

**THE HUMAN SOUL'S INDIVIDUATION AND ITS  
SURVIVAL AFTER THE BODY'S DEATH:  
AVICENNA ON THE CAUSAL RELATION  
BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL**

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The ontological status of the human (or rational) soul much puzzled Avicenna who, on this issue, wanted to take some distance from Aristotle. In his *De anima* Aristotle does not seem to grant a very privileged status to the human soul since it is, like any other sublunary soul, the substantial form of the body and he does not determine whether or not it is immortal. *De anima*, 3.5 is rather obscure but seems to imply that to speak meaningfully of human individual immortality one must take the agent intellect to be a part of the human soul. Avicenna, on the other hand, considers that there is only one Agent Intellect which is the last separate intelligence “common” to all human beings. Hence, to endow the human soul with a unique ontological status he makes of it a complete substance which cannot be the substantial form of the body. But, if the human soul is a complete substance which does not inhere in a body since it is not imprinted in it, as shown in *De anima*, V, 2 of the *Shifā'*, then, the problem of its individuation arises. If, as Avicenna asserts in V, 3, the human soul's individuation requires the body, then it seems that this soul, just as the vegetative and animal soul, cannot survive or subsist after the death of the body, at least as an individual soul. Nevertheless, in V, 4 Avicenna argues that it does.

Dimitri Gutas has highlighted the chronological steps Avicenna took in order to elaborate the “Metaphysics of the Rational Soul”<sup>1</sup> but I would like to limit myself to a specific issue in a specific text, i.e., the arguments Avicenna offers in the

<sup>1</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden, 1988), particularly pp. 254-61.

*De anima* sections, V, 3 & 4 of the *Shifā'*,<sup>2</sup> to prove that the human soul originates with the body, yet, does not die with it. Avicenna's resolution of these problems rests on a subtle and complex conception of the causal relation between body and soul but one may wonder whether it is sufficient to give an account of the individuation of the human soul after the death of the body.

It is not surprising, therefore, that causation too puzzled Avicenna since the Aristotelian conception, which limits itself to an analysis of purely physical causal relations, i.e., causation of motion, cannot and does not even try to give an account of existence. As Avicenna's metaphysics focuses on being and attempts to find its causes, it needed to develop a properly metaphysical approach to efficient causality. This explains why in the *Shifā'* Avicenna studies causes not only in the first treatise of the *Physics* in which he already introduces the distinction between physical and metaphysical causes but also at great length in Books IV, chapter 1, and VI of the *Metaphysics*. Michael E. Marmura has explored the originality of Avicenna's approach<sup>3</sup> in these texts as well as in some of the logical treatises of the *Shifā'*.

Many accounts of Avicenna's conception of the human soul have not much focused on individuation which is more of a metaphysical problem but personal immortality clearly involves it.<sup>4</sup> If individuation requires some link to matter then, it is

<sup>2</sup> Arabic edition by Fazlur Rahman: *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text) Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'* (London, 1959), pp. 227-31; Medieval Latin translation ed. by Simone Van Riet: *Avicenna Latinus: Liber De Anima seu Sextus De Naturalibus, IV-V* (Louvain-Leiden, 1968), pp. 113-20. Arabic text of the parallel sections in the *Najāt*, ed. by Mohammed Dānesh Pazhuh (Tehran, 1985), pp. 378-83; English translation by Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology. An English Translation of Kitāb al-Najāt*, Book II, Chapter VI with historico-philosophical notes and textual improvements on the Cairo edition (London, 1952), pp. 58-61.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, "Avicenna on causal priority," in Parviz Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (Delmar, N.Y., 1981), pp. 65-83, and "The metaphysics of efficient causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)," in Michael E. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy. Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani* (Albany, N.Y., 1984), pp. 172-87. See also Jean Jolivet, "La répartition des causes chez Aristote et Avicenne: Le sens d'un déplacement," in J. Jolivet, Z. Kaluza, & A. de Libera (eds.), *Lectionum varietates. Hommage à Paul Vignaux (1904-1987)*, Études de Philosophie Médiévale, LXV (Paris, 1991), pp. 49-65.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Herbert A. Davidson in his remarkable *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averroes on Intellect. Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, & Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford, 1992) in its long section on Avicenna (pp. 74-126) barely touches upon it.

difficult to explain how the separated soul can remain individuated.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper I intend to show how Avicenna brings his analyses of causation to bear on the human soul's individuation and temporal origination, as well as on the ability of the human soul to subsist despite the death of the body. The human soul's individuation as well as its subsistence after the body's death are two of the ontological puzzles related to the rational soul and grounded in the causal relation between body and soul. I shall, therefore, discuss mainly the causal influence of the body on the soul and not the reverse.

### I. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL IS A STRONG ONE

#### a. *Individuation and the Temporal Origination of the Human Soul* (V,3, Arabic, pp. 223-5; Medieval Latin, pp. 105-9)<sup>6</sup>

An examination of chapter 3 of book V shows that Avicenna claims that there is a connection between the temporal origination<sup>7</sup> of the body and that of the soul but acknowledges that the nature of this connection remains fairly obscure.

The chapter begins with the claim that though at the beginning sensory, imaginative, and bodily faculties are useful to the human soul in order to acquire intelligibles, they later on may

<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Marmura in "Avicenna and the problem of the infinite number of souls," *Mediaeval Studies*, 22 (1960): 232-9, explains how disciples of Avicenna thought that asserting the individuation of the separated human soul would lead to the problem of the infinite number of souls, though Avicenna had tried to solve it, and more importantly that Averroes refuted the individuation of the separated soul on the ground that matter is the individuating principle. See also his "Ghazali and the Avicennan proof from personal identity for an immaterial self," in Ruth Link-Salinger (ed.), *A Straight Path. Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture. Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman* (Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 195-205. On individuation in Avicenna, see Allan Bäck, "The Islamic background: Avicenna (b. 980; d. 1037) and Averroes (b. 1126; d. 1198)," in Jorge J.E. Gracia (ed.), *Individuation in Scholasticism. The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation 1150-1650* (Albany, 1994), pp. 39-67, particularly, pp. 40-53.

<sup>6</sup> We will use the parallel passages in the *Najāt* only when they contain interesting additions or differences.

<sup>7</sup> In this chapter Avicenna always uses the term *hudūth* (Latin *creatio*), which I am translating as "temporal origination," instead of *kawn* (Latin *generatio*) or generation since he is looking for a cause of being, a metaphysical cause, and not simply a cause of "motion" or even of substantial change.

become a hindrance by distracting the soul from turning to itself and the divine world, as it should if it wishes to acquire its second perfection. Once the rational soul has reached its first perfection it no longer needs the body to perform its own proper activity, just as someone, who needed a mount and instruments to reach a certain aim, once at destination begins to find them cumbersome and leaves them behind. The body is not an integral feature of the human being but simply a vehicle and an instrument the usefulness of which is limited to the first stage of development.

If, indeed, as Avicenna has argued in chapter 2 of this book, the rational soul is not a form imprinted in matter, i.e. a substantial but material form, then it must be a pure immaterial form, enjoying independence from the body since it has no need of it to reach self-consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Its status as a substance in the strict sense seems to imply that its existence is eternal, ontologically and temporally precedes the existence of the body, and raises the question of its individuation. Avicenna thinks that its individuation depends on its temporal origination and, therefore, on its connection to the body. Hence he rejects the pre-existence of the human soul which would be one both in species and concept and so could not be multiple.

In order to determine what individuates the human soul Avicenna applies general principles<sup>9</sup> and argues that, being one in species and concept, it cannot be individuated by itself but must have some “connection” (Arabic *nisba*; Latin *comparatio*) to what receives it, i.e., some corporeal matter. The term connection is rather vague and Avicenna is not keen to spell out what exactly it means. This connection individualizes the rational soul because of the particular spatial and temporal location of that matter. Human “souls originate whenever a corporeal matter apt to be used by them originates” (Arabic, p. 225, l. 1; Latin, pp. 107, 77-108, 1). The soul originates simultaneously with the body destined to be its kingdom and instrument (Arabic, p. 225, l. 2; Latin, p. 108, l. 2). Here again the body is only an instrument or object of activity for the soul and Avicenna carefully insists that the temporal origination of both

<sup>8</sup> See the famous thought experiment of the “flying man”, in I, 1, and V, 7 discussed by Michael E. Marmura, “Avicenna’s “flying man” in context,” *The Monist*, 69 (1986): 383-95.

<sup>9</sup> See, Arabic, twice p. 224 and Latin, p. 106, 45 & 53-54.

soul and body is simply a simultaneous “happening.” He does not present the body as the cause of the soul’s “happening” since he always uses the preposition *ma‘a* (Latin *cum*), or “with,” and never *bi*, i.e., by means of which, to talk about the function of the body in the temporal origination of the soul. He also states that the soul comes from *min* (Latin *ex*) first principles, i.e., beings beyond the sublunary world.<sup>10</sup>

Because of the simultaneous temporal origination of both body and soul the soul has a disposition *hay‘a* to a natural inclination to busy itself with its own body. Such disposition, which seems to be *per se* once the connection with the body is made, ensures that individuation persists even when in this world the soul acts on its own or later on after its separation from the body.

Since individuation is a perpetual feature of the soul, Avicenna needs to give some “strength” to the connection ensuring it, even if it cannot be an essential property of the human soul qua soul since then all souls should have it from all eternity. This connection is linked to temporality and, therefore, human souls must have a temporal origination and must originate simultaneously with their bodies. It cannot be simply a mere simultaneity of origination since it ensures that the soul’s relation to its own body is a privileged one, different from its relation to any other body, and, as the *Najāt* adds, the soul can only contact any other body through its own.<sup>11</sup> The dispositions arising from that connection determine the soul’s attachment to its own body and the correlation of their matching.<sup>12</sup> This last statement implies some kind of “mutual suitability,” as Rahman puts it,<sup>13</sup> but Avicenna, instead of elaborating this concept, simply acknowledges that this state and this attachment of the soul remain obscure to us.

The only causal function attached to the body is that its mediation is necessary for the soul’s attainment of its first perfection or entelechy, since “the soul is destined to reach the beginning of its perfection by the mediation of the body” (*bi-wisāta*, Latin

<sup>10</sup> The *Najāt*, p. 394 (Rahman’s translation p. 68) states that the existence of the soul is simultaneous with that of the body but does not arise from (*an*) the body but rather from a substance which is an immaterial form.

<sup>11</sup> Arabic, p. 377, l. 4; Rahman’s translation, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Arabic, p. 225; Latin, pp. 108, 86-109, 87 is slightly different: *propter quas affectiones illa anima fit propria illius corporis*.

<sup>13</sup> Rahman’s translation of the *Najāt*, p. 58.

*mediante corpore*)<sup>14</sup> and the *Najāt* adds that the “subsequent development, however, does not depend on the body but on its own nature.”<sup>15</sup> The body, then, is an instrumental cause for the soul’s activities – but nothing is said about the soul’s being – and a very temporary one at that since it is no longer required once the soul has reached its first perfection.

Avicenna had already acknowledged that the exact nature of the rational soul’s connection to the body is obscure to us – he will reiterate that point several times – and feels now the need to give further precision. First he explains what it is not. Afraid, since he has been careful to avoid causal language in what concerns the soul’s origination and being, that such a connection be minimized, he distinguishes it from a relation in the technical sense of the category of relation. Individuation is not based on an accidental relation *idāfa*. If it were, then the soul would be essentially one and only accidentally multiple, just as a father is essentially one but has individual relations to each of his children while being young, wise, or foolish in himself. If individuation were to rest simply on an accidental relation to bodies, then we would all be knowers or all fools at the same time (Arabic, p. 226; Latin, pp. 110, 7-111, 18). It would also follow that individuation would stop after death.

Having argued that this “connection” cannot be construed as a “relation” in the sense of an accidental category, Avicenna then reiterates that it is not caused by the soul being impressed in the body – the soul is not the substantial form of the body – but is some affection, power, and spiritual accident or the collection of them, even if we do not know exactly what it is. Individuation seems to be some kind of per se property (as the Latin says, p. 111, 26, though the Arabic does not) of the human soul subsequent to its temporal origination.

#### b. *Refutation of the Transmigration of Souls*

(Arabic, pp. 233-4; Latin, pp. 124-6)

In the previous passage Avicenna had eliminated the possibility that the “connection” between body and soul be a mere accidental relation and indicated that it was a “strong” connection.

<sup>14</sup> Arabic, p. 22; Latin, p. 109, 89-90.

<sup>15</sup> Rahman’s translation, p. 58; Arabic text, p. 377.

Now he needs once again to emphasize its strength in order to refute transmigration, a view defended, for instance, by his predecessor the philosopher-physician al-Rāzī.<sup>16</sup> The connection between a particular body and its own soul is so strong that, though this soul survives the death of its own body, it cannot be involved in transmigration since it is individualized once and for all. Therefore, the connection is not a connection to any appropriate body but to this particular body at the exclusion of any other.

Avicenna's rejection of transmigration gives him the opportunity to clarify somewhat the connection between body and human soul and the particular contribution of the body to the origination of the soul. "Readiness of bodies necessitates the emanation of the soul's existence from the separate causes" and so it cannot be by chance. For, if it were by chance, then there would be no essential cause for the individuation of the soul and, therefore, I assume, its individuation would cease after death. Each body essentially requires that a soul originate for it and attach to it. Avicenna, then, once again indicates that this attachment between body and soul is not such that the soul be imprinted in the body but rather such that the soul be busy with it and therewith be conscious of its own body and act on it. Curiously Avicenna adds that every animal is aware that its soul is one and administers and rules its own body. Both in the *Shifā'* and in the *Najāt* there is a shift from the rational soul to that of every animal but we should not forget that Avicenna is discussing transmigration and in fact rejecting the possibility that two souls, one animal and the other rational, could at the same time "occupy" one and the same body. It does not follow that for Avicenna animal and human consciousness are identical and in fact the text does not speak of pure self-consciousness which is independent from the body. Animals apparently are aware they have a soul and that it does rule the body but true immediate self-consciousness is not accessible to them.

It is clear now that the body is an essential cause for the soul's individuation but nothing has been said about the soul's existence, except that it arises from separate causes, i.e., immaterial beings.

<sup>16</sup> See Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Al-Razi's conception of the soul: Psychological background to his ethics," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 5 (1996): 245-63.

## II. THOUGH STRONG THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL IS NOT SO STRONG THAT PURELY RATIONAL ACTIVITIES DEPEND ON IT

Since in the *Najāt* Avicenna claims that the soul's second perfection not only does not depend on the body but even may be hindered by it, he needs to ensure the soul's continuous individuation, and this even after the body's death. Though the body, as we have seen, is an essential cause for the soul's original individuation, it does no longer play that role at a further stage. Hence in the *Shifā'* Avicenna adds that the soul is also individuated 1. by its own thinking once it has become intellect in act; 2. by its self-consciousness, which does not require the body since it is immediate, but involves a grasp of one's own individuality; and 3. by its moral acts.<sup>17</sup> So the individuation originally granted by a connection to corporeal matter and ensuring the temporal origination of the soul gets strengthened by intellectual autonomous activities and virtuous acts in such a way that this connection will no longer be necessary or even helpful. As the human soul has no intellectual memory – each act of intellectual memory is the result of a new emanation of some intelligible from the Agent Intellect – and as a separated soul has no longer an imaginative or sensible memory one wonders how the human separated soul in particular can be individuated by its own thinking, its self-consciousness, and its moral acts.<sup>18</sup>

Though these last points are rather fascinating they do not much clarify the nature of the connection between the body and the human soul. The only causal function granted to the body in

<sup>17</sup> Bäck, in his article on individuation “The Islamic background,” limits himself to the individuation of quiddities of sensible beings by means of matter and of concepts.

<sup>18</sup> Already Davidson, in his *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averroes on the Intellect*, indicated that Avicenna's claim that in the next life “simpleminded souls,” unable to conceive of their immateriality, suffer imaginary physical punishment seems inconsistent, since the compositive imagination requires a physical organ and the now disembodied soul has no such organ. Avicenna suggests that such a disembodied soul attaches itself to one of the celestial spheres and something in such a sphere is what the soul uses to exercises its compositive imaginative function. Davidson asserts that Avicenna does not expressly accept or reject this rationalization of a popular religious belief and that consistency does not allow him to accept it. Even if we would accept the solution of the attachment to a celestial sphere to ensure imagination for the separated soul, it would not solve the problem of its continuous individuation since the link would be not only to a different “bit” of sensible or sublunary matter but to some different kind of matter, celestial matter.



the development of intellectual activity is a purely instrumental one which, on top of this, is temporary since it ceases or should cease once the soul has reached its first perfection. This very limited causal function prepares the way for arguing that the soul does not die with the body. Body and soul originate simultaneously but do not die simultaneously since the soul does not depend on the body for its highest and proper activities and will be shown to be incorruptible and thus to maintain its individuation. Therefore, Avicenna will need to articulate more precisely what is the causal link – or lack thereof – between body and the rational soul's very existence in contradistinction to its temporal origination, its individuation, and its attainment of its first perfection.

**III. THOUGH STRONG ENOUGH TO ENSURE INDIVIDUATION  
THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL IS ONLY  
ACCIDENTAL TO THE SOUL'S EXISTENCE AND, THEREFORE,  
THE SOUL DOES NOT DIE WITH THE BODY**

(Arabic, pp. 227-231; Latin, pp. 113-120)

In V, 4, Avicenna argues that the rational soul does not die with the body and, therefore, he must clarify the “connection” between body and soul respecting the soul's existence. The argument focuses on the “dependence” of the soul on the body. Notice the shift from “connection” (*nisba*) in the previous chapter to “dependence” (*ta'alluq*, *'alāqa*; Latin, *modus pendendi*) in the present argument. Dependence seems to be a subset of connection. Avicenna will argue that the soul does not really depend on the body for its very existence and, therefore, that the body's death does not entail that of the soul. Dependence appears to be too strong a connection for Avicenna's purpose. Notice also the shift from “temporal origination” (*hudūth*) to “existence” (*wujūd*).

The structure of the argument is an elimination process. There are three kinds of “dependence” for existence:

- co-dependence (mutual and equal; *mukāfi*);
- dependence by posteriority;
- dependence by essential priority.

Avicenna will show that either such kinds of dependence cannot exist for the human soul or, if they can exist, they do not entail that the soul dies when the body does. Co-dependence and

dependence by priority of the soul over the body are easy to eliminate but dependence by posteriority is more plausible and will lead Avicenna to examine more closely the causal “connection” between body and soul.

a. rejection of co-dependence (Arabic, pp. 227-228, l. 2; Latin, pp. 113, 46-114, 56). If body and soul were ontologically mutually and equally dependent on each other, then they would be so either essentially or accidentally. If the co-dependence is essential, then each one is essentially related to its partner and neither the soul nor the body can be substances but complete substances they are. Since essential co-dependence is not the case, Avicenna then explores whether it is merely accidental. If accidental, then the corruption of the body entails only the corruption in the soul of the correlative accidental relation (*iḍāfa*) and not the corruption of the soul’s itself.

b. refutation of the dependence on the body by essential priority of the soul (Arabic, pp. 230, l. 5-231, l. 2; Latin, pp. 118, 11-120, 34). If this ontological dependence be not only essential but also temporal, then the soul would pre-exist the body and there would be no reason why it would die with the body. If this priority is simply essential, then, in application of a general principle, the existence of the soul would necessitate that of the body but the corruption of the body would not necessitate that of the soul, since the soul’s own corruption would be the sole cause of corruption for its body. As we know that the body has its own particular causes of corruption, i.e., changes in the humors, etc, it is clear that there is no dependence by essential priority. In fact, Avicenna shows that dependence by essential priority would not be a dependence of the soul on the body but rather the reverse and the body’s corruption would simply be a sign of that of the soul.

c. arguments against dependence by posteriority (Arabic, pp. 228, l. 3-230, l. 4; Latin, pp. 114, 57-118, 10). If the existence of the soul is posterior to that of the body, then the body is a cause for the soul’s existence. Avicenna reminds us that there are four causes and again will eliminate each one.

The body cannot be the efficient cause of the soul’s existence for, among other reasons, if it were the case, how could a body be efficient cause of a being which is not in matter but rather is an “absolute substance” (*jawhar muṭlaq*; Latin *substantia absoluta*), i.e. an immaterial one.

Neither can the body be the receptive (i.e., material) cause for

the soul's existence since Avicenna has already argued that the soul is not imprinted in the body and, therefore, the body strictly speaking cannot be "informed" by the soul which is not the form of the body.

Furthermore, the body cannot be the formal or perfective (*kamāliyya*), i.e., final, cause of the soul, since the reverse is more to the point.

Therefore, concludes Avicenna, the ontological dependence by posteriority of the soul on the body is not that of an effect on its essential cause, even if the body is an accidental cause of it. For, "when the matter of a body fit to be the instrument and kingdom of the soul originates, then separate causes originate the particular soul. In this manner does the particular soul originate from ('*an*) the separate causes" (Arabic, pp. 228, l. 20-229, l. 1).<sup>19</sup> But in what way is the body, or more exactly its matter, which alone temporally precedes the soul, an accidental cause for the soul's existence? As the separate causes<sup>20</sup> cannot give existence to a human soul without an individuating cause, one must apply a general principle: anything which comes into being after non-existence must be preceded by a matter in which there is a disposition to receive it or to be connected with it. Furthermore, if a particular soul were to originate without an instrument by means of which it acts and gets its perfection, its existence would be in vain. Since such is not the case, then, whenever a material disposition to connection (*nisba*) and a preparedness to be an instrument originates, a human soul necessarily originates from ('*an*) the separate causes.

Even, says Avicenna, if the origination of one thing is necessary at the origination ('*inda*; Latin *creato uno*) of another, the annihilation of the former does not necessarily entail the simultaneous annihilation of the latter. Such annihilation would follow only if the essence of the latter would originate by means of, or in (*bi*, Latin *propter*; *fī*, Latin *in*), the essence of the former. This does not apply to the existence of the soul since what gives it existence is other than a disposition to receive existence. What gives existence to the soul is neither a body nor a power in a body but

<sup>19</sup> The Latin text is a bit muddled. See pp. 115-16.

<sup>20</sup> Whether the human soul originates from one immaterial cause, i.e., the Agent Intellect, or from several as the plural here implies is not clear. See Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, & Averroes, on Intellect. Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, & Theories of Human Intellect* (New York-Oxford, 1992), pp. 80-1.

rather a being subsistent without matter or dimensions. Therefore, the soul owes its existence to ('*an*) an immaterial being and to the body only owes the instant appropriate for its existence, or more exactly, though Avicenna does not put it that way, for its temporal origination. Hence, there is no dependence of the soul on the body such that the body has a causal, i.e., essential, priority over the soul. The matter fit to be an appropriate body, and, therefore, a source of individuation, is a necessary and even a sufficient cause for the soul's origination but a merely accidental one as it precedes in time the origination of both body and soul.

Having reviewed each kind of "dependence" of the soul on the body, be it essential or accidental, Avicenna triumphantly concludes that there is no essential ontological dependence of the human soul on the body and, that, therefore, the body's death does not entail that of the human soul. The soul ontologically depends on other principles which suffer neither alteration nor corruption and, it is implied, therefore, will not cause its corruption (Arabic, p. 230, last line-231, l. 2; Latin, 120, 31-34).

Avicenna, then, goes on to show that the soul has no inner principle of corruption and, hence, does not admit corruption at all and so is truly immortal, though originated in time.

#### IV. THE ACCIDENTAL CAUSAL CONNECTION BETWEEN BODY AND SOUL AND THE THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON CAUSATION

For Avicenna causation is one of the most important philosophical issues because cause and effect are one of the essential attributes of being qua being (*Metaphysics*, VI, 1, Arabic p. 207, ll. 5-6; Latin, p. 291, 6-8).<sup>21</sup> He, therefore, begins his natural philosophy in the *Shifā'* with a treatise on natural causes and principles (*Physics*, Bk I, treatise I).<sup>22</sup> Therein he states several

<sup>21</sup> Arabic, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt (La Métaphysique)*, ed. by G. C. Anawati and Sa'id Zayed, 2 vol. (Cairo, 1960); Medieval Latin translation: *Avicenna Latinus. Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, ed. Simone Van Riet (Louvain-Leiden), Bk. I-IV, 1977; Bk. V-X, 1980; Indexes, 1983; and French translation: Avicenne, *La métaphysique du Shifā'*, transl. by Georges C. Anawati (Paris), Bk. I-V, 1978; Bk. VI-X, 1985.

<sup>22</sup> *Al-Shifā'* (*al-Ṭabī'iyyāt*), 1: *al-Samā' al-ṭabī'ī*, ed. by Said Zayed (Cairo, 1983); Medieval Latin translation: *Avicenna Latinus. Liber primus naturalium, Tractatus primus: De causis et principiis naturalium*, ed. by Simone Van Riet (Louvain-La-Neuve-Leiden, 1992).

times that what he is now claiming will be proven in metaphysics.<sup>23</sup> Are Avicenna's views on the accidental causal connection between body and human soul compatible with his reflections on causation in the *Metaphysics*? It seems to be the case.

In *De anima* V, 3 Avicenna focuses on the connection between body and soul in respect to the soul's temporal origination (*ḥudūth*), while in V, 4 he does so regarding the soul's existence or being (*wujūd*). *Metaphysics*, VI, 1 carefully distinguishes origination from existence because one should avoid confusing natural causation, which deals only with causes of motion, with ontological causation, which concerns causes of existence. So-called natural agents are not really true causes of existence but simply accidental ones. Avicenna concludes his chapter by the following statements:

It is clear that an effect requires something which gives existence to it because of existence itself essentially. But its origination and its like are things happening to it accidentally. The effect requires something to give it continuous existence as long as it continues existing.<sup>24</sup>

In this chapter Avicenna contends that a necessary and even sufficient condition for the origination of something is only an accidental cause for its origination and, therefore, not an essential one for its continuous existence. This fits well with Avicenna's views on the matter of the body in relation to the human soul's origination and existence. One may wonder also whether we can include individuation under the indefinite "like" of origination in the previous quotation. In this chapter too as well as the following, Avicenna states that the true efficient ontological cause for the human soul is one or several immaterial beings.

The following chapter in the *Metaphysics* argues at great length that every cause – be it efficient, material, or formal – is simultaneous with (*ma'a*) its effect. In *De anima*, V, 4 Avicenna shows that though the human soul and its body originate simultaneously (*ma'a*), they do not corrupt simultaneously because

<sup>23</sup> See Arabic, p. 16, 17-18, Latin p. 25, 24-26; Arabic, p. 18, 1-2, Latin, p. 27, 76-77; Arabic, p. 30, 6, Latin, p. 51, 33-34.

<sup>24</sup> Arabic, p. 263, 16-18; Latin, p. 300, 87-91. There is an English translation of the first two chapters of *Metaphysics*, Bk VI, by Arthur Hyman in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, 1983), pp. 247-55.

the body is not an essential ontological cause for the human soul and this is why he eliminates each of the four types of essential causal relations. Hence, the body's corruption simply affects an accidental relation in the soul but not its very being. It is interesting that in the previous chapter Avicenna claims that individuation of the human soul is achieved by a connection with the body which is stronger than a mere accidental relation but remains indeterminate.

In *De anima*, V, 4 in order to show that there is no essential relation of posteriority between the soul and its body, Avicenna uses a claim on essential priority – if the soul were posterior to the body, then the body would be prior to it – he establishes much more clearly in *Metaphysics*, IV, 1.<sup>25</sup> The relation of essential causal priority is not reversible, i.e., though cause and effect would corrupt simultaneously the corruption of the effect is not the cause of that of the cause but merely its sign. In the same way, though body and soul originate simultaneously since the body has its own inner cause of corruption but is not an essential cause of the soul, its corruption is neither cause of that of the soul – which will be shown to be incorruptible – nor even its sign.

*Metaphysics*, VI, 2 also argues that true causes do not temporally precede the effect in such a way that they cease to exist when the effect originates, for this would be possible only in the case of accidental and non-proximate causes. The matter of the body does not cease to exist at the origination of the soul but being only an accidental cause of it and its continuous existence being necessary only up to the soul's attainment of its first perfection, it can later on cease to exist without causing the simultaneous annihilation of its soul. Besides, as the soul is not a substantial form of the body it does not need it for its very existence.

Clearly Avicenna's treatment of the connection between body and human soul is consistent with its treatment of causation in the *Metaphysics* but it does not seem to be a complete treatment and, therefore, as Avicenna himself acknowledges in the *De anima*, remains obscure. Individuation seems essential for the existence of the human soul and is caused by its connection to a particular body which locates it in space and time. In V, 4

<sup>25</sup> There is an English translation of that chapter in Marmura, "Avicenna on causal priority," pp. 73-83.

Avicenna claims that the body simply contributes the appropriate moment for the temporal origination of the soul. First, several souls may be originated at one and the same moment and, therefore, this is not a sufficient condition for individuation. To be sure, Avicenna tries to claim that the “spatial” connection to the body also contributes to individuation as well as some properly rational activities which will continue after the death of the body, but the true cause of the continuity of individuation remains hidden, though it should be simultaneous with it. Second, temporal origination is utterly different from continuous existence while individuation must be continuous and, therefore, cannot be considered a “like” of origination. Third, to ground this continuity Avicenna argues that the “connection” to the body cannot be construed as simply a mere accidental relation. This is to say what it is not but there is no clear explanation of what it positively is. One question seems to remain unanswered: what is the true cause of the continuity of individuation? It cannot be the body since the separated soul is no longer embodied – this is why Averroes rejects Avicenna’s contention about personal immortality – and memory of its past relation with the body does not seem possible since it supposes a physical organ located in a specific part of the no longer existing brain and intellectual memory is simply reception of a new emanation of some intelligible. Though Avicenna affirms the continuation of this individuation on psychological ground, as we saw in section II, he does not seem to provide an ontological account for it. Even if we would grant to Avicenna that in its embodied state the human soul is individuated by matter and in its disembodied state by some other principle, can we still even speak of continuous individuation, for each true cause must be simultaneous with its effect and, in this case, one and the same effect, individuation of one and the same human soul, would arise from two different and successive causes?