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā: while both seem capable of guaranteeing genuine individuality in the afterlife, only Ṣadrā can incorporate perceptuality in it. This eschatological difference is a direct consequence of differences in their psychologies, which Ṣadrā was fully aware of when he claimed that a correct understanding

of the afterlife requires the correct account of the human soul (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1384HSh, XIX.2, II.1003).

Ultimately, however, we are faced with a question of theoretical priorities. For an uncompromising *faylasūf* like Avicenna, Ṣadrā's conception of mental existence comes at too great a metaphysical cost. Although the substantial change from material existence to mental existence may have had its precedents in Islamic philosophy (Cf. Fārābī, 1964, p. 36), it poses grave problems for a Peripatetic natural philosopher, insofar as it requires the emergence of what is ontologically superior from what is inferior. Moreover, the complete rejection of the function of corporeal organs in imagination would seem to violate the principle according to which nature does nothing in vain, for what use can there be for an idle brain? Finally, since only like produces like, how can the higher metaphysical principles cause perceptions in us, unless they consist of perception in themselves? Such a claim, however, would go severely against the grain of the traditional account of the very superiority of those higher principles. These are but some of the problems Avicenna would likely have perceived, and if any kind of principle of parsimony is adhered to, Ṣadrā seems to be compelled to make a few too many metaphysical assumptions to make his theory palatable. But Ṣadrā's willingness to pay the price may have been dictated by the ulterior motive of strict submission to Revelation. If interpreters like Jambet are right, and if Ṣadrā's priority throughout his philosophical career was to make theoretical sense of the Revelation in its terms, we have to ask whether his metaphysics and psychology are ultimately as parsimonious as he could make them. Categorically resistant to any revisions of the Revelation by means of special strategies of interpretation, and starting from the premise that philosophical psychology must be molded to accommodate the Qur'ānic description of the afterlife, perhaps his theory is the natural outcome.

### 3. Conclusion

Let us conclude as we began, with the Book. Again, *Sura 52* tells us that “[t]hose who were mindful of God are in Gardens and in bliss, rejoicing in their Lord’s gifts: He has saved them from the torment of the Blaze, ‘Eat and drink with healthy enjoyment as a reward for what you have done.’ They are comfortably seated on couches arranged in rows; We pair them with beautiful-eyed maidens; We unite the believers with their offspring who followed them in faith – We do not deny them any of the rewards for their deeds: each person is in pledge for his own deeds – We provide them with any fruit or meat they desire. They pass around a cup which does not lead to any idle talk or sin. Devoted youths like hidden pearls wait on them. They turn to one another and say, ‘When we were still with our families [on earth] we used to live in fear – God has been gracious to us and saved us from the torment of intense heat – We used to pray to Him: He is the Good, the Merciful One.’” (Q 52:17-29)

Amid the references to sensual pleasures, the Qur’ān here mentions inter-subjective relations between the faithful in its description of the hereafter. If this reading is correct, and if these relations contribute to the beatitude, then it seems we can duly ask whether a paradise is imaginable without the possibility of contact to real human others. For example, would the hereafter be as enticing without the presence of one’s “offspring”, as the text has it?

If questions like this are considered worthwhile, they will leave the dualist with a further dilemma. Even if we agreed that Ṣadrā found a way to interpret literally the Revelation’s highly concrete and sensual descriptions of the afterlife, though arguably at a high metaphysical cost, it remains an open question whether he, or any other dualist, can incorporate relations to human others in his philosophical system. The treatment of this question, however, is topic for another paper.

## References

1. Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (2010). *The Qur'ān: English Translation and Parallel Arabic Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Adamson, P., Benevich, F. (2018). The Thought-Experimental Method: Avicenna's Flying Man Argument. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 4(2), pp. 147-164.
3. Aristotle. (n.d.). *De anima* (III.5, 430a20-25).?
4. Avicenna. (1952). *Shifāʾ: Madkhal* (I. Madkour, M. El-Khodeiri, G. Anawati, & F. El-Ahwani, Eds.). Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale,
5. Avicenna. (1959). *Shifāʾ: Nafs* (F. Rahman, Ed., Vol. 3, 4, 6, 7). London: Oxford University Press.
6. Avicenna. (2005). *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt* (M. Marmura, Trans.) Provo: Brigham Young University Press.
7. Avicenna. (2013). *Taʿlīqāt*. (S. H. Mousavian, Ed.). Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy.
8. Avicenna. (1892). *al-Ishārāt wa'l-Tanbīhāt* (J. Forget, Ed.). Leiden: E. J. Brill.
9. Avicenna. (1984). *al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'ād* (A. Nūrānī, Ed.). Tehran: McGill University and Tehran University.
10. Avicenna. (1969). *al-Risāla al-Aḥwāyā fī al-Ma'ād* (F. Lucchetta, Ed., VI). Padova: Editrice Antenore.
11. Avicenna. (n.d.). *Mubāḥathāt*.??
12. Badawī, A. (1947). *Aristū 'inda al-ʿArab*. Cairo: Maktaba al-Nahḍa al-Miṣrīya.
13. Benevich, F. (2019). Individuation and Identity in Islamic Philosophy after Avicenna: Bahmanyār and Suhrawardī. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 28(1), pp. 4-28
14. Black, D. (2012). Avicenna on Individuation, Self-Awareness, and God's Knowledge of Particulars (R. Taylor & I. A. Omar, Eds.). *The Judeo-Christian-Islamic Heritage*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.



15. Fārābī, Cf. (1964). *al-Siyāsa al-Madanīya al-Mulaqqab bi-Mabādi' al-Mawjūdāt* (F. Najjār, Ed.). (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique).
16. Gutas, D. (2014). *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*. Leiden: Brill
17. Ha'iri Yazdi, M. (1992). *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence*. Albany: SUNY Press.
18. Henrich, D. (1970). Selbstbewußtsein, kritische Einleitung in eine Theorie (R. Bubner, K. Cramer, & R. Wiehl, Eds.). *Hermeneutik und Dialektik*. Tübingen: Mohr.
19. Jambet, C. (2008). *Mort et résurrection en islam: L'au-delà selon Mullā Sadrā*. Paris: Albin Michel.
20. Kaukua, J. (2015). *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
21. Kalin, I. (2010). *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadrā on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
22. Michot, J. R. (1986). *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne: Le retour à Dieu (ma 'ād) et l'imagination*. Louvain: Peeters.
23. Mullā Ṣadrā. (2001). *al-Ḥikma al-muta'āliya fī al-asfār al-arba'ā al-'aqlīya* (S. M. Khamenei, Ed.). Tehran: Sadra.
24. Mullā Ṣadrā. (1384HSh). *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*. (N. Habibi, Ed.). Tehran: Sadra.
25. Reisman, D. C. (2002). *The Making of the Avicennan Tradition: The Transmission, Contents, and Structure of Ibn Sīnā's al-Mubāḥḥathāt*. Leiden: Brill.
26. Suhrawardī. (1999). *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (J. Walbridge and H. Ziai Eds., II.1.5). Provo: Brigham Young University Press.