

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### BODIES, SOULS AND RESURRECTION IN AVICENNA'S *AR-RISĀLA AL-ADḤAWĪYA FĪ AMR AL-MA'ĀD*

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Although Avicenna devotes much of his treatise *ar-Risāla al-Adḥawīya fī amr al-ma'ād*<sup>1</sup> to a refutation of various doctrines on the fate of the soul, his ultimate intention is to offer a solution to the problems of personal identity and individual immortality. These problems are evident throughout the treatise, particularly in the refutation of the Mu'tazilī position on the "return" (*ma'ād*), for Avicenna uses an argument from personal identity to refute the doctrine that resurrection belongs to bodies only. Avicenna's own argument in favor of a philosophical "return" contains two demonstrations; first, that the identity of man resides in his soul, and second, that the soul is a separate, immaterial and, hence, immortal substance. The intention of this paper is to offer an exegesis of Avicenna's refutation of the opponents of the *Adḥawīya*, including the *mutakallimūn* and those who support metempsychosis (*ahl at-tanāsuh*).

In the *Adḥawīya*, Avicenna refutes three principal doctrines on the subject of the fate of the soul.<sup>2</sup> The first two doctrines belong to the *kalām* schools in Islam, and the third belongs to those who support metempsychosis (*tanāsuh*). Although Avicenna does not refer to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Avicenna, Epistola sull' vita futura, al-Risāla al-Adḥawīya fī l-ma'ād, I: Testo arabo, traduzione, introduzione e note*, ed. Francesca Lucchetta (Padova: Antenore, 1969) [hereafter *Adḥawīya*]. For a general description of the issues involved in Avicenna's discussion, along with useful notes, see J.R. Michot, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenna* (Louvain: Aedibus Peeters, 1986), 14ff.

<sup>2</sup> The return (*ma'ād*) is defined in the first chapter of the treatise: "... its real meaning is the place or situation which a thing was in, then separates from, then returns to; then, [it means] transportation to the first state or place, or to the place which is a man's becoming after death" (*Adḥawīya*, 17). Avicenna states his own position on the subject in the clearest possible terms: "If it is false that the return belongs to the body only, and if it is false that it belongs to the body and soul together, and if it is false that it is for the soul by way of metempsychosis, then the return belongs to the soul alone. . . ." (*Adḥawīya*, 139).

*mutakallimūn* by name (he refers to them as *ahl al-ḡadal min al-ʿarab*), al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* indicates that the doctrines of bodily resurrection and the joint resurrection of the body and soul belong to the *kalām*. Avicenna's objections to the theological doctrines of resurrection are rooted in a deeper dispute over personal identity and the nature of the self. The brunt of Avicenna's argument is that the *kalām* doctrines are unable to account for the continuity of personal identity through time. In his refutation of metempsychosis, the third and final doctrine he refutes, Avicenna does not specify his opponents. Since Greek and Islamic doctrines of metempsychosis were well known by this time, Avicenna could have had any number of thinkers in mind when he attacked this doctrine.<sup>3</sup> In his refutation of metempsychosis, Avicenna disregards the principal objection of those who support metempsychosis: if human souls are separate substances, and do not transmigrate with the corruption of the body, then there would be an actual infinity of coexisting separate souls, but this is impossible since the actual infinite is impossible.<sup>4</sup> Instead, he refutes a claim inherent in their doctrine, namely that the soul pre-exists the body.

### *The Refutation of the Kalām Positions*

Avicenna's arguments against his opponents begin in the third chapter of the *Aḍḥawīya*. The first doctrine Avicenna refutes belongs to a group of theologians who hold that life is an accident created in the body. Avicenna presents this doctrine as follows:

Those who uphold that resurrection is for the body only are a group of dialecticians who believe that the body alone is animal and human through a life and a humanity created in it. These [latter] are two accidents, death being their non-existence in them or that [i.e., an accident] which is contrary to them. In the second life there is cre-

<sup>3</sup> Avicenna's predecessor Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī (d. 935) is a possible candidate; see Th.-A. Druart, "Al-Rāzī's Conception of the Soul: Psychological Background to his Ethics," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996), 245–263, and her recent article on Avicenna, "The Human Soul's Individuation and its Survival after the Body's Death: Avicenna on the Causal Relation between Body and Soul," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10.2 (2000), 259–273.

<sup>4</sup> On this issue, see M.E. Marmura, "Avicenna and the Problem of the Infinite Number of Souls," *Mediaeval Studies* 22 (1960), 232–239.

ated in that body life and humanity after it had decayed and disintegrated, and that very same human returns to life.<sup>5</sup>

The above doctrine, which Avicenna attributes to a “group of dialecticians,” can be traced to Mu‘tazilī circles. Some of the Basrian Mu‘tazila argued that “life” and “humanity” are accidents of the body. When a body has a certain structure (e.g., human or animal), it becomes possible for the accident “life” to inhere in every one of its component atoms,<sup>6</sup> which in turn lays the foundation for the inherence of the accidents of the autonomous power of action, will, and knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The accident “life” is created directly by God. If God were to refrain from creating the accident “life,” the body to which that accident attaches would cease to exist. This is precisely what occurs at resurrection; God returns the annihilated body to existence and re-creates the accident “life” that had been annihilated.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of the Basrian Mu‘tazila were atomists; they held that the soul was not immortal, and that it survived only in unity with the body.<sup>9</sup> They differed, however, over whether death (the quality of being inanimate or non-living) was the non-existence of life or the existence of its opposite in the body (i.e., the accident “death”). Avicenna was well aware of this dispute and alludes to it in his presentation of their doctrine of resurrection.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the

<sup>5</sup> *Adḥawīya*, 21–3; tr. M.E. Marmura, “Avicenna and the Kalām,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (1992), 197.

<sup>6</sup> The accident “life” inheres either in all the atoms which constitute the body, or in the specific structure these atoms constitute as a whole. Man is alive, knowing, has autonomous power, and exists; these attributes are a result of accidents that inhere in the atoms that constitute him. The case is otherwise with God; God has the essential attributes (predicates true at all times) of being Eternal (*qadīm*), Alive (*ḥayy*), Knowing (*‘ālim*), having the Power of autonomous action (*qādīr*), and Existent (*mawǧūd*). For discussions on this subject, see A. Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu‘tazilī Cosmology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 18; R.M. Frank, *Beings and their Attributes: The Teaching of the Basrian School of the Mu‘tazila in the Classical Period* (Albany, New York: SUNY, 1978), 42ff.

<sup>7</sup> There is some dispute over whether the accident “life” inheres in one atom or many atoms. Some of the Basrian Mu‘tazila argued that each atom needed to have the accident “life” inhere in it so that the whole could be alive, while others argued that the accident “life” could inhere in a single atom, and that the presence of the accident in a single atom could give life to the body.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Gazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers/Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, tr. M.E. Marmura, Islamic Translation Series/al-Ḥikma (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 219.

<sup>9</sup> J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990–1997), 4:514ff.

<sup>10</sup> See *Adḥawīya*, 23, where Avicenna states that the “dialecticians” thought that death was either the non-existence of the accident “life” or the presence of its

Mu‘tazila did not agree on the relation of this accident to the body, and disagreed about the relation of *nafs*, *rūḥ*, and *ḥayāt* to each other. Although Avicenna does not tell us anything about the nature of the accident “life,” some *kalām* fragments suggest that at least some of the Mu‘tazila held that life was an entitative accident. By this they meant an attribute that is simply possible (*ḡā’iza*), since the being has such an attribute with the simultaneous possibility of its not being so qualified, or of its being qualified by a contrary or different attribute under the same conditions. The accident “life” has an effect upon the substrate of the composite; it is by virtue of the accident “life” in each atom of the living that the whole becomes ontologically a single being, and life’s determinant effect on its substrate is that it renders it living, sentient, and capable of serving as the substrate of certain other accidents.<sup>11</sup>

But how is life (*ḥayāt*) related to the body and how does it differ from spirit (*rūḥ*)?<sup>12</sup> Unlike Avicenna, who insisted that the soul originates as a separate substance and survives the corruption of the body, the Mu‘tazila insisted that the soul could exist only with the body. Though the Mu‘tazila disagreed over whether life and spirit were identical, a number of them agreed that life was an accident by virtue of which man becomes alive, and thus also sentient, willing, knowing, etc. It was undoubtedly this doctrine that Avicenna had in mind when he criticized the schools of *kalām* on the subject of resurrection.<sup>13</sup> This doctrine was in circulation in Mu‘tazilī circles in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, and is found in a number of *kalām* sources. According to ‘Abd al-Ġabbār’s *Muḡnī*, Abū l-Hudayl (d. 227/841–2) regarded life as something distinct from the body, though he (Abū l-Hudayl) seems to be uncertain whether

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contrary (viz. death). Avicenna probably had in mind Abū ‘Alī al-Ġubbā’ī (d. 303/915), who held that death was the contrary of life, and Abū Hāšim al-Ġubbā’ī (d. 321/933), who held that death was not the contrary of life, which has no contrary. ‘Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 415/1025) should be ruled out as a candidate, since he held that life was not an accident; to be non-living was simply the absence of life and of the unity of being that life entailed; Frank, *Beings*, 50, n. 23; but cf. Abū Rāšid an-Nisābūrī (d. mid-5th/11th century?), who, in speaking for the Basrian theologians, states that the contrary of the accident “life” is not death, and that death is not an accident; see Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 49, n. 97.

<sup>11</sup> Frank, *Beings*, 107–8.

<sup>12</sup> On this subject, see M. Fakhry, “The Mu‘tazilite View of Man,” in *Recherches d’Islamologie: Recueil d’articles offert à George C. Anawati et Louis Gardet par leurs collègues et amis* (Louvain: L’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1977), 107–121.

<sup>13</sup> *Aḥḥawīya*, 23.

life should be classified as an accident or a body.<sup>14</sup> But al-Aš'arī (d. 324/935) makes it clear that Abū l-Hudayl regarded *nafs*, *rūh*, and *hayāt* as different things, and that life (*hayāt*) was an accident (*'arad*).<sup>15</sup> Abū 'Alī al-Ġubbā'ī (d. 303/915) held that spirit (*rūh*) is the body, and that it is other than life, which is an accident.<sup>16</sup> Al-Aš'arī's own view seems to have been that life is an accident (*'arad*), and that it is created (*muḥdata*). He contrasts this with God's attribute (*ṣifa*) "life," through which God does not cease to be living, which is eternal life and not an accident, as it subsists by virtue of itself and is not created.<sup>17</sup> He distinguished spirit from life; spirit in itself is inanimate or non-living, but is essential to the maintenance and continuance of life in the body.<sup>18</sup> Ibn Fūrak makes it clear that al-Aš'arī claimed that spirit (*rūh*) is a subtle body (*ḡism laṭīf*) circulated in the cavities of the organs of the body. But man is alive by virtue of the accident "life," not through the spirit, since "life" is derived from "living," whereas "spirit" is derived from "spiritual."<sup>19</sup> The subsistence of the body depends on spirit, just as its subsistence depends on nourishment, food, and drink. The condition of the existence of the accident "life" is the existence of spirit and nourishment;<sup>20</sup> the maintenance and continuance of the accident "life" thus depend on spirit, which was commonly understood as a corporeal element or organ distinct from life.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup> This is Abū l-Hudayl's view, according to 'Abd al-Ġabbār's *al-Muġnī fī abwāb at-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm an-Naġġār and Muḥammad 'Alī an-Naġġār (Cairo: al-Mu'assasa al-Miṣriya al-'Āmma, 1965), 11:310. On this issue, see Frank, *Beings*, 42f.

<sup>15</sup> Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Aš'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn wa-iḥtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Second Edition (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1963), 337. According to Aš'arī, Ġa'far ibn Ḥarb (d. 236/850) also held that life was other than the spirit (*rūh*), and that life was an accident (*'arad*), see *ibid.*, 334. Cf. Ibrāhīm ibn Sayyār an-Nazzām (d. between 220–230/835–845), who claimed that spirit (*rūh*) is the soul (*nafs*), which is identical with the body; the spirit is alive by virtue of itself and not by the accident "life"; *ibid.*, 333–34 and 'Abd al-Ġabbār, *Muġnī*, 11:310.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Aš'arī, *Maqālāt*, 334.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Fūrak, *Muġarrad Maqālāt al-Aš'arī*, ed. D. Gimaret (Beirut: Dār al-Mašriq, 1987), 257.

<sup>18</sup> Other Mu'tazila, including an-Nazzām, held that spirit (*rūh*) was identical with life (*hayāt*), and that it exists in the body by way of interpenetration; see 'Abd al-Ġabbār, *Muġnī*, 11:310. Aš'arī makes it clear that an-Nazzām equated the spirit (*rūh*) with the body, and that it is the soul; spirit is alive by virtue of itself and not through the accident "life"; *Maqālāt*, 333–34.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Fūrak, *Muġarrad Maqālāt*, 257.

<sup>20</sup> It is for this reason that God can be qualified by life, but not by spirit; *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Frank, *Beings*, 49, n. 14.

Avicenna uses an argument from personal identity to refute the doctrine that resurrection belongs to bodies only. He directs his attack against the Mu‘tazilī theologians who identified man with the body.<sup>22</sup> The dispute over personal identity is thus rooted in a deeper disagreement over the nature of the self. While a majority of the *mutakallimūn* adhered to a materialistic notion of the self, and claimed that there was no self-subsisting soul that managed the body,<sup>23</sup> Avicenna argued consistently throughout his writings that the self is an immaterial substance. Many of the Mu‘tazila thought that the self was either a subtle material substance that is diffused throughout the body, or an individual material atom to which the transient accident “life” attaches. Avicenna’s argument is that if the self were the body, then resurrection of the body alone would at best produce a replica of the original man. For, since the parts of the body are continually being replaced by one another, the body cannot account for the identity of the same person through time. Avicenna completes this argument against the *kalām* by demonstrating that man is man neither through the body nor through an accident which inheres in the body. The individual, he claims, is what he is by virtue of his soul, and the identity of man resides in his substantial form that exists in his matter. The theologians, Avicenna argues, claim that man is man through the body, and go so far as to deny that the soul and spirit have existence at all; they maintain that bodies become alive by virtue of a “life” created in them, so that life is not the existence of the soul for the body, but is one of the accidents created in bodies.<sup>24</sup>

Avicenna refutes the doctrine that resurrection belongs to bodies only by objecting to the doctrine that the self is a body. He presents this argument as follows:

The human is not human by reason of his matter, but through the form that exists in his matter. Human acts proceed from him, only

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<sup>22</sup> Avicenna argues that even if one were to accept that life were an accident (which, according to Avicenna, it is not), resurrection would be impossible. This argument is presented by al-Gazālī in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* as follows. Even if one were to accept the claim that life is an accident, a “return” would be impossible. For if the accident “life” must pass from existence to non-existence, then to existence, its continuity would be interrupted, and its identity through time requires the endurance of its property “existence” through time; al-Gazālī, *Incoherence*, 219f.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Gazālī, *Incoherence*, 219.

<sup>24</sup> *Aḥḥawīya*, 41–3.

because of the existence of his form in his matter. If his form ceases to exist in his matter and his matter returns to earth or to some other elements, then that human in himself ceases to exist. If then in that same matter a new human form is created, what comes into existence as a result is another human, not that [former] human. For that which exists of the first human is his matter, not form. Moreover, he is what he is, praised or blamed, deserving of reward and punishment, not by reason of his matter, but by reason of his form, and by reason of his being a human, not earth.<sup>25</sup>

Man is not identical with his matter, but with his substantial form that exists in his matter. If man were identical with his matter, then the new human who is rewarded or punished would not be the one who did good or evil, but another. As a result, praise and blame would be ascribed to the wrong person.

The above argument is related to a more rigorous one in which Avicenna insists that an individual is what he is by virtue of his soul. This argument appears in *Risāla fī n-Nafs*,<sup>26</sup> and demonstrates the immateriality of the self by way of an argument from personal identity. The point of the argument is that because the parts of the body are continually being replaced, while the soul knows itself, or the permanence of itself, as continually existing throughout its existence, an individual is what he is by virtue of his soul. Thus, man remains the same man through time by virtue of his soul.<sup>27</sup> Avicenna illustrates this point again in the fourth chapter of the *Aḏḥawīya*; he defines the soul as that by virtue of which the subject is called “he” and refers to himself as “I.” In the same chapter, he defines the soul as the thing through which man knows that he is he.<sup>28</sup>

The remainder of Avicenna’s argument against the *kalām* doctrine of bodily resurrection is presented by al-Ġazālī in his *Tahāfut*.<sup>29</sup> Either life and the body both cease to exist—and God then returns the annihilated body to existence and returns the accident “life,” which

<sup>25</sup> *Aḏḥawīya*, 63–54; tr. M.E. Marmura, “Avicenna and the Kalām,” 198.

<sup>26</sup> *Aḥwāl an-nafs: Risāla fī n-Nafs wa-baqā’ihā wa-mā’ādhā*, ed. A.F. al-Ahwānī (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1952).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 183–84; M.E. Marmura, “Ghazzālī and the Avicennan Proof from Personal Identity for an Immaterial Self,” in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture (Essays in Honor of A. Hyman)*, ed. R. Link-Salinger (Washington: The Catholic University Press, 1988), 197.

<sup>28</sup> *Aḏḥawīya*, 145. In his *Risāla fī n-Nafs*, 183, Avicenna defines the soul as that which each person refers to by the term “I.”

<sup>29</sup> Al-Ġazālī, *Incoherence*, 219f.

had been annihilated—or the matter of the body survives as earth and this earth is gathered and constructed in the form of a human, and life is then created in it anew. The first scenario does not fulfill the conditions of a “return,” since a “return” in the real sense involves the continuity of one thing as well as the emergence of another. But in this case, the return cannot be of the same man, since if the body passes out of existence, then there is a break in the continuity of the subject and hence an absence of the continuity of personal identity through time. Since it is impossible for something to pass from existence to non-existence, then back to existence (as this would entail a break in continuity and hence in identity), even if life is an accident (which according to Avicenna it is not), the return, then, cannot be of the same man, for there will still remain an absence of continuity, in this case that of the accident “life.” Finally, if the body survives as earth, and is then reconstructed, then the resurrection could only involve the production of something similar to the original man. For, if the body does not cease to exist and life is returned to it, there is still no continuity of personal identity, for the parts of man are continually being replaced by food. Since man is man not by virtue of his matter but by virtue of his soul, and life or spirit ceases to exist but is then re-attributed to man, the return would at best involve a replica of the original man.

Avicenna presents a number of objections to the doctrine that resurrection belongs to the body and soul together.<sup>30</sup> The main argument against which he directs his objection is that the body at resurrection would join an already separated soul; the resurrected man would be the identical man since the soul would be that same soul. Here he uses a quantitative argument to demonstrate the impossibility that the body is resurrected to join an already separated soul. He argues that matter existing in the world is not sufficient to repro-

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<sup>30</sup> First, the existing matter in the world is insufficient to produce enough bodies for a resurrection. For Avicenna, there are an infinite number of souls and a finite amount of matter existing in the world. Because the corporeal infinite is impossible, the existing matter is insufficient to accompany the infinite number of souls. Second, the divine will, as immutable and unchanging, precludes the possibility of a resurrection. Third, absolute felicity opposes the existence of the soul in the body; true pleasures belong to the activity of the soul itself, and do not concern the body. Fourth, the matters mentioned about resurrection in the revealed law, if taken in their literal sense, would have unpleasant and impossible consequences; see *Adḥawīya*, 69–71.



duce enough bodies for a resurrection. If the world is pre-eternal (as Avicenna maintains), and humans have always existed in the past, and if souls after separation from their bodies retain their individuality, then the number of such souls is infinite. The amount of matter in the sublunar world is finite, however, and the matter available is not sufficient to accommodate all the souls. Hence, there can be no resurrection that involves the return of souls to bodies.<sup>31</sup>

Avicenna then blocks off the remaining escape route by arguing that it is impossible for the soul to return to any matter whatsoever. Here the *mutakallimūn* advance two possibilities: the human soul, an existent that survives the death of the body, could return to the original body when all the parts of that body have been collected, or it could return to some other body, whether that body is composed of the same parts as the original body or not. In both doctrines, the return would be of the same man, since man is man by virtue of his soul and not of his matter.

Avicenna's objection to the first doctrine is that such a resurrection, that is, one in which only those parts present at the time of death are recombined, would lead to the resurrection of people whose limbs had been amputated, or whose ears and noses were cut off, or whose limbs were defective, in exactly the same form as they had in the world.<sup>32</sup> If the supposition of return is confined to the recombination of the parts present at the time of death, resurrection would be an unpleasant and disgraceful event. Further, if it were true that all the parts which belonged to man during his lifetime were resurrected, then it would be necessary that the same part be resurrected as liver and heart and hand and leg at once, for some organic parts derive nourishment from the residuary nourishment of others.<sup>33</sup> Thus, if it is supposed that there are specific parts which had been the matter for all organs, then it is unclear to which organ these parts will return.

<sup>31</sup> Marmura, "Avicenna and the Problem," 232–39.

<sup>32</sup> *Aḏḥawīya*, 77–9; al-Gazālī, *Incoherence*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> *Aḏḥawīya*, *ibid.*; al-Gazālī, *ibid.*

*The Refutation of Metempsychosis*

The final argument Avicenna refutes belongs to those who adhere to some form of metempsychosis.<sup>34</sup> The supporters of metempsychosis hold that the number of (separate) souls is finite, and that these souls rotate over infinitely many bodies. Although Avicenna disagrees over the quantity of separate souls, he disregards this issue and bases his refutation on the claim that the soul cannot pre-exist the body. Avicenna begins his refutation of metempsychosis by presenting the argument of his opponents: those who affirm the transmigration of souls assert that souls are substances separate from matter, that they separate from bodies after death, and that material bodies are infinitely many.<sup>35</sup> The number of souls is either finite or infinite. But if the souls existing now (those separate from material bodies) are infinite, then an actual infinite would exist, and this is impossible. The number of separate souls is thus finite. Since the number of souls is finite and the number of bodies are infinite (since an infinite number has been produced in succession), the rotation of souls over bodies is necessary.<sup>36</sup>

The supporters of metempsychosis hold that the soul must pre-exist the body, and that once this is demonstrated, the rotation of separate souls over bodies is established. Their argument runs as follows. What comes into existence simultaneously with the body is a material form, and the material form is inseparable from the body. The soul, however, is separable, and since souls are separate substances, they do not perish; hence it must precede the body in existence. But there cannot be a new soul for each body, which would

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<sup>34</sup> By the time of Avicenna, a number of various views in favor of metempsychosis were prevalent. On the subject of metempsychosis, see al-Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, ed. E. Sachau, (London: K. Paul, 1914), 43–44 and 49–51. See also W. Madelung, “Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī and Metempsychosis,” *Acta Iranica* 16 (1990), 131–143; S. Schmidtke, “The Doctrine of the Transmigration of Soul According to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (killed 587/1191) and his Followers,” *Studia Iranica* 28 (1999), 237–254; P. Walker, “The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Islam,” in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. W. Hallaq and D. Little (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 219–38; and G. Monnot, “La transmigration et l’immortalité,” *MIDEO* 14 (1980), 149–66.

<sup>35</sup> The infinite number of bodies, since they follow each other in succession and do not form a coexisting magnitude, do not form an actual infinite. The problem of an actual infinity arises with the separate souls because they coexist.

<sup>36</sup> *Aḥḥawīya*, 99.

result in an infinite number of souls (and this is impossible); therefore, there must be a finite number of souls rotating over an infinite number of bodies, and this is metempsychosis.<sup>37</sup>

Avicenna agrees that souls are substances separate from matter, and that they separate from bodies after death. He also agrees that material bodies are infinitely many, since the bodies follow each other in succession. The supporters of metempsychosis are well aware of the problem of an infinite number of souls, for they use this claim to establish their argument for transmigration: if immortal souls were to coexist, they would form an actual infinite, but the actual infinite is impossible. Avicenna disregards the problem of the infinite number of souls, and instead refutes the claim that the soul precedes the body in existence. He argues that those who uphold metempsychosis make the unwarranted assumption that whatever comes into existence simultaneously with the body is necessarily a material form.

Avicenna demonstrates that it is impossible for the soul to exist before the body, and in doing so refutes the doctrine of metempsychosis, which uses this claim as a premise. Avicenna argues as follows. If the soul were to exist before the body, then there would be either a plurality of souls, or only one soul. But both of these are impossible, and therefore the soul must come into existence with the body. A plurality of souls is impossible, for in their prior existence these souls are immaterial, and since matter is the individuating principle, these souls cannot be many. Nor can souls in their prior existence be one, for if all souls were one, then the soul of Zayd and 'Amr would be one, and this is absurd.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the soul cannot exist before the body in any way whatsoever. Because the soul cannot exist before the body, but comes into existence with the coming into existence of the body, metempsychosis cannot hold true, for then two souls could inhabit one body—the soul which originates with the coming into being of the body, and the transmigrating soul.

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<sup>37</sup> *Adḥawīya*, *ibid.*: “Those who uphold metempsychosis support the validity of what they maintain with their doctrine that it is true [in the case of souls] that they are substances separate from matter, and that they separate from bodies after death, and that material bodies are infinite. But it must be that souls are either finite or infinite. If the souls existing now—those separate from material bodies—are infinite, then that which is infinite in actuality would exist, but this is impossible. And if they are finite—and their bodies are infinite—then transmigration is inevitable, as is their rotation over bodies.”

<sup>38</sup> *Adḥawīya*, 125–7.

However, because each person experiences himself to be one person, not two, it is impossible for two souls to inhabit one body.<sup>39</sup> Metempsychosis is thus impossible on two counts. It admits the possibility of more than one soul inhabiting a particular body, and refuses to concede that the rational soul comes into existence with the coming into existence of the body as a separate substance.

Avicenna's arguments against the *mutakallimūn* and *ahl at-tanāsul* are incisive. The arguments he advances, particularly those against the theologians, indicate that he was deeply dissatisfied with the theological positions on resurrection. His polemics against the two groups, however, are driven by an urge to explain resurrection in philosophical terms. Although much of the *Adḥawīya* is devoted to polemics, Avicenna's primary intention throughout the treatise is to establish that man's identity resides in his soul (and not the body or anything bodily), and that this soul is a separate, immaterial, and, hence, an immortal substance.

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<sup>39</sup> *Adḥawīya*, 133.

## AFTER AVICENNA

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