

THE SOUL OF, THE SOUL IN ITSELF, AND THE FLYING MAN EXPERIMENT

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Abstract. In Avicenna's *Nafs* there are two investigations that run in parallel from its very beginning: (a) the investigation of the soul as a *relational* entity, always considered in connection with the body, and (b) that of the human soul *in itself*. Both investigations aim at ascertaining the existence and the essence of the soul, *in relation to* the body, of which it is the soul, and *in itself* respectively. The aim of this contribution is to reconstruct the phases of these investigations, in order to single out the way in which they are mutually related to each other, and to detect what acts as an indicator of the transition from the first, more general investigation to the second, more specific one. In my reconstruction, this role is assigned to the *Flying Man* experiment. In order to corroborate this interpretation, passages from three other Avicennian works (*Ḥikma mašriqiyya* or *al-Mašriqiyyūn*, *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, and *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma'ād*) are taken into account, since they contain the three other attested formulations of the *Flying Man* experiment, and an argumentative move similar to the one detectable in the *Nafs*.

Résumé. Il y a, dans le *Nafs* d'Avicenne, deux enquêtes cheminant dès le début en parallèle : (a) celle sur l'âme comme entité *relationnelle*, toujours considérée dans sa connexion avec le corps, et (b) celle sur l'âme humaine *en elle-même*. Les deux enquêtes visent à établir l'existence et l'essence de l'âme, respectivement en relation au corps dont elle est l'âme et en soi-même. Le but de cette contribution est de reconstruire les étapes de ces enquêtes, afin de mettre en relief leur relation mutuelle, et d'identifier ce qui fait office d'indicateur permettant de localiser la transition de la première enquête, plus générale, à la seconde, plus spécifique. Selon la reconstitution ici présentée, ce rôle peut être attribué à l'expérience de l'*homme volant*. Afin de corroborer cette interprétation, on prendra en considération trois autres ouvrages d'Avicenne (*Ḥikma mašriqiyya* ou *al-Mašriqiyyūn*, *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt* et *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma'ād*), ceux-ci contenant les trois autres formulations attestées de l'*homme volant*, ainsi qu'un mouvement argumentatif similaire à celui que l'on peut reconstituer dans le *Nafs*.

“*Wa-hal al-nafs tafsuḍu am tabqā?*” (“Does the soul corrupt or endure?”, *Ġadal*, I, 9, 83.10)¹: in reworking Aristotle's *Topics*, I, 14 Avicenna provides this disjunctive proposition as his own example (together with other Aristotelian

¹ All quotations from and the translations of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Nafs* are based on *Avicenna's De Anima [Arabic Text], being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed. F. Rahman, London / New York / Toronto, Oxford U. Press, 1959, 1970. The quotations from Avicenna's

examples)² of a scientific question (*mas'ala*) or premise (*muqaddima*), with respect to which the truth of each side of the alternative is hard to establish on the dialectical level – either because there are persuasive arguments about both sides or because the issue is too vast –, but can be attained on the philosophical level. Therefore, in order to answer the aforementioned question and to establish the truth of one of the two sides of the alternative, we have to move from *Ġadal (Dialectics)*, which is the sixth section of the logic of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Šifā'* (*Book of the Cure / Healing, Sufficientia* in Latin, henceforth *Šifā'*), and is the domain of dialectics, to *Kitāb al-Nafs (Book of the Soul* in English, *Liber De Anima* in Latin, henceforth *Nafs*), which is the sixth section of the natural philosophy of the *Šifā'*, entirely devoted to the investigation of the soul.

In the *Šifā'* Avicenna closely follows the Aristotelian sources more than elsewhere (on this aspect he is amazingly clear in the preface to the entire work);³ however, different levels of adherence to his source are detectable: the logical part of his *summa* can be considered more similar to a sort of paraphrase of Aristotle's corresponding writings, since Avicenna largely quotes from them; by contrast, in natural philosophy and metaphysics, though depending on the Aristotelian sources (Aristotle and the Late Ancient commentators), Avicenna approaches them more freely: he rephrases them and, at the same time, distances himself from them.⁴ The *Nafs* does not escape this approach: there, on

Nafs are usually followed by the reference to the page and line number of the corresponding passage in the edition of the Latin translation in square brackets (see Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus IV–V*, édition critique de la traduction latine médiévale par S. Van Riet, introduction sur la doctrine psychologique d'Avicenne par G. Verbeke, Louvain / Leiden, 1968; Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus I–II–III*, édition critique de la traduction latine médiévale par S. Van Riet, introduction sur la doctrine psychologique d'Avicenne par G. Verbeke, Louvain / Leiden, 1972). The same quotation scheme is followed in the case of other sections of the *Šifā'* whose Latin translation is edited in the Avicenna Latinus series. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Arabic are mine.

² I thank Amos Bertolacci for bringing this passage to my attention. Galen seems to have been among the first to list the nature of the soul among the examples of undecidable issues. See P. Koetschet, "Galien, al-Rāzī, et l'éternité du monde : Les fragments du traité *Sur la démonstration*, IV, dans les *Doutes sur Galien*", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 25, 2015, pp. 167–198, in part. 172, n. 11.

³ Cf. *Madḥal*, I, 1, pp. 9–10. For the English translation of this introduction, see D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works. Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition, Including an Inventory of Avicenna's Authentic Works*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2014, pp. 41–46.

⁴ The fact that in the natural philosophy part of the *Šifā'* Avicenna noticeably diverges from Aristotle, is pointed out by Avicenna himself (*Madḥal*, I, 1, 11.3–4), and by his biographer al-Ġūzġānī, who explains it by saying that it is the result of the unavailability of the Aristotelian physical works while Avicenna was composing that part of the *Šifā'* and, consequently, of his reliance on memory (*The Life of Ibn Sina. A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, W.

the one hand and in the Aristotelian fashion, Avicenna investigates the soul insofar as it is responsible for the activities observable in bodies, that is, the soul *qua* principle of plant⁵ and animal life; whereas, on the other hand, he attempts to answer the question raised in *Ġadal*, which transcends the boundaries of Aristotle's psychology but, at the same time, seems to be conceived as urgent as the investigation of the soul *qua* principle of plant and animal life. As becomes clear to the reader of the *Nafs*, this question concerns the possibility that there might be something more to investigate than the mere phenomenal datum, that is, the soul's being the principle of activities in something else, i. e. the body. However, this question does not concern every sublunary soul but, rather, the human soul, the only instance of soul with respect to which it seems not senseless to investigate what it is in itself, simply because in this case there seems to be an *in itself* aspect, which survives after the severance of its relation to the body.⁶

E. Gohlman, ed., State University of New York Press, Albany – New York 1974, 57.6–59.8). For the same explanation, see also Ġūzġānī's introduction to the *Šifā'*: *Madhal*, 2.16–3.2. For a thorough analysis of al-Ġūzġānī's Introduction and Avicenna's Prologue to the *Šifā'*, see Amos Bertolacci, Silvia Di Vincenzo, "On Avicenna's Prologue and Ġūzġānī's Introduction to the *Kitāb al-Šifā'* (Book of the Cure / of the Healing)", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 29, 2018, forthcoming. As an example of this attitude in the *Nafs*, see *Nafs*, I, 1, 8.8–9.18 where, unlike some Peripatetics, Avicenna argues against the equation of perfection with substance. More on this passage *infra*.

⁵ Although A. Tawara has recently argued that in the *Kitāb al-Nabāt* (*Book of Plants*), i. e. the botany of the *Šifā'*, Avicenna denies that plants have life (see A. Tawara, "Avicenna's denial of life in plants", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 24, 2014, pp. 127–138), in my forthcoming article "Is Nutrition a Sufficient Condition for Life? Avicenna's Position between Natural Philosophy and Medicine", in R. Lo Presti, G. Korobili eds., *Nutrition and Nutritive Soul in Aristotle and Aristotelianism*, De Gruyter – Topics in Ancient Philosophy, I show that precisely in *Nabāt*, 1 Avicenna assigns to plants the most elementary form of life.

⁶ The twofold consideration of the soul, namely in relation to the body and in itself, emerges for example in *Nafs*, I, 1, 10.15–11.4 [26.24–27.36]. On this passage see p. 194 below. This idea might have come to Avicenna from Philoponus' exegesis of Aristotle's *De anima*. See Philoponus, *In Aristotelis de anima*, 246.27–247.7 (Hayduck ed.): "And besides, the intellect, insofar as it is actuality of the body (καθὸ ἐντελέχειά ἐστι τοῦ σώματος), is to that extent inseparable (ἀχώριστός). But it is actuality of the body neither in substance (οὔτε τῆ οὐσίᾳ) nor in all its activities (οὔτε πάσαις ἐαυτοῦ ταῖς ἐνεργείαις), but in the ones that it has from the relation to the body (ἐκ τῆς σχέσεως τῆς πρὸς τὸ σῶμα), among which especially the practical ones (αἱ πρακτικά). These activities are inseparable (ἀχώριστοί) from the body. And just as the steersman (ὁ κυβερνήτης), who is the actuality of the ship, insofar as he is steersman, is inseparable from the ship (ἀχώριστός), but since he is not only steersman, but also a man (ἐπειδὴ δὲ οὐ μόνον κυβερνήτης ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄνθρωπος), as a man not being actuality of the ship, he is in this way also separable (χωριστός), so also our soul (οὔτω καὶ ἡ ἡμετέρα ψυχῆ), as a soul being actuality of the body in this way would not be without a body, but since it has some activities which are also separable from the body (ἔχει τινὰς καὶ χωριστὰς σώματος ἐνεργείας), I mean those related to the intelligibles (τὰς περὶ τῶν νοητῶν φημι), which the body not only does not help, but actually hinders, it is quite clear

Thus, in the *Nafs* there are two investigations that run in parallel from the very beginning of the work: (a) the investigation of the soul as a *relational* entity, always considered in connection with the body, which leads also to the investigation of this entity, essential to explain the body-soul relationship, and (b) that of the human soul *in itself*, which firstly though cursorily emerges in I, 1 with the thought experiment of the *Flying Man*, and more explicitly only in *Nafs*, V, 2 and V, 4, where Avicenna demonstrates that the human soul does not subsist as something impressed in a corporeal matter neither as a form nor as a faculty,⁷ and answers the question as whether the human soul corrupts (*fasada*) together with the corruption of the body, or endures (*baqiya*).⁸ Both investigations aim to ascertain the existence and the essence of the soul, *in relation to* the body, of which it is the soul, and *in itself* respectively.

The aim of this contribution is to reconstruct the phases of both these investigations, in order to single out the way in which they are mutually related to each other, and to detect what acts as indicator of the transition from the first, more general investigation to the second, more specific one. In my reconstruction, this role is assigned to the *Flying Man* argument. In order to corroborate this interpretation, passages from three other Avicennian works, namely *Hikma mašriqiyya* or *al-Mašriqiyyūn* (*Eastern Philosophy* or *The Easterners*), *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt* (*Book of Pointers and Reminders*), and *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma'ād* (*Epistle on Return*),⁹ will be taken into account since they contain the

that it will also have the substance separable (πρόδηλον ὅτι καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἔξει χωριστήν), and it then is and is called 'intellect' (νοῦς τότε καὶ οὐσα καὶ λεγομένη), and no longer soul except in potentiality (οὐκέτι μέντοι ψυχὴ εἰ μὴ δυνάμει), just as, when it is in a body, it is also intellect in potentiality, as he also says" (The English translation is the one made by W. Charlton, though slightly modified). On the Philoponian influence on Avicenna, in particular with respect to the doctrine of the immateriality of the intellect, see D. Gutas, "Philoponos and Avicenna on the Separability of the Intellect", *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 31, 1986, pp. 121–129; and id., "Avicenna's Marginal Glosses on *De Anima* and the Greek Commentatorial Tradition", *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, vol. 2, 2004, pp. 77–88.

⁷ *Nafs*, V, 2 is entitled "[Chapter] on establishing that the rational soul does not subsist as something impressed in a corporeal matter".

⁸ *Nafs*, V, 4 is entitled "[Chapter] concerning the fact that human souls neither corrupt (*lā tafṣudu*), nor transmigrate".

⁹ The *Hikma mašriqiyya*, also known as *al-Mašriqiyyūn* (*The Easterners*), seems to have been written around 418–420 / 1027–1030. More on this work in Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 119–144, and in id., « Avicenna's Eastern ("Oriental") Philosophy. Nature, Contents, Transmission », *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 10, 2000, pp. 159–80. The *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt* is Avicenna's last philosophical summa, which, according to D. Gutas, he composed sometime between 421/1030–1 and 425/1033–4. For general information about this work, see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 155–59. The *Risāla al-Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma'ād* is said to have been composed in Rayy, before the death of

three other attested formulations of the *Flying Man* argument, and an argumentative move similar to the one detectable in the *Nafs*.

1. THE A *POSTERIORI* PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE SUBLUNARY SOUL (*NAFS*, I, 1)

In the opening lines of *Nafs*, I, 1 the main purpose of this treatise is stated: “We say that the first thing with which it is necessary to deal is establishing the existence of the thing (*ibtāt wuğūd al-šay’*) that is called ‘soul’ (*nafs*)” (*Nafs*, I, 1, 4.4–5 [14.69–70]). However, shortly afterwards, the presence of two levels within Avicenna’s investigation of the soul is certified and, at the same time, the preference for one over the other is attested, at least at this stage of the investigation: “This expression [*sc. nafs*, soul] is a name for this thing (*ism li-hādā l-šay’*) not with respect to its substance (*lā min ḥaytu ḡawharihi*), but in virtue of a certain relationship it has (*wa-lakinna min ḡihati idāfa mā lahu*), namely, in virtue of its being the principle for these activities (*ay min ḡihati mā huwa mabda’ li-hādīhi l-aḡā’īl*)” (*Nafs*, I, 1, 4.10–12 [15.78–79 (lacuna in the Latin translation)]). That whose existence the philosopher is going to investigate is the soul; however, this term does not designate the thing in itself, but rather the thing insofar as it is the principle of activities. Here the distinction of references of the terms *šay’* (thing) and *nafs* (soul) is pivotal:¹⁰ the former refers to an entity in its totality having its own essence, and being separable from the body and conceivable independently of it;¹¹ the latter, by contrast, designates only one characteristic of this *šay’*, that is, its mode of existence in relation to the body. Thus, there is the implicit recognition that there is something behind and besides what the term *nafs* / *soul* designates (though being this applicable not to every kind of soul, as has been said); however, its investigation is left – temporarily, I would say – aside.

At the outset of the psychological investigation, its target is thus limited to the aspect of the thing for which it is called *soul*, namely to its being principle of the activities observable in bodies (relational entity). This phenomenal datum

Hilāl ibn-Badr, which took place in Dū l-Qa’da 405 / April-May 1015. See Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 472–77.

¹⁰ See pp. 204–205 below.

¹¹ For the term *šay’* as a means to refer to an entity in light of its essence, see Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 5. For a critical study of the concept of *šay’* in Avicenna and its theological background, see M. Rashed, “Chose, *item* et distinction: l’homme volant d’Avicenne avec et contre Abū Hāšim al-Ġubbā’ī” in this volume, in part. p. 171, n. 9, and p. 180, and R. Wisnovsky, “Notes on Avicenna’s concept of *thingness* (*shay’iyya*)”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 10, 2000, pp. 181–221.

is crucial: the *a posteriori* proof of the soul's existence is based precisely on direct observation (*nuṣāhidu*, we see, I, 1, 4.5–6 [videmus, 14.71–73]); a proof concerning all sublunary souls existing in bodies, according to which whoever sees activities in bodies cannot deny that in them there is a soul. “We thus say that we do sometimes see bodies that sense and move at will; indeed, we see bodies that nourish themselves, grow and generate the like. And this does not belong to them due to their corporeality (*ḡismiyya*, *corporeitas*); therefore, it remains that in themselves there are principles for that other than their corporeality, that is, the thing from which these activities derive. In short, whatever is a principle for the derivation of activities that are not in the same manner [of those] devoid of will,¹² we call it ‘soul’” (*Nafs*, I, 1, 4.5–10 [14.71–15.78]).

Once the existence of this thing insofar as it has a certain characteristic – here even referred to as accident (‘*araḍ*, I, 1, 4.14 [*accidens*, 16.82])¹³ – is established, and this is the only conclusion that can be drawn from direct observation, Avicenna defers the ascertainment of its essence to another investigation,¹⁴ which takes place in *Nafs*, I, 3. Although the advancement of knowledge from the level of existence to that of essence is recommended,¹⁵ it is impossible to infer the substantiality of what is a soul from the very fact that it is a soul, in the very same way in which elsewhere the knowledge that something which is in motion has a mover does not immediately imply the knowledge of the essence of that mover: “And we need to arrive from this accident belonging to it, at ascertaining its essence in order to know its quiddity, just as if we have already known

¹² *I en passant* note that here Avicenna seems to have in mind a narrower notion of *life* that identifies with animal life. On this aspect, I take the liberty of referring to my forthcoming article “Is Nutrition a Sufficient Condition for Life? Avicenna’s Position between Natural Philosophy and Medicine”.

¹³ It is not surprising that the characteristic with respect to which something is called *soul* is said to be an accident, at least here, when the nature of the thing in itself has not been ascertained yet. What is more, this term conforms to the term *idāfa* (*Nafs*, I, 1, 4.14 [lacuna in the Latin translation]) – the term also used to designate the category of an accident, i. e. the *relative* – which has been used to refer to the characteristic in virtue of which something is called *soul*.

¹⁴ *Nafs*, I, 1, 4.13 (*min ba’din*, later on [*postea*, 16.80]).

¹⁵ However, in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2 Avicenna claims that every science (metaphysics included) takes for granted both the existence and the quiddity of its own subject-matter: “Establishing [the existence] (*itbāt*) of the subject-matter [of a science] and verifying its quiddity (*taḥqīq māhiyyatihi*) cannot occur in the science of which it is the subject-matter, but only assuming its existence and quiddity (*taslīm inniyyatihi wa-māhiyyatihi faqat*) [can occur in it]” (13.11–12 [13.35–36]). On this passage, see A. Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s Metaphysics in Avicenna’s Kitāb al-Šifā’. A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2006, in part. p. 123. Two notable exceptions to this tenet seem to be the investigation of God in metaphysics, and the investigation of the human rational soul in psychology, both representing a part of the subject-matter of metaphysics and psychology respectively.

that something which is in motion has a certain mover (*anna li-šay' yataḥarraku muḥarrikan mā*), but we do not know from that what the essence of this mover is (*anna dāt hādā al-muḥarrik mā huwa*)” (*Nafs*, I, 1, 5.1–3 [16.82–86]).¹⁶

After having ascertained that in bodies there must be a principle other than their corporeality which is responsible for their activities, namely the soul (4.4–6.1), Avicenna devotes the first part of *Nafs*, I, 1, (6.1–8.8 [18.11–22.69]) to a careful inspection of several terms by which his Peripatetic predecessors have referred to the soul under different respects. It has been referred to as *power* (*quwwa*), with respect to both the activities ensuing from it (*quwwa* as faculty), and its reception of sensible and intellectual forms (*quwwa* as potentiality to receive / receptivity); as *form* (*šūra*), with respect to matter; and as *perfection* (*kamāl*), with respect to the whole, i. e. to the complete thing in which it inheres in order to make the incomplete genus realized into a (higher or lower) species.¹⁷ Avicenna opts for the term *perfection* because it is the most indicative of the meaning of the soul,¹⁸ and includes both the separable soul and the soul that does not separate.¹⁹ It seems evident that Avicenna’s primary concern here is to include within his account of the soul also the human soul, which, unlike the other sublunary souls, is separable from the body, and possibly the celestial soul, to which the human soul is said to be similar.²⁰ However, the

¹⁶ This almost neglected comparison seems to be a reference to *Samā’ tabī’ī*, IV, 15, where an *a posteriori* proof of the existence of a first mover is drawn from the eternal heavenly movement without inquiring into its essence, an issue properly pertaining to metaphysics. Therefore, an analogy, at least with respect to methodological procedure, between the investigation of the soul and that of God as the First Mover seems to have been established: their existence is proved *a posteriori* through the observation of their effects, i. e. the activities of bodies and the eternal motion of heavenly substances, respectively.

¹⁷ Cf. *Nafs*, I, 1, 6.1–13 [18.11–19.26], and 6.18–7.6 [20.34–42].

¹⁸ *Nafs*, I, 1, 7.8–10 [20.44–21.48]: “From this it is clear that, if in determining the soul (*fī ta’rīf al-nafs, in doctrina de anima*) we say that it is perfection, it is the most indicative (*adallu, hoc plus significat*) of its meaning. It would also include all the species of soul in all their respect, the soul separable from matter not being an exception to it”.

¹⁹ *Nafs*, I, 1, 8.4–8 [22.64–69]: “Moreover, if we say *perfection*, [it] would include both meanings. For the soul with respect to the power by means of which the perception of the animal is perfected, is perfection, and, with respect to the power from which the activities of the animal derive, is also perfection. And both the separable soul and the soul that does not separate are perfection”.

²⁰ Cf. *Nafs*, IV, 2, 178.17–8 [28.87–29.89]. In *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 2, 386.14–387.8 [454.86–455.5] the soul of celestial body is called *šūra* (*form*) and *kamāl* (*perfection*); however in *Nafs*, I, 1, 13.10–14.8 [32.87–33.5] Avicenna excludes that the very same notion of *soul* can be predicated of both sublunary and celestial souls except by equivocation, given the hiatus between the terrestrial and the celestial realm that he posits. For this issue, see T. Alpina, *Subject, Definition, Activity. The Epistemological Status of the Science of the Soul in Avicenna’s Kitāb al-nafs, ‘Chapter 2. Subject. Psychologia generalis vs. psychologia specialis’, De Gruyter,*

equation of perfection with substance is firmly rejected: for, if saying that the soul is substance insofar as it is form, as some (e.g. Aristotle) did, is completely uncontroversial, because the form is unquestionably a substance inasmuch as it is not in a subject at all,²¹ saying that it is substance insofar as it is perfection raises some difficulties. Perfection can be either substance or accident (e.g. the capacity for laughter of a human being is a perfection of the human being, but it is an inseparable accident, not a substance), because its being a part of the composite does not entail its being not in a subject at all and, consequently, its being a substance. In other words, the fact that something is a substance (or an accident) is not determined with respect to something else (the body, in this case), but is a consideration belonging to that something in itself.²² Therefore, in order for the term ‘perfection’ to designate the soul *qua* substance, its substantiality needs to be founded by means of another, independent investigation.

Although this *terminological* excursus has the merit of isolating a unitary label under which all sublunary souls, in spite of their irreducible differences,²³ are included, it cannot be considered a proper advancement of knowledge of the soul: it remains at the level of *names* without grasping the quiddity. In introducing the Peripatetic standard definition of the soul, Avicenna iterates the boundaries of the investigation conducted so far, which perfectly fits with its having been placed in natural philosophy: “We say, then, that, when we know that the soul is perfection, by whatever clarification and distinction we have designated the perfection, we would not know yet the soul and its quiddity; rather, we would know it insofar as it is soul. And the term ‘soul’ does not apply to it with respect to its substance, but insofar as it governs the bodies and is related to them. For this [reason] the body is included in its definition, just as the building, for example, is included in the definition of the builder, even though it is not included in his definition insofar as he is a human being. For this [reason] the investigation of the soul is part of natural science, because the investigation of the soul insofar as it is soul is an investigation of it insofar as it has a certain connection with matter and motion. However, we must devote another inquiry (*baḥṭ āḥar, alium tractatum*) to our acquaintance of the essence of the soul” (*Nafs*, I, 1, 10.15–11.4 [26.24–27.36]).

Scientia Graeco-Arabica, Paris (forthcoming).

²¹ See § 3 below, and n. 72.

²² Cf. *Nafs*, I, 1, 8.14–9.18 [23.77–25.5]. On Avicenna’s analysis of substance and accident see F. Benevise, “Fire and Heat: Yahyà b. ‘Adī and Avicenna on the Essentiality of Being Substance or Accident”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 27, 2017, pp. 237–67.

²³ They are all substances, but of different kind, and belong to different realms and, consequently their investigation should pertain to different sciences. On this aspect, see T. Alpina, *Subject, Definition, Activity. The Epistemological Status of the Science of the Soul in Avicenna’s Kitāb al-nafs*, ‘Chapter 2. *Subject. Psychologia generalis vs. psychologia specialis*’.

The investigation of the soul in the *Nafs* has to focus on and to limit to the relational aspect of the soul, i. e. to the soul insofar as it governs the body and is related to it, precisely because it is conducted in natural philosophy, which deals with what is connected with matter and motion. In this connection, the definition of the soul has to include a reference to the body: it is the other element of the relation with respect to which the soul, being the principle of something (activity) in something else (the body), can be defined and, consequently, known. The ascertainment of the essence of the soul is, then, deferred to another inquiry for the second time. The investigation of the essence of the soul, that is, of the soul whose existence in bodies has been grasped by direct observation, is conducted in *Nafs*, I, 3, although it properly pertains to metaphysics, and is ultimately founded therein.²⁴

Given the framework outlined above, unlike Aristotle's general account of the soul²⁵ as "the first actuality of an organic natural body"²⁶ of which it is the reworking, the definition of the soul formulated in the *Nafs* as "the first perfection of a natural, organic body, having the capacity of performing the activities of

²⁴ Although in *Nafs*, I, 3 Avicenna ascertains the essence of the sublunary soul, i. e. of the soul existing in bodies and, consequently, having a relation to matter and motion, the investigation of substance – what it is, and what its different kinds are – properly pertains to metaphysics (see n. 15 above), cf. *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 1. However, the treatment of the quiddity of sublunary soul in *Nafs*, I, 3 (the soul's being a substance insofar as it is a form) can be considered as an anticipation of the treatment of the substantiality of the form in *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 1 for propaedeutic reasons, and consequently founded therein. By 'propaedeutic reasons' I mean that, in order for Avicenna to account for the way in which the soul is the operational principle of activities in the body, he has to say something about the essence of the soul: knowing the nature of the soul is essential to know the kind of relation it has to the body (substance *qua* form always inheres in / is related to a matter). As has been pointed out at the beginning, the investigation of the quiddity of the soul in *Nafs* is not completed by the ascertainment of the quiddity of sublunary souls existing in bodies, but also encompasses the investigation of the human soul in itself, which protrudes into metaphysics without being founded therein (see n. 94 below). The knowledge of quiddity of every kind of sublunary soul will allow Avicenna to refine the description of their relation to the body. For their relations are not of the same kind: in *Nafs*, V, 4, 229.3–5 [116.85–8] Avicenna distinguishes the relation of reception (*qubūl*) of something in something else, from a mere relation (*nisba*) of something to something else. An example of the first kind of relation can be that of a sublunary soul *qua* form to the body, whereas an example of the second kind that of an independent substance, i. e. the human rational soul, to the body it governs.

²⁵ For the description of his definition of the soul as a *general account*, see T. K. Johansen, *The Powers of Aristotle's Soul*, Oxford Aristotle Studies, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, in part. Chapter 1, pp. 9–19.

²⁶ *De an.*, II, 1, 412 b 4–6: εἰ δὴ τι κοινὸν ἐπὶ πάσης ψυχῆς δεῖ λέγειν, εἴη ἂν ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ ὀργανικοῦ.

life”²⁷ does not (and cannot) pinpoint the essence of the soul, precisely because Avicenna refuses to equate perfection with substance on basis of the notion of perfection, since it can refer to both a substance and an accident. Although this is congruent with what Avicenna’s has maintained so far, this definition raises a general problem concerning the possibility of defining something without referring to its quiddity: according to Avicenna, the definition is that which indicates the quiddity of something;²⁸ therefore, defining the soul by employing a characteristic belonging to it (a *lāzim*, an inseparable concomitant, a *per se* attribute, etc.), but not its quiddity, seems to contradict an Avicennian (but also Aristotelian) tenet.²⁹ This doctrinal problem can be solved by arguing that this is not Avicenna’s own definition of the soul, but rather the retrieval of a standard formula through which in the Aristotelian tradition it is custom to define sub-lunary souls: there are some reasons for arguing that. Apart from the doctrinal coherence within Avicenna’s thought, the phrasing of the sentence in which the formulation of the definition of the soul is contained, is unusual: “*fa-l-nafs al-latī nahudduhā hiya [...]*” (*the soul that we are defining is [...]*). In formulating his own definition of the soul, one would have expected a more straightforward sentence rather than this convoluted formulation. The relative clause seems to be out of place. At the outset of an investigation of the soul that aspires to be exhaustive, Avicenna would not have used a sentence that gives the impression of excluding some soul from the general psychological inquiry he is embarking on: for the sentence we read seems to imply that there is some soul that Avicenna will not define, nor deal with in the *Nafs*.

The major obstacle to interpret this not as Avicenna’s own definition of the soul is the use of the verb *ḥadda* (I, 1, 12.7, *to define* [*invenimus*,³⁰ 29.61]), which echoes the infinitive *taḥdīd* (I, 1, 4.3, *defining* [*definire*, 14.68]) in the chapter title, and the noun *ḥadd* (10.19, 12.10, 13.12, *definition* [*definitio*, 27.30, 29.65, 32.89]).³¹ However, examination of the critical apparatus of the editions of Avicenna’s text,³² and inspection of a part of the extant manuscripts preserving

²⁷ *Nafs*, I, 1, 12.7–8 [29.62–63]: ‘*kamāl awwal li-ḡism ṭabī’ī ālī lahu an yaf’ala af’āl al-ḥayā’*’.

²⁸ *Ilāhiyyāt*, V, 8, 244.14 [274.52]: *li-anna al-ḥadd huwa mā yadullu ‘alā l-māhiyya*.

²⁹ There cannot be a definition of something that does not designate the essence of that something. On this tenet, see p. 200 below. See also *Samā’ ṭabī’ī*, III, 2, 183.7–10, where, with respect to the *continuum*, Avicenna distinguishes its definite description (*rasm*), where the notion of divisibility is implied, from its real definition, which refers to what the continuum is in itself (*fī naḥsihi*). I thank Alessia Astesiano for bringing this passage to my attention.

³⁰ On the Latin translation of this passage, see n. 42 below.

³¹ The weight of these *contra* arguments, however, can be limited by considering that the standard formulation of the Aristotelian definition of the soul is to all intents and purposes a definition, and thus it is no surprise that Avicenna refers to it by using the term *ḥadd*.

³² There are five complete printed versions of Avicenna’s *Nafs*, none of them providing a stemma

it, reveal that Avicenna's own words might have been different: *nağidu* (*we find*) is attested as a variant for *nağuddu*, which is confirmed by the Latin translation of the *Nafs* (*invenimus*).³³ Therefore, Avicenna might have meant to say that

codicum: (i) Tehran lithography, published in Tehran in 1303/1885-6; (ii) *Psychologie d'Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne), d'après son œuvre al-Shifā'*, vol. I: Texte arabe, vol. II: traduction annotée, J. Bakoš ed., Travaux de l'Académie Tchèque des Sciences. Section de linguistique et de littérature, Prague 1956; (iii) *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text), being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, F. Rahman ed., Oxford University Press, London – New York – Toronto 1959; repr. 1970; (iv) *Kitāb al-Shifā': al-Ṭabī'iyāt*, vol. 6: *al-Nafs*, G. C. Anawati, S. Zayed eds., revised edition by I. Madkour, al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, Cairo 1975; and (v) Avicenna, *al-Nafs min kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed. Ḥ. al-Āmulī, Maktab al-I'lām al-Islāmī, Markaz al-Nashr, Qum 1417/1996-7.

³³ By agreeing on the translation of *nağuddu* as *we define*, scholars show a certain *consensus* with respect to the way in which *Nafs*, I, 1, 12.6–8 has to be understood. In a pioneering article published in 1969 on Avicenna's theory of the substantiality of the soul, L. E. Goodman translates the aforementioned passage as follows: "Thus the soul, as we define it is: *the primary entelechy of a natural body organized so as to carry out the function of life*" ("A Note on Avicenna's Theory of the Substantiality of the Soul", *The Philosophical Forum*, 1, 1969, pp. 547–562, in part. p. 559). After three decades, in an article entirely devoted to the exegesis of Avicenna's definition of the soul, M. Sebti paraphrases the aforementioned passage as follows: "il (*sc.* Avicenne) peut alors conclure ce premier chapitre (*sc.* du *De anima*) par la définition de l'âme comme « la perfection première d'un corps naturel organique capable d'accomplir les actes de la vie »" ("La signification de la définition avicennienne de l'âme comme « perfection première d'un corps naturel organique » dans le livre I du Traité de l'âme du ŠThis analysis is confirmed one year later in her monograph on the human soul in Avicenna (Avicenne, *L'âme humaine*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 2000, in part. p. 16 : "Il (*sc.* Avicenne) énonce au livre I une définition générique de l'âme qui s'applique aux trois espèces du vivant : 'L'âme est la perfection première d'un corps naturel organique capable d'accomplir les actes de la vie' (I, 1, p. 10 [ed. Cairo])"). In 2003, in chapter 6 of the first part of his monograph, which is devoted to Avicenna's reworking of the notion of *perfection*, R. Wisnovsky translates the passage quoted above as follows: "So the soul which we are defining is a first perfection of a natural instrumental body [which the soul uses] to perform the activities of living" (*Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca - New York, 2003, in part. p. 114). In their anthology of classical Arabic philosophy texts, J. McGinnis and D. C. Reisman provide the following translation of the passage in question: "Thus, the soul – the one we are defining here (note that *here* does not correspond to anything in the Arabic text) – is a first perfection of a natural body possessed of organs that performs the activities of life" (*Classical Arabic Philosophy. An Anthology of Sources*. Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary by J. McGinnis and D. C. Reisman, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis, Cambridge, 2007, p. 178). Lastly, in an article which appeared in 2010, where the position of psychology in Avicenna's system of science is investigated, O. Lizzini translates *Nafs*, I, 1, 12.6–8 as follows: "l'âme que l'on va ici définir est donc perfection première d'un corps naturel organique [ou instrumental ou doué d'organes] qui accomplit les actes de la vie" ("L'âme chez Avicenne: quelques remarques autour de son statut épistémologique et de son fondement métaphysique", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 21, 2010, pp. 223–242, in part. p. 227, n. 13). O. Lizzini refers to this formulation as Avicenna's definition of the soul in *Fluxus* (*fayḍ*). *Indagine sui fondamenti della metafisica*

‘the soul that we *find*’ – and not ‘that we *define*’ – is the first perfection of a natural, organic body, having the capacity of performing the activities of life, without committing himself to endorsing the Aristotelian definition of the soul, which carries the aforementioned disadvantages (it would be a non-quidditative definition because the equation of perfection with substance is not allowed). If it is agreed that in *Nafs*, I, 1 Avicenna simply retrieves the Aristotelian definition of the soul without endorsing it, the meaning of this retrieval, and of the absolute use of *wağada* (*to find*) has to be explained.

This explanation, however, cannot overlook the context in which the aforementioned retrieval occurs. *Nafs*, I, 1 has to be considered on the whole dialectical, where the major theoretical achievements of predecessors concerning the soul are offered. The definition of the soul is one of them, and its formulation testifies Avicenna’s reverence towards the Aristotelian tradition: for it is the outcome of a series of distinctions, i. e. that between first and second perfection, that between artificial and natural bodies, and, within the latter, that between simple and composite bodies (*Nafs*, I, 1, 11.7–12.6 [27.40–29.61]), which reproduce the same distinctions that have led into the Aristotelian definition of the soul.³⁴ However, by distinguishing between first and second perfection, Avicenna adds a clarification about the kind of perfection the soul is, and points out the nature of its relation to the body: the soul is a first perfection insofar as it is the *formal principle* (*şakl*, 11.9 [*figura*, 27.42]) of the body, immanent to it,³⁵ which, like the shape of the sword, organizes the body in such a way that from it some activities or affections, i. e. the second perfections, derive. As Wisnovsky argues in his analysis of the passage,³⁶ although Avicenna’s distinction between first and

e della fisica di Avicenna, Edizioni di Pagina, Bari, 2011, in part. p. 102; and in *Avicenna*, Carocci editore, Roma 2012, in part. p. 237.

³⁴ Aristotle’s definition of the soul, provided in *De an.*, II, 1, 412 b 4–6, is preceded by: (1) the distinction between artificial and natural bodies (412 a 11–13); (2) the distinction, within natural bodies, between inorganic (i. e. simple), and organic (i. e. composite) bodies (412 a 13–16); and, lastly, (3) the distinction between first and second actuality (412 a 21–27).

³⁵ In a similar vein Aristotle says that the body that is potentially alive is not that which has lost the soul, but that which has it, meaning that the soul is the principle of the vital activities that the body possessing that principle, i. e. the soul, is capable of performing at will. See *De an.*, II, 1, 412 b 25–6: ἔστι δὲ οὐ τὸ ἀποβεβληκὸς τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ δυνάμει ὄν ὥστε ζῆν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔχον.

³⁶ See Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, p. 121: “Avicenna might have reasoned along the following lines: given that Aristotle says at the very beginning of L1 [*sc.* *De an.*, II, 1, 412 a 6–28] that the soul is an *entelekheia* in the sense of substantial form; given that Aristotle goes on to say later in L1 that the soul is a first *entelekheia*; and given that in L1 and in the later passage (412 b 11 – 413 a 3) Aristotle illustrates what first *entelekheia* means by using an example that is most easily interpreted as referring to a capability to perform a function, form and capability to perform a function are therefore equivalent”.

second perfection depends broadly on Aristotle's distinction between first and second ἐντελέχεια in *De an.*, II, 1, it also echoes Aristotle's distinction between the capacity for performing one or more functions and the actual exercise of that capacity, and his equation of the form *qua* first perfection with the capability to perform a function.³⁷ The soul's being a first perfection would therefore be equated to being a certain formal structure which enables a certain body to perform a set of vital activities according to its level of organization, independently of the modality by means of which it renders the body ensouled, be it a substantial form or an independent substance, that is, regardless of the quiddity of the thing that is perfection.³⁸ The recourse to the term *šakl* in illustrating what first perfection means, has to be read against this background. Here Avicenna equates it with the *šakl* of the sword, and not with its *šūra* (*form*), which would be the appropriate term to designate a formal principle.³⁹ However, it might be the case that Avicenna resorts to the word *šakl*, which here has to be considered as a synonym of *šūra*,⁴⁰ precisely in order to avoid using the latter that is heavily

³⁷ Cf. *De an.*, II, 1, 412 b 11–413 a 3: τοῦτο δὲ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι τῷ τοιῶδι σώματι, καθάπερ εἶ τι τῶν ὀργάνων φυσικὸν ἦν σῶμα, οἷον πέλεκυς· ἦν μὲν γὰρ ἂν τὸ πελέκει εἶναι ἢ οὐσία αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἢ ψυχὴ τοῦτο· χωρισθείσης δὲ ταύτης οὐκ ἂν ἔτι πέλεκυς ἦν, ἀλλ' ἢ ὁμωνύμως, νῦν δ' ἔστι πέλεκυς. οὐ γὰρ τοιοῦτου σώματος τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι καὶ ὁ λόγος ἢ ψυχὴ, ἀλλὰ φυσικοῦ τοιοῦδι, ἔχοντος ἀρχὴν κινήσεως καὶ στάσεως ἐν ἑαυτῷ. θεωρεῖν δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν μερῶν δεῖ τὸ λεχθέν. εἰ γὰρ ἦν ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς ζῶον, ψυχὴ ἂν ἦν αὐτοῦ ἢ ὄψις· αὕτη γὰρ οὐσία ὀφθαλμοῦ ἢ κατὰ τὸν λόγον (ὁ δ' ὀφθαλμὸς ὕλη ὄψεως), ἢς ἀπολειπούσης οὐκέτ' ὀφθαλμὸς, πλὴν ὁμωνύμως, καθάπερ ὁ λίθινος καὶ ὁ γεγραμμένος. δεῖ δὲ λαβεῖν τὸ ἐπὶ μέρος, οὕτως ἢ ὅλη αἰσθησις πρὸς τὸ ὅλον σῶμα τὸ αἰσθητικόν, ἢ τοιοῦτον. ἔστι δὲ οὐ τὸ ἀποβεβληκὸς τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ δυνάμει ὄν ὥστε ζῆν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔχον· τὸ δὲ σπέρμα καὶ ὁ καρπὸς τὸ δυνάμει τοιοῦδι σῶμα. ὥς μὲν οὖν ἢ τμησις καὶ ἢ ὄρασις, οὕτω καὶ ἢ ἐγρήγορις ἐντελέχεια, ὥς δ' ἢ ὄψις καὶ ἢ δύναιμις τοῦ ὀργάνου, ἢ ψυχὴ· τὸ δὲ σῶμα τὸ δυνάμει ὄν· ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ὀφθαλμὸς ἢ κόρη καὶ ἢ ὄψις, κάκει ἢ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ζῶον.

³⁸ Cf. n. 24 above.

³⁹ Cf. *Nafs*, I, 1, 6.4–6 [18.14–16].

⁴⁰ Pace Wisnovsky (*Avicenna's Metaphysics*, p. 121), here *šakl* does not necessarily refer to an extrinsic feature, i. e. the external configuration, of something, as μορφή does. Overall, Wisnovsky's analysis of *Nafs*, I, 1, 11.7–17 [27.40–28.51] is persuasive: by following the Aristotelian path, Avicenna equates the first perfection with the capacity for performing a certain function but, unlike Aristotle, he does not equate it with the substantial form of a certain material composite, but with its shape (μορφή). It might be possible, however, to explore the possibility that Avicenna's first perfection is *shape* (*šakl*) not in the very sense in which the Greek word μορφή means shape. Here *šakl* may not (only) refer to the mere external configuration as μορφή does, but, rather, may render the Greek word σχῆμα, which refers not only to the external appearance of something, but also to the formal structure conferred upon something by means of which that something is enabled to perform a set of functions according to the level of organization of its body. For the various meanings of the word σχῆμα,

ontologically connoted, and not to confuse the operational level with the ontological level, which have been sharply distinguished at the outset of this inquiry. That sublunary souls are substance insofar as they are *ṣūra* is the conclusion of the demonstration provided in *Nafs*, I, 3, but it cannot be revealed in advance, precisely because from the notion of perfection, by means of which the soul has been defined, the essence of the soul cannot be inferred. A confirmation of this is that in other texts, where Avicenna refers to the soul as the formal principle of the body, which is responsible for the activities observable in them, and the essence of the soul, that is, its being a substance, is taken for granted, he uses the term *ṣūra*.⁴¹

Therefore, here Avicenna does not want to provide his own definition of the soul;⁴² rather, he retrieves the standard definition of the soul as a formula capable of encompassing all instances of sublunary soul (vegetative, animal, human) while they are in our world (in this perspective *nağidu* has to be read in connection with *fī ‘ālamīnā*, in our world, I, 1, 12.5 [*in hoc nostro mundo*, 29.58]),⁴³ namely insofar as they are the principle of organization and activity in the body, not in themselves (it is therefore not a proper definition, nor a definition that Avicenna can accept). This remodelling and subtle exegesis of Aristotle’s definition of the soul, functional to Avicenna’s project, seem to be validated by the aforementioned passage from the *De anima*.⁴⁴ In this manner Avicenna manages to provide the science of the soul with a unique subject, i. e. the sublunary soul grasped during its material existence in our world, and related to matter and mo-

i. e. 1. *form, shape, figure*; 2. *appearance*; 3. *bearing, air, mien*; 4. *fashion, manner*; 5. *character, role*; 6. *character, characteristic property*; 7. *figure* (mostly in pl., *figures, gestures*); 8. *geometrical figure*; 9. in *Tactics, military formation*; see H. G. Liddell - R. Scott, *A Greek - English Lexicon*. Revised and augmented throughout by H. S. Jones with the assistance of R. McKenzie and with the cooperation of many scholars; with a revised supplement, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996, p. 1745.

⁴¹ In other, not psychological contexts, where the soul is referred to as the principle of a set of activities in the body, Avicenna names it *ṣūra* (form). See, for instance, *Ṣamā’ ṭabī’ī*, III, 12, 242.15–16: “It seems, thus, that the human soul does not exist as a form (*ṣūra*), unless as belonging to a body of the sort that it performs the human motions, if nothing impedes it”.

⁴² A further, *e silentio* argument in favour of this interpretation is provided by parallels in other sections of the *Šifā’*, and in other Avicennian works: for in the *Šifā’*, the soul is called *ṣūra* (form) and *kamāl* (perfection), while in other *summae*, when the soul is referred to as *first perfection*, Avicenna never presents it as his own way to define the soul. For instance, in *Nafs*, V, 7, 254.4 [160.22–3] the soul is said to be perfection, and not first perfection, of the body.

⁴³ In the same perspective there has to be read the addition in *animali et vegetabili* that the Latin translator adds in order to explain the absolute occurrence of *nağidu* (*invenimus*), probably by echoing precisely *fī ‘ālamīnā*, which occurs a few lines before (12.5).

⁴⁴ See n. 37 above.

tion,⁴⁵ which guarantees the possibility of placing it in natural philosophy with full rights.⁴⁶

As for the interpretation of Avicenna's reference to the standard definition of the soul as a means to narrow the focus of his investigation in the *Nafs* by referring to the sublunary soul precisely during its existence in our world, further confirmation can be found in the *Kitāb al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb* (*Canon of Medicine*), and in the so-called *al-Ma'ād al-aṣḡar* (*Lesser Destination*). In the former, by contrasting the position held by philosophers with that held by physicians about the meaning of the term *nafs*, soul and the adjective *nafsānī*, *psychic*, Avicenna explicitly maintains that, when the philosophers employ the term *nafs* in referring to the terrestrial soul (*nafs arḍiyya*),⁴⁷ they have in mind the perfection of a natural organic body, namely an operational principle in bodies from which the faculties and the corresponding activities derive. What is more, in the latter, Avicenna – if he is to be considered the author of this work –⁴⁸ argues that there are several kinds of soul, some separable and immortal, some inseparable and mortal, and that the definition of the soul as *first perfection* has to be taken as a formula referring exclusively to the terrestrial (*arḍiyya*) soul, namely to the veg-

⁴⁵ Apart from *Nafs*, I, 1, 10.15–11.3 [26.24–27.34] quoted above, see also *Nafs*, V, 5, 238.3–9 [132.17–23]: “However, since our discourse here concerns only the state of the soul insofar as it is soul, namely insofar as it is associated with this [bodily] matter, we ought not to deal with the matter of the return of the soul [to the celestial realm] while we are dealing with nature, [but postpone this discussion] until we move to the sapiential discipline and there investigate the separate entities. As to the investigation in the natural discipline, it is peculiarly concerned with what is appropriate to natural things, namely the things having a relation to matter and motion”.

⁴⁶ Psychology, being a particular science, investigates attributes and properties of the thing insofar it is soul, namely insofar as it is a relational entity, without tackling the issue of its quiddity, which should be assumed. On the kind of investigation that is up to a particular science, and on the fact that every science should assume the quiddity of their subject-matter, see n. 15 above.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Qānūn*, I, i, VI, 4, 127.27–29 (New Delhi, India, 1981–96 ed.): “[...] when philosophers (*falāsifa*) said soul (*nafs*) [referring] to the terrestrial soul (*li-l-nafs al-arḍiyya*), they meant [by it] ‘perfection of a natural, organic body’, and had in mind the principle of each faculty from which motions and activities derive in itself.”

⁴⁸ For the debate on the authenticity of this work see Gutas, *Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition*, pp. 102–103; 477–479, and J. R. Michot, “Avicenne. *La Définition de l'âme*. Section I de l'Épître des états de l'âme. Traduction critique et lexicque”, in A. de Libera, A. Elamrani-Jamal, A. Galonnier eds., *Langages et philosophie. Hommage à Jean Jolivet*, Vrin, Paris 1997, pp. 239–256, who consider the work authentic, even though they suggest two different dating of composition; and M. Sebtī, “La question de l'authenticité de l'Épître des états de l'âme (*Risāla fī aḥwāl al-nafs*) d'Avicenne”, *Studia graeco-arabica*, 2, 2012, pp. 331–354, who does not consider the work authentic. The passage from the *Qānūn* that I have quoted above can be considered a new datum in support of the authenticity of the work.

etative, animal, and human soul existing in our world after having been emanated from above. A similar claim, though not as explicitly stated as in the *Qānūn* and the *Ma'ād aṣṣgar*, seems to emerge also from *Nafs*, I, 1, 13.12 [32.89–90]: “This definition [of the soul] pertains only to the soul existing in what is composed”. Furthermore, in *Nafs* Avicenna qualifies the soul of those having the nutritive faculty, and of those having, in addition to this, also the sense of touch, as *terrestrial* (*arḍiyya*, *Nafs*, II, 3, 67.9 and 67.12 [*terrena*, 130.83 and 131.88]): these two faculties univocally identify the two classes to which all sublunary animated beings belong, namely that of plants and that of animals.

Ultimately, in *Nafs*, I, 1 the existence of the soul insofar as it is the principle of activities in bodies is established by means of an *a posteriori* demonstration; in this connection, the soul is named *perfection*, and is referred to by the standard Aristotelian definition of the soul. The main conclusion of this dialectical chapter is therefore the ascertainment of the existence of the soul *qua* operational principle, which represents the aspect of the thing called *soul* that psychology as particular science is called to investigate; the ascertainment of its essence, by contrast, is deferred to another investigation.

2. THE TRANSITION TO THE ‘ESSENCE-INQUIRY’: THE *FLYING MAN* ARGUMENT

The transition from the inquiry into the existence of the soul as a *relational* entity to that into the essence is marked by the *Flying Man* argument at the end of I, 1.⁴⁹ The thought-experiment of the *Flying Man*, or *Man in the Void* is probably the most famous passage of Avicenna’s *Nafs*, to which many scholars have directed their attention,⁵⁰ especially for its alleged similarity with Descartes’ *Cog-*

⁴⁹ The thought-experiment of the *Flying Man* also occurs in other works, namely *Ḥikma mašriqiyya*, 135.13–21 (ed. Özcan); *Išārāt wa-Tanbihāt*, 119.1–10 (ed. Forget); and *Risāla Adḥawiyya*, IV, pp. 140–151 (ed. Lucchetta).

⁵⁰ On this topic, see M. Rashed, “Chose, *item* et distinction: l’homme volant d’Avicenne avec et contre Abū Hāšim al-Ġubbā’ī” in this volume; P. Adamson, “Into Thin Air – Avicenna on the Soul”, in *Philosophy in The Islamic World. A History of Philosophy without Any Gaps*, Volume 3, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 133–139; J. Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy. Avicenna and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, in part. chapters 2 and 3; M. Sebti, “Avicenna’s ‘Flying Man’ Argument as a Proof of the Immateriality of the Soul”, in E. Coda, C. Martini-Bonadeo eds., *De l’Antiquité Tardive au Moyen Âge. Études de logique aristotélicienne et de philosophie grecque, syriaque, arabe et latine offertes à Henri Hugonnard-Roche*, Vrin, Paris 2014, pp. 531–543; L. Muehlethaler, “Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284) on the argument of the Flying Man in Avicenna’s *Išārāt* and in al-Suhrawardī’s *Talwihāt*” in Y. T. Langermann ed., *Avicenna and his Legacy. A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, Brepols, Turnhout 2009, pp. 179–203; D. L. Black, “Avicenna

ito ergo sum.⁵¹ Moreover, here the thought-experiment occurs twice, in *Nafs*, I, 1 and V, 7. In this section I will focus on its first and more complete formulation.

The first version of the thought-experiment, which occurs at the end of *Nafs*, I, 1 (16.2–17 [36.49–37.68]),⁵² consists of two moves.⁵³ In the first, Avicenna

on Self-Awareness And Knowing that One Knows”, in S. Rahman, T. Street, H. Tahiri eds., *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition. Science, Logic and Epistemology and their Interactions*, Springer, Dordrecht 2008, pp. 63–87; A. Bertolacci, “Il pensiero filosofico di Avicenna”, in C. D’Ancona ed., *Storia della filosofia nell’Islam medievale*, 2 vols., Einaudi, Torino 2005, pp. 522–626, in part. pp. 552–554; pp. 616–618; D. N. Hasse, *Avicenna’s De Anima in the Latin West. The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul 1160-1300*, The Warburg Institute – Nino Aragno Editore, London – Turin 2000, in part. pp. 80–92; M. E. Marmura, “Avicenna’s ‘Flying Man’ in Context”, *The Monist*, 69, 1986, pp. 383–395; Goodman, “A Note on Avicenna’s Theory”; S. Pines, “La conception de la conscience de soi chez Avicenne et chez Abu’ l-Barakat al-Baghdadi”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 1954, pp. 21–98; E. Gilson, “Les sources gréco-arabes de l’augustinisme avicennisant”, *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, 5, 1930, pp. 1–107 (Gilson has been claimed to be responsible for the name of this thought-experiment). For the version of the *Flying Man* in Avicenna’s *al-Iṣārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, see M. E. Marmura, “Fakhr al-Dīn ar-Razī’s Critique of an Avicennan *Tanbīh*”, in B. Mojsisich and O. Pluta eds., *Historia Philosophiae Medii Aevi*, Amsterdam 1991, pp. 627–37.

⁵¹ For the connection between Avicenna’s *Flying Man* and Descartes’ *Cogito ergo sum*, see A. Hasnawi, “La conscience de soi chez Avicenne et Descartes”, in J. Biard, R. Rashed eds., *Descartes et le Moyen Âge*, Vrin, Paris 1997, pp. 283–291; T.-A. Druart, “The Soul and Body Problem: Avicenna and Descartes”, in T.-A. Druart ed., *Arabic Philosophy and the West. Continuity and Interaction*, Georgetown University, Washington 1988, pp. 27–49; T. McTighe, “Further Remarks on Avicenna and Descartes”, *ibidem*, pp. 51–54.

⁵² *Nafs*, I, 1, 16.2–14 [36.49–37.64]: “We say: one of us must be imagined as though he is created instantaneously and perfect, but that his sight has been impeded from observing external things, and that he is created fluttering in the air or in the void in some manner where the air resistance would not hit him in a manner that compels him to sense [it], and that his limbs are separated from each other so that they neither meet, nor touch. He must, then, look attentively as to whether he will affirm that he exists (*hal yuṭbitu wuḡūd dāri-hi*), and he will not doubt about whether to do so. However, by means of that he will not affirm [the existence of] any of his limbs, of any of his internal organs, of [his] heart, of [his] brain, of any external thing. Rather, he will affirm [the existence of] himself (*bal kāna yuṭbitu dātahu*), though he does not affirm to have length, breadth, and depth. And, in that [aforementioned] state, if he were able to imagine a hand or some other organ, he would imagine them neither as parts of himself, nor as conditions for [the existence of] himself.

You know that what is affirmed is different from what is not affirmed, and what is acknowledged is different from what is not acknowledged.

Hence, the self (*dāt*), which [this human being] has affirmed to exist as something proper to it, because of being his self, is different from his body and his organs whose [existence] he has not affirmed.”

⁵³ Lukas Muehlethaler singles out these two moves in the formulation of the *Flying Man* argument occurring in Avicenna’s *K. al-Iṣārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, see L. Muehlethaler, “Ibn Kam-mūna (d. 683/1284)”, p. 185.

invites the reader to imagine (*tawahhama, putare debet*)⁵⁴ himself in the state of a mature human being (*ḥuliqa duf'atan wa-ḥuliqa kāmīlan, quasi subito creatus esset et perfectus*), and as fluttering in the air or in the void (*ḥuliqa yahwī fī hawā' aw ḥalā' huwiyyan, creatus esset sic quasi moveretur in aere aut in inani*) in a condition of complete sensory deprivation, both external and internal, and of lack of memory. In the second move, the reader has to consider whether, in the aforementioned state, he will affirm the existence of anything. According to Avicenna, he will be prompted to affirm the existence of his self (*kāna yuḥbitu dātahu, affirmabit se esse*), although he will not affirm the existence of anything corporeal, neither of his external body, nor of his internal organs, like the heart or the brain, which are generally considered human being's most basic organs. Furthermore, even if he were to imagine any other organ, he would imagine it neither as part of his self, nor as condition for its existence.

Generally speaking, the conclusion of this experiment is the affirmation of the existence of the essence of the human soul as something different from the body, i. e. immaterial. However, its brief introduction (I, 1, 15.17–16.2 [36.43–48]) and its concise conclusion (I, 1, 16.14–17 [37.65–68]) can help us to understand more precisely the purpose of this experiment.

This thought-experiment occurs at the end of the investigation of the traditional definition of the soul in *Nafs*, I, 1, and seems to be intended to connect this investigation with that of the essence of the soul in I, 3 (I, 2 has a doxographical character).⁵⁵ That the thought-experiment marks a change of direction with respect to the investigation that Avicenna has conducted so far is clearly stated in the introduction to the experiment (15.17–19 [36.43–45]): “We have now known the meaning of the term (*ma'nā l-ism, intellectus nominis*) that applies to the thing called ‘soul’ in virtue of a relation (*iḍāfa, relatio*) belonging to it. It behoves us, then, to engage ourselves in grasping the quiddity of this thing (*māhiyya ḥādā l-šay'*, *quid sit haec res*) which, through the aforementioned consideration (*bi-l-i'tibār al-maqūl, ex respectu praedicto*), has become soul (*šāra [...]* *nafsan*,

⁵⁴ Here *tawahhama* is translated as ‘to imagine’; however, this verb is related to the noun *wahm* that, in Avicenna, designates the faculty of estimation, that is, the faculty responsible for perceiving the non-sensible attributes of what is perceived by the external senses. On a brief but effective description of this faculty see, for example, *Nafs*, I, 5, 45.6–11 [89.48–53]. For this consideration, see Muehlethaler, “Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284)”, p. 185, n. 18.

⁵⁵ On the fact that the *Flying Man* serves as a bridge to the discussion of the substantiality of the soul in I, 3, see Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima in the Latin West*, p. 86. *Nafs*, I, 2 seems to pave the way to the investigation of the essence of the *soul of plants and animals*, since it provides a preliminary survey of the opinions of the predecessors on the soul and its essence, and their refutation (chapter title: [*Chapter*] *concerning what the Ancients said about the soul and its substance, and its refutation*).

est anima)”.⁵⁶ Avicenna aims to move from the traditional definition of the soul to the ascertainment of its quiddity: in virtue of the possession of a certain accident, namely an *idāfa* to the body, a certain thing (*šay'*) becomes (*šāra*) soul; however, the quiddity of the thing bearing that name awaits to be ascertained. The distinction of references of the terms *šay'* (thing) and *nafs* (soul), which has been hinted at at the beginning of I, 1, is thus confirmed.⁵⁷

Then, there is a key sentence to understand the purpose, the method, and the recipient of the experiment: “Here we must point out a manner of [(a)] establishing the existence of the soul belonging to us [(b)] by way of pointing and reminding [(c)] giving an indication that is adequate for someone who has the capacity for noticing the truth itself, with no need of being educated, constantly prodded, and diverted from errors” (15.19–16.2 [36.45–48]). As for the purpose of the experiment, there is disagreement in the scholarship.⁵⁸ Avicenna explic-

⁵⁶ That the thought-experiment of the *Flying Man* marks the transition from the investigation of the existence of the soul to that of its essence is also clear in the *Hikma mašriqiyya*: “We have to devote another inquiry (*baḥṭ āḥar*) to know the essence of the soul and to verify its quiddity (*li-ta'arruf dāt al-nafs wa-taḥaqquq māhiyyatihi*). Before we begin with it, we must point out (*fa-yaḡibu an nušīra*) a manner of establishing the existence of the soul belonging to us by way of pointing” (135.11–14). Here the *Flying Man* argument plays the same role it has in the *Nafs*, namely that of serving as a bridge to the discussion of the substantiality of the sublunary souls while existing in bodies. In the *Hikma mašriqiyya* this transition is even more evident since there there is no doxographical digression. On this passage, see Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima in the Latin West*, p. 84.

⁵⁷ See n. 11 above. That the human being considered *in itself* identifies with a *šay'* (thing), which is his individual essence (*amniyya*) or true essence (*dātuhu bi-l-ḥaqīqa*), is clearly said in the *Risāla Aḏḥawiyya*, IV, 140–145, in the same context of the *Nafs*, namely when Avicenna hints at the essence of the human being by means of the *Flying Man* argument.

⁵⁸ In the rich bibliography on this subject, three major interpretations of Avicenna's purpose in providing this thought-experiment can be singled out:

1) Goodman's interpretation (1969), according to which Avicenna resorts to the *Flying Man* in order to indicate the substantiality of the (human) soul by means of the notion of consciousness, and leaving aside the thorny issues of the body-mind dualism, and of the individual immortality of the soul (p. 548). However, there are two major problems with Goodman's interpretation: i) he seems to equate the kinds of substance coming out from *Nafs*, I, 1 and I, 3, respectively (p. 548); ii) the first version of the experiment seems to be reduced to the second version, which is, however, slightly different (p. 552).

2) Marmura's interpretation (1986), according to which the *Flying Man* is used to account for the immateriality of the human soul and, by implication, for its immortality (pp. 384–85). In particular, Marmura refers to the experimental knowledge of the immaterial self through which it is possible to acquire the experimental knowledge of this immaterial existence (p. 387).

3) Hasse's interpretation (2000), according to which, by means of the thought-experiment Avicenna aims to affirm the independence of the human soul from the body, although the incorporeality and the existence of the human soul are implied (p. 85). The *Flying Man*, therefore, affirms the existence of his core entity, his existence, while not affirming the exis-

itly claims that here he is going to establish the existence of the soul belonging to us (*itbāt wuğūd al-nafs allatī lanā, affirmetur esse animae quam habemus*). However, that the *soul* of any sublunary living being (human being included) exists has already been shown in the opening lines of chapter I, 1 by means of direct observation;⁵⁹ therefore, establishing again the existence of one of its instances would be at the same time redundant and pointless. The conclusion of the experiment, however, might cast some light on this aspect. There Avicenna says: “the recipient of the pointing has a way to be alerted to the existence of the soul as something other than the body, indeed other than body (*al-mutanabbih lahu sabīl ilā an yatanabbaha ‘alā wuğūd al-nafs šay’an ġayr al-ğism bal ġayr ġism*)” (16.14–15 [37.65–66]). Therefore, by means of the thought-experiment of the *Flying Man* Avicenna seems to aim to establish not that the *soul* of human beings exists without qualification, but, rather, that it is *in itself* something different from all body, i. e. as something incorporeal. The conclusion of the *Flying Man* argument can be defined as ‘negative’: it allows us to establish what the soul belonging to us is not, i. e. body – incorporeality meaning ‘*not being body*’. The positive conclusion, by contrast, which is based on the notion of independence / independent existence, represents a step forward in ascertaining what the human soul in itself is, and will be offered in the opening lines of *Nafs*, I, 3, and demonstratively displayed only in *Nafs*, V, 2 (*Nafs*, I, 2 is coherent with this perspective: it deals with what the soul is not according to Avicenna).

The outcome of this experiment is thus restricted to the human rational soul, the only instance of sublunary soul in which there is a *šay’* behind and besides what *nafs* designates, and which is consequently capable of existing in a condition of isolation from the body, as will emerge in the course of the treatise.⁶⁰ What is more, this restriction echoes the preface of the *Nafs*, where Avicenna states that it is difficult to grasp the specific differences of each instance of soul,

tence of his body (p. 86).

I would be inclined to agree with Marmura’s interpretation without, however, pushing the discussion into the issue of the immortality of the soul, even if only by implication, because this issue is irrelevant here, and Avicenna seems to not even be interested in this possibility. As for Hasse’s interpretation, I see his concern about keeping distinct the two versions of the experiment occurring in the *Nafs*; however, I think that here Avicenna is primarily concerned with the immateriality of the rational soul, namely with its being distinct from the body. The notion of independence, on the basis of which the substantiality of the human rational soul is argued, will be referred to in the opening lines of *Nafs* I, 3, and directly tackled only in *Nafs*, V, 2. For an exhaustive survey of the critics on this subject, see Hasse, *Avicenna’s De anima*, pp. 80–87.

⁵⁹ See § 1 above.

⁶⁰ It is evident in the parallel passage from the *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma‘ād* quoted in n. 57 above.

and therefore we should limit ourselves to what is common to all (sublunary) souls.⁶¹ In the case of the human rational soul, however, this difficulty is overcome, because we are our soul (in the experiment the human being's *dāt* is identified with the human being's soul) and hence perfectly able to account for its peculiar nature due to our privileged and direct access to it: the knower, i. e. his core being taken in isolation as happens in the thought-experiment, and the object of knowledge are one and the same thing.⁶²

As for the method of the experiment, Avicenna presents this mode of establishing the qualified existence of the human soul as a pointer and a reminder (*al-tanbīh wa-l-tadkīr*),⁶³ which immediately recall the title of and the method used in Avicenna's latest *summa*, i. e. *Kitāb al-Iṣārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*.⁶⁴ Such a 'pointer-and-reminder' represents a temporary suspension of the demonstrative method that Avicenna generally follows in the *Šifā'* in order to attain universal, demonstrative knowledge in the Aristotelian fashion.⁶⁵ However, the different status of the *Flying Man* does not have to invalidate its conclusion: as Lukas Muehlethaler brilliantly notices, "the term *reminder* describes not an alternative form of argument, but an alternative way of *presenting* an argument. In a reminder, Avicenna merely hints at an argument and leaves it to the perspicacious reader to work out its exact form".⁶⁶ With respect to the *Flying Man* what has to be spelt out is precisely the relationship existing between the knowledge coming out from it and the recipient of that knowledge. In this connection, a passage from Avicenna's *Mubāḥaṭāt* (*Discussions*) helps us, as L. Muehlethaler and M. Sebti have noticed.⁶⁷ There in answering questions by his disciple Bahmanyār about the *Flying Man* Avicenna maintains that for people whose mind stops short of understanding it, "this argument (*hādā al-ḥuḡḡa*) is not useful, or

⁶¹ *Nafs*, preface, 2.16–7 [12.41–3]: "We deal a little with the essential *differentiae* of each soul, of each plant and of each animal because it is difficult for us". For a thorough analysis of the preface to Avicenna's *Nafs* see T. Alpina, "Knowing the Soul from Knowing Oneself. A Reading of the Prologue to Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Nafs* (Book of the Soul)", *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia Toscana di Scienze e Lettere 'La Colombaria'*, 82(68), 2018, pp. 443–458.

⁶² See Rashed, "Chose, *item* et distinction", p. 167.

⁶³ As we have seen, in the *Ḥikma mašriqiyya* the argument is presented as a pointer (*tanbīh*). The same happens in the *K. al-Iṣārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, where the entire argument is introduced by the word *tanbīh*. In the *Risāla Adḥawiyya* the thought-experiment does not have a proper introduction, but begins – so to say – *in medias res*.

⁶⁴ I am inclined to agree with Hasse on this point: *pace* Marmura, here Avicenna cannot be accused of "using a hypothetical example for categorical ends" (p. 87).

⁶⁵ For the non-Aristotelian character of this argument, see Hasnawi, "La conscience de soi", p. 286; and Black, "Avicenna on Self-Awareness", p. 63.

⁶⁶ See Muehlethaler, "Ibn Kammūna", p. 181, n. 9.

⁶⁷ See Muehlethaler, "Ibn Kammūna", pp. 195–197; and Sebti, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' Argument", p. 535.

rather, it is wasted (*dā'i'*) – I mean the argument that is discovered from the reflection of the person upon the state of his soul – and they need an argument that is based on species and genus such as ‘because the bodies have such and such animal actions, they have a principle that is such and such which is the soul’⁶⁸ and similar [arguments]. With regard to the perspicacious, however, [this argument] is decisive (*qāṭi'*).⁶⁹ Following Avicenna’s explanation, the *Flying Man* has to be considered as an argument whose conclusion can be attained by the perspicacious (“someone who has the capacity for noticing the truth itself, with no need of being educated, constantly prodded, and diverted from errors”, *Nafs*, I, 1, 16.1–2), who makes this experiment and achieves the knowledge it conveys, namely the immateriality of his soul, that is, of the soul of the one who is making the experiment. As for the others, the same conclusion has to be attained by means of an argument presented in another, perhaps demonstrative, way. Although two arguments presented in two different ways can reach the same conclusion, it is hard to see, *contra* Ibn Kammūna, how the very same formulation of the *Flying Man* argument can be turned into a proper demonstration syllogistically arranged.

The role that the *Flying Man* plays within the context of *Nafs*, I, 1 is, therefore, to mark a transition from the inquiry into the existence of the soul as the operational principle of activities observable in bodies, to the essence-inquiry. However, at the level of the *Flying Man* the essence-inquiry is not the inquiry into the quiddity of the *soul of* the body, that is, the counterpart of the investigation of the sublunary soul *qua* operational principle conducted in chapter I, 1, to which *Nafs*, I, 3 will be devoted (we will see in the next section what kind of inquiry it is). Rather, this first step of the essence-inquiry provides a means by which those who are perspicacious enough can immediately acknowledge the incorporeality of their soul, i. e. what their soul – their human soul – *in itself* is.

The aforementioned passage from the *Mubāḥaṭāt*, however, leaves open the possibility of formulating, besides the exclusive *Flying Man* argument, another argument bearing the same conclusion, but understandable by those who are not sufficiently perspicacious. We have therefore to check whether in the *Nafs* there can be found a proper demonstration (“an argument that is based on species and genus”) of the fact that the human soul is an immaterial substance.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ I just notice that this is precisely the way in which Avicenna proves that the soul exists in *Nafs*, I, 1, namely what I have called the *a posteriori* demonstration of the existence of the soul.

⁶⁹ *Mubāḥaṭāt*, 56–59. For the English translation, see Muehlethaler, “Ibn Kammūna”, pp. 195–196.

⁷⁰ I speak of a demonstration of the fact that the human soul is an immaterial substance because, given the primitiveness of the notion of *immateriality*, there cannot be provided a demonstration of it but, rather, of a substance of that kind.

3. THE SOUL IS SUBSTANCE INsofar AS IT IS THE FORM OF THE BODY: THE ASCERTAINMENT OF THE ESSENCE OF SUBLUNARY SOUL

That the transition to the ‘essence-inquiry’ is accomplished is marked by the title of *Nafs*, I, 3: “[Chapter] concerning the fact that the soul falls under the category of substance (*Fī anna l-nafs dāhila fī maqūlat al-ḡawhar*)”. The introductory lines of this chapter are crucial to understand the kind of investigation Avicenna is embarking on: “We ourselves say: [(a)] you know from what has preceded (*mimmā taqaddama*) that the soul is not body (*al-nafs laysat bi-ḡismin*). And [(b)] if it is confirmed for you that it rightly happens for some soul the isolation [from the body] because of its self-subsistence [*sc.* its isolated self-subsistence] (*fa-in tubita laka anna nafsan mā yaṣiḥḥu lahā l-infirād bi-qiwām dātihā*), you will not doubt that it is a substance. [(c)] That, however, is confirmed for you only (*innamā*) in the case of some [thing] that is said to be soul (*fī ba‘ḍ mā yuqālu lahu nafs*). In the case of others, such as the vegetative and the animal soul (*miṭla l-nafs al-nabātiyya wa-l-nafs al-ḥayawāniyya*), this has not been established for you [yet]” (*Nafs*, I, 3, 27.15–19 [58.23–28]).

Here three elements are noteworthy. By referring to *what has preceded*, Avicenna resumes [(a)] the general conclusion emerging from the investigation conducted in I, 1, namely that the soul is other than body (see, for instance, *Nafs*, I, 1, 5.3–6.1), and [(b)] the specific conclusion of the *Flying Man* experiment. However, here Avicenna goes a bit further than the proper conclusion of the *Flying Man*: there it has been – negatively, I would say – concluded that the human soul is incorporeal, here – positively – that it is something independent of the body and, for this very reason, substance.⁷¹ Therefore, the demonstration of the substantiality of the human soul *in itself*, that is, in the condition of complete isolation from the body, a condition that it is the only kind of sublunary soul to enjoy, is considered unnecessary. Avicenna can therefore focus on [(c)] the proper demonstration of the quiddity of the *soul of* plants and animals (human beings included) that, while existing in the sublunary world, is always connected with matter and motion, a connection that might raise some doubts about its substantiality, which thus needs to be demonstrated. However, in spite of its bodily existence, the soul of plants and animals is a substance, not an accident, because it is in the body not like an accident in a subject, but like a form in a receptacle (*maḥall*): “Therefore, the existence of the soul in the body is not like the existence of the accident in the subject. Then, the soul is a substance because it is a form not in a subject (*ḡawhar li-annahā ṣūra lā fī mawḍū‘*)” (*Nafs*, I, 3, 29.6–8 [60.59–61]).

⁷¹ Hasse has considered this as the conclusion of the *Flying Man* experiment, see n. 58 above.

In order to account for the substantiality of the vegetative and animal souls, Avicenna revives his standard criterion of substantiality derived from Aristotle's *Categories*, together with Aristotelian hylomorphism: what is not in a subject at all is said to be a substance, and since the form is not in matter as in a ὑποκείμενον, i. e. a subject, the form is (or can be) a substance.⁷²

Once the substantiality of the soul has been ascertained, Avicenna recalls the term *kamāl* (*perfection*), which has been used in *Nafs*, I, 1 to refer to the soul with no reference to its essence, and concludes that, when it is referred to the soul, it always designates a substance, not an accident: “the soul is perfection as substance, not as accident, but it does not follow necessarily from this that it is separable or inseparable (32.19–33.1 [67.46–48])”. Going beyond the dialectical detour of *Nafs*, I, 1, in *Nafs*, I, 3 Avicenna finds the application of the term *kamāl* to the *soul of* plants and animals on the quidditative level: *kamāl* passes then from designating the soul insofar as it has a relation (*iḍāfa*) to the body (operational level) to designate it insofar as it is a substance (ontological level). In doing so, he also succeeds in unifying the notion of *kamāl*: when applied to the soul, it always refers to a substance, regardless of its being an instance of separable or inseparable perfection. It is noteworthy that here any reference to the distinction between first and second perfection disappears: a further confirmation of the fact that the definition of the soul as first perfection provided in *Nafs*, I, 1 was not Avicenna's. Furthermore, on a more general level, Avicenna manages to provide the science of the soul with a proper, unitary place in natural philosophy: for it investigates the sublunary soul *qua* principle of activities in bodies, and provides a glimpse of its essence that, though falling outside the prerogatives of natural philosophy,⁷³ is metaphysically founded in *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 1, where Avicenna deals *ex professo* with form as substance. The investigations conducted in *Nafs*, I, 1 and I, 3, respectively, are thus complementary: the latter ascertains the quiddity of the thing of which the former ascertains the existence on the basis of its relation to the body.

However, this cannot be the end of the whole story. For we are left with the conclusion of the *Flying Man* argument about the human soul considered

⁷² See Aristotelis *Categoriae et Liber de interpretatione* recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit L. Minio-Paluello, Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford 1949, 5, 2 a 11 – 3 a 15. For Avicenna's endorsement of this as his standard criterion of substantiality, see *Maqūlāt*, III, 1, 92.5: “Our discourse is that substance exists not in a subject.” (the same sentence is repeated at 93.10, and in III, 3); and in *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 1, 57.10–11 [65.12–13]: “The second [sc. of the two divisions of the existent, the first being accident] is what exists without being in another thing in this manner [sc. as accident does]. Hence it would not be in a subject at all. This is substance”.

⁷³ See n. 24 above.

in itself, and its refinement at the beginning of I, 3 (where Avicenna goes from incorporeality to independence in existence), which are not universal, available to everyone: the *Flying Man* is addressed to the perspicacious reader; and, the not better specified soul (*nafs mā*), whose substantiality is immediately acknowledged in virtue of the kind of existence it enjoys, in all likelihood and in the very same vein of the *Flying Man* experiment, refers not to the human soul in general, but to the particular soul belonging to a particular man. Thus, only the man reflecting on his self will not doubt that it (and not whatever human soul!) is a self-subsistent substance, since the knowledge he attains by means of this reflection is not based on demonstration and, consequently, is not universal.⁷⁴

That this is an individual, intuitive, non-demonstrative conclusion seems to be confirmed by a sort of exception that Avicenna makes to his standard criterion of substantiality – *not being in a subject at all* – in pointing at the substantiality of *that* soul. By speaking of *al-infrād bi-qiwām dātihā*, its isolated self-subsistence, Avicenna does not aim to introduce an alternative criterion of substantiality, with the same status of his standard one, but he simply hints at a way to get immediate, subjective (non-demonstrative) access to the substantiality of a particular human soul (the soul of a human being reflecting on himself): this human soul is a substance because it is a self-subsistent entity, and therefore it makes no sense to wonder whether it is in a subject or not, because what enjoys a condition of independent existence is *a fortiori* not in a subject at all.

However, in spite of its immediate acknowledgement, the substantiality of the human soul considered *in itself* and on a universal level, seems to await a proper demonstration. A confirmation of the necessity of a demonstration of that kind can be found in all the writings in which the *Flying Man* argument occurs (*Hikma mašriqiyya*, *Kitāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, and *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma'ād*), for there it is always followed by a demonstration of the quiddity of the human soul as a sort of complement.⁷⁵ In my reconstruction, this demonstration is pro-

⁷⁴ In this perspective – I think – the references to an hypothetical reader at the beginning of I, 3 (*laka, for you*, I, 3, 27.16² and 27.17 [*dubitabis, tibi*, 58.25 and 58.26]; the first occurrence of *laka* is omitted in Latin) should be read.

⁷⁵ In the *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya* Avicenna moves from the *Flying Man* argument (chapter 4) to the proof of the self-subsistence of the human rational soul (chapter 5), which is an abridged formulation of the demonstration provided in *Nafs*, V, 2. The opening lines of chapter 5, which contains a possible perspective reference to *Nafs*, V, 2, might help us to understand the general purpose of this demonstration in the contexts in which it occurs after the *Flying Man* argument. See *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya*, V, 153.1–5: “Chapter fifth on establishing that in order to subsist the soul does not need the body. In many of our books there is the clarification of the substantiality of the soul (*bayān ḡawhariyyat al-nafs*), especially in our commentary on Aristotle’s *Book on the Soul* (*hāṣṣatan fī šarḥinā li-kitāb Aristūṭālīs fī l-nafs*). As for that to which we will limit ourselves concerning this [topic] in this book, it is that we will demonstrate (*an*

vided in *Nafs*, V, 2, which contains exactly the same demonstration attested in all aforementioned writings.⁷⁶

4. THE *A POSTERIORI* PROOF OF THE ESSENCE OF THE HUMAN RATIONAL SOUL AND THE *FLYING MAN* ARGUMENT (2)

Avicenna's purpose in *Nafs*, V, 2 is immediately pointed out in the chapter title: "[Chapter] on establishing that the rational soul does not subsist as something imprinted in a corporeal matter (*Fī ṭbāt qiwām al-naḥs al-nāṭīqa ḡayr munṭabi'a fī mādda ḡsmāniyya*)". Here, Avicenna aims at demonstrating that the human rational soul is an incorporeal substance, capable of self-subsisting. In the chapter title the meaningful word *ṭbāt* occurs, which is the very same word occurring in the title of *Nafs*, I, 1, though with a significant difference. There, it refers to the ascertainment of the existence of the soul insofar as it is soul, namely to the *a posteriori* proof of the existence of the sublunary soul insofar as it is related to the body as its operational principle. Here, by contrast, it cannot have the same meaning, and refer to the same purpose. If it were so, it would be redundant, and useless, because a proof of the existence of the soul has been already provided and, what is more, on a general level, not limited to the rational soul. Thus, here *ṭbāt* refers to the ascertainment of the qualified existence of the human rational soul, that is, its existence as an incorporeal substance.

It is noteworthy that here, with respect to the human rational soul *in itself*, we are in the presence of the very same transition from the level of existence to that of essence that in *Nafs*, I, 1 is marked by the *Flying Man* experiment. There, however, Avicenna passes from the demonstration of the existence of sublunary soul in general (*Nafs*, I, 1) to the allusion to the essence of one of them, namely of the human soul considered in itself (*Flying Man* experiment) and, lastly, to the demonstration of the essence of all sublunary souls (*Nafs*, I, 3); here, by contrast, he provides a proper demonstration of what has just been hinted at by means of the *Flying Man* experiment. In this manner Avicenna brings to a proper

nubarhina) that the human soul (*al-naḥs al-insāniyya*), which is called rational (*bi-l-nāṭīqa*), is not impressed in the matter (*laysat munṭabi'a fī l-mādda*), nor subsists in the body in any respect (*wa-lā qā'ima bi-l-ḡismi min wuḡūhin*)". From these lines we get the impression that Avicenna considers this demonstration, which is the same as the one provided in *Nafs*, V, 2, as the standard demonstration of the substantiality of the human rational soul, which he says to provide in many of his writings.

⁷⁶ For this demonstration in the *Risāla Adḡawiyya*, see the note above. As for the passage containing this demonstration in the *Ḥikma mašriqiyya*, see 185.20–192.7; as for the passage containing the same demonstration in the *Kūāb al-Išārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, see 130.4–15; 131.13–132.6; 176.9–178.8.

completion also the second investigation conducted in *Nafs*, that of the human rational soul *in itself*, whereas in *Nafs*, I, 1–3 he has already accomplished the investigation of the existence and the essence of the sublunary *soul of* plants and animals, that is, as a relational entity.

Let us turn back to the word *itbāt*. In spite of their different purpose, the *itbāt* of I, 1 and that of V, 2 share the same status and the same method: they designate an *a posteriori* proof, starting from the observation of some activities for which the soul is responsible, i. e. general psychic activities, and the specific activity of the human rational soul, respectively.⁷⁷

The fact that *Nafs*, V, 2 contains something different from the investigation generally accomplished in *Nafs*, I, 1–3, and reconnects with what is alluded to in the *Flying Man* experiment, though providing something more, especially with respect to the logical status of the argument⁷⁸ and, consequently, to the universality of its conclusion, emerges from its introductory lines: “Of that about which there is no doubt there is that [(a)] in the human being there is a thing (*šay*) and a certain substance (*ğawhar mā*) that accepts the intelligibles by receiving [them]. [(b)] We say that the substance that is the receptacle of the intelligibles is in no way a body (*al-ğawhar alladī huwa maḥall al-maḥlāt laysa bi-ğismin*), [(c)] nor is subsisting in a body (*wa-lā qā’ima fī ğismin*), either as a faculty in it or as a form belonging to it (*‘alā annahu quwwa fīhi aw šūra lahu bi-wağhin*) (V, 2, 209.16–210.1 [81.89–82.93])”.

The quidditative focus of the investigation Avicenna is embarking on is immediately revealed: [(a)] it concerns a *thing*, considered in its totality and having its essence (we have already become familiar with this use of *šay*), and a *substance*, whose nature has to be demonstrated. This thing is the intellecting substance, which Avicenna has hinted at in the *Flying Man* experiment, and cursorily at the beginning of *Nafs*, I, 3. This intellecting substance, that is, the receptacle of intelligibles in human beings – basically the human rational soul – is said to be by no means a body [(b)]. That the human soul is not body chimes with the general conclusion of *Nafs*, I, 1, and echoes the incorporeality of the human soul, which

⁷⁷ For the intellectual activity as the most specific operation of the human rational soul, see *Nafs*, V, 1, 206.11–13 [76.4–7]: “The most specific property of the human being (*wa-aḥaṣṣu l-ḥawāṣṣ bi-l-insān*) is the conceptualization of the universal, intellectual notions, that are completely abstracted from matter, as we have reported and shown, and the attainment of the knowledge of unknown things from intellectual things [already] known through assent and conceptualization”.

⁷⁸ The logical status of this *itbāt* seems uncontroversial: the terminology used therein suggests that it is a proper demonstration. See the terms *barhana* (*to demonstrate*, 214.6 [*probare*, 89.96]; 216.6 [*probare*, 92.45]), and *burhān* (*demonstration*, 214.6 [*demonstratio*, 89.96]; 218.8 [*probatio*, 96.1]).

emerged from the *Flying Man* experiment. However, here the *demonstrandum* is the fact that the human rational soul *in itself* is an immaterial substance. By contrast, that the *soul of* plants and animals, human being included, existing in bodies, is incorporeal and a substance has been demonstrated in *Nafs*, I, 3, where Avicenna argues for this on the basis of its being a form inhering in a receptacle.⁷⁹

That the scenario and the purpose of this investigation are different from those of *Nafs*, I, is confirmed by Avicenna himself: [(c)] what will be demonstrated is that this substance, which is not body, does not subsist in a body, neither as a faculty, nor as a form. The fact that Avicenna rules out the possibility that the human rational soul is a *form* in a body, by means of which the substantiality of the *soul of* plants and animals has been accounted for in *Nafs*, I, 3, testifies the change of focus of the inquiry, and the transition from the investigation of the *soul of* to that of the soul *in itself* (in *Nafs*, I, 1 Avicenna has already pointed out that *form* is not capable of encompassing all instances of soul, because it excludes what is separable). Together with the possibility that the human rational soul is a form, Avicenna also excludes that it is a *faculty* in a body. This aspect needs to be spelt out, because the exclusion that the human rational soul is a faculty represents another, stronger confirmation of the aforementioned change of focus. For here the rational soul is not investigated insofar as it is a faculty belonging to the *soul of* a human being, but rather insofar as it is the essence of that soul, what a certain soul is *in itself*, what remains when its relation to the body is severed, and it is in the condition of complete isolation from the body.⁸⁰

Although I believe that in *Nafs*, V, 2 Avicenna aims to demonstrate that the human soul in its entirety is an immaterial substance, the reference to the *rational soul* (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*, *anima rationalis*) in the chapter title might be interpreted as a limitation of this demonstration to the rational soul, that is, to that part of the soul that is responsible for theoretical activity, i. e. the theoretical intellect.⁸¹ In particular, the major difficulty that some scholars have found in this interpretation is that in the *Nafs* Avicenna distinguishes between the human soul, and its two faculties, i. e. the practical and the theoretical intellect,⁸² and argues against

⁷⁹ See § 3 above.

⁸⁰ It is noteworthy that the characterization of the human rational soul as something not impressed in a body neither as a form nor as a faculty, echoes the characterization of the '*aql muḡarrad*, the abstracted (in the sense of "separated from matter") intellect belonging to the celestial sphere in *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 4, 408.13–14 [486.48–51].

⁸¹ For example, Sebtī maintains this position in her "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' Argument", in part. pp. 534–35.

⁸² See, for instance, I, 5, and V, 1, where the human soul is referred to as *one, isolated substance*, having two faculties. For these passages, see n. 88 below. In general in *Nafs*, I, 5 Avicenna

the possibility that the human soul identifies with the intellectual forms by identifying with the intellect.⁸³

However, it should be preliminarily noted that in the *Nafs*, when Avicenna refers to the rational soul, he has in mind the human soul in its entirety, as emerges – for instance – in *Nafs*, I, 5.⁸⁴ Moreover, in several passages Avicenna refers perspectively to V, 2 as the chapter in which it is shown that the human soul (not a part of it) is not related to the body like form to matter⁸⁵. All these references cannot be dismissed as a sort of sloppiness in style on Avicenna's part.⁸⁶

makes a distinction between soul and psychic faculties.

⁸³ Cf. *Nafs*, V, 6, 239.10–241.4 [134.50–138.89], where Avicenna maintains this position because the human intellect does not ceaselessly think, this being God's prerogative (*Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 6), and therefore, if the human soul identifies with the intellect, its essence would be identical with something that is sometimes in potentiality, and sometimes in actuality. Nonetheless, in *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 7, 426.9–10 [511.93–4] Avicenna maintains that in human intellection the intellect, the intellecting thing and the intellected thing are “one thing or almost one thing” (*wāḥid aw qarīb min al-wāḥid [unum vel paene unum]*); and in *Ilāhiyyāt*, X, 1, 435.13–14 [523.21–22] he claims that in the case of the prophet the soul becomes identical with the intellect in actuality in this life.

⁸⁴ *Nafs*, I, 5, 40.7–9 [81.21–24]: “You will know the difference between the animal soul and the faculty of perception and of setting in motion, and the difference between the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqā*) and the faculty concerning the aforementioned things with respect to discernment, etc.”; and, I, 5, 45.17–18 [90.61–62]: “As to the human rational soul (*wa-ammā al-nafs al-nāṭiqā al-insāniyyā*) its faculties are divided into a practical faculty and a cognitive faculty”.

⁸⁵ Apart from the important text quoted in n. 87 below, see, for instance, *Nafs*, II, 1, 57.11–12 [113.44–47]: “As to the human soul, it is not connected to the body in terms of a formal connection (*ta'alluq ṣūri*), as we will show (*kamā nubayyinu*) [*sc.* in V, 2]. Then, it does not require that an organ is prepared for it”; and IV, 4, 200.14–15 [65.41–42]: “This is because, as we will show (*sanubayyinu*) [*sc.* in V, 2], the human soul is not impressed (*ḡayr munṭabi'a*) in the matter belonging to it, but directs its endeavour towards it”. *ḡayr munṭabi'a* are precisely the same words that Avicenna uses in the title of V, 2. See also *Nafs*, I, 4, 39.3–5 [78.91–93]: “As for the human faculty, we will show (*sanubayyinu*) [*sc.* in V, 2], regarding it, that it is free in itself from being impressed in matter, and we will show (*sanubayyinu*) [*sc.* in V, 8] that all the activities ascribed to the animals need an organ” (with respect to this passage, two elements are noteworthy: (1) Avicenna contrasts the human faculty, which is in itself free from matter, with all the other psychic faculties, which require a bodily organ; (2) Avicenna seems to identify the human soul with one of its faculties, namely the theoretical faculty).

⁸⁶ M. Sebti, “La distinction entre intellect pratique et intellect théorique dans la doctrine de l'âme humaine d'Avicenne”, *Philosophie*, 77, 2003, pp. 23–44, in part. p. 26: “Cependant, dans divers passages consacrés à l'âme rationnelle – comme ceux du cinquième livre du *T.S.A.*, une imprécision dans le vocabulaire peut laisser croire qu'Avicenne identifie l'âme rationnelle à l'intellect.” This position, however, is potentially dangerous because it implies a certain amount of arbitrariness in judging the Avicennian text. In the psychological section of other *summae* Avicenna assigns to the human soul two faculties and, at the same time, he reproduces almost verbatim the contents of chapter V, 2: according to Sebti's view we have to consider

What is more, from the outset of his investigation Avicenna clearly states that the thing whose immaterial substantiality he is going to prove is not a faculty in a body.⁸⁷ For, if the human rational soul were a faculty in a body, Avicenna would be in the difficult situation of explaining the way in which the human soul, which is said to be a substance, relates to its theoretical faculty, which is in turn another substance.

Certainly, we cannot ignore the passages in which Avicenna says that the human soul is a substance having two faculties;⁸⁸ however, it is crucial to evaluate the context in which this statement is made. In those passages Avicenna deals specifically with human faculties that, like all other faculties, are observable in bodies, and for which the soul is responsible. However, in the course of the treatise the respect under which the human soul is treated changes and, in this different respect, the distinction between soul and faculties fades.⁸⁹ In particu-

sloppy all these texts.

⁸⁷ At the end of *Nafs*, V, 1, in the very same chapter in which he makes a distinction between the human soul and its faculties, Avicenna announces the subject of the subsequent chapter (V, 2) by saying: “We must [now] first of all show that this soul [*sc.* the human rational soul], disposed to receive the intelligibles through the material intellect, is neither a body, nor subsisting as a form in a body”. Then, at the beginning of V, 2 he also excludes the possibility that the human rational soul is a faculty in a body.

⁸⁸ See, for example, *Nafs*, I, 5, 47.7–10 [93.99–3]: “The characters in us are ascribed only to this [practical] faculty, because the human soul, as will become evident later on (*kamā yazharu min ba’din*), is one substance (*ḡawhar wāhid*), but it has a relation and a reference to two sides, a side below it, and a side above it, and in accordance with each side it has a faculty by means of which the connection between it and that side is regulated.” And, V, 1, 208.10–13 [80.58–60]: “Neither of the two [*sc.* the practical and the theoretical intellect] is the human soul; rather, the [human] soul is the thing that has these faculties, this [soul] being, as has become clear (*kamā tabayyana*), an isolated substance (*ḡawhar munfarid*) which has a disposition towards some activities.”

⁸⁹ See, apart from *Nafs*, V, 1, 206.11–13 [76.4–7] quoted in n. 77 above, V, 1, 207.12–13 [78.32–34], where the practical faculty is said to depend on the theoretical faculty (“The support of this faculty [*sc.* the practical intellect] is from the faculty that concerns universals (*wa-takūnu hādīhi al-quwwa istimdāduhā min al-quwwa allatī ‘alā l-ḡuz’iyyāt*): from here it grasps the major premises for what it deliberates upon and infers in particular [matters]”). On these faculties as two sides of one and the same cognitive power, see *Nafs*, I, 5 quoted in n. 88 above. Furthermore, with the exception of V, 1, which is an introductory chapter, and a cursory reference to the ethical dimension at the end of V, 2, in the rest of the fifth treatise, which is devoted to the activities of the human, rational soul, there is no further reference to the practical faculty. Avicenna defers to *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 7 the treatment of the way in which the human soul curbs the body and its faculties through the practical faculty in order to obtain the celestial beatitude (cf. V, 1, 208.18–19 [80.69–70]). It is noteworthy that in *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 7, 429.16 [517.00] Avicenna refers to the practical faculty of the soul by naming it *al-ḡuz’ al-‘amalī* [*partis animae quae est practica*], practical part, not *al-‘aql al-‘amalī*, practical intellect. On this terminological issue, and on the fact that in Avicenna the treatment of the practical intellect fits with the ethical and eschatological dimension of metaphysics more than

lar, the distinction holds true when Avicenna investigates the *soul of* plants and animals, and distinguishes the soul from the activities of which it is the principle. However, when he turns to the soul *in itself*, that is, the human soul, the only instance of soul for which it is not senseless to investigate what it is *in itself*, the distinction between soul and activities collapses because the essence of the soul considered in itself identifies with its intellectual activity, since it is what remains after the separation from the body, and that by means of which it is primarily defined: “But we say that the substance of the [human] soul has two activities (*ḡawhar al-naḡs lahu fi ‘lānī*): an activity belonging to it in relation to the body, which is the guidance [of the body] (*bi-l-qiyās ilā l-badani wa-huwa l-siyāsa*), and an activity belonging to it in relation to its essence and its principles, which is the perception by means of the intellect (*bi-l-qiyās ilā dātīhi wa-ilā mabādi’ihi wa-huwa l-idrāk bi-l-‘aql*)” (*Nafs*, V, 2, 220.5–7 [9.55–58]). Even when Avicenna maintains that the human soul is a substance having two activities, the essence of the human soul is tied only to one of these activities, i. e. intellectual conceptualization. Certainly, the *soul of* human beings is responsible, among other activities, for the intellectual processes occurring in the concrete human being while existing in the sublunary world; however, the human soul *in itself* is the rational soul, namely identifies with its theoretical part, the one that eternally survives.⁹⁰ The perspective of *Nafs*, V, 2 chimes with Avi-

with the epistemological dimension of psychology, see Lizzini, *Avicenna* cit., p. 282, n. 136; and p. 283, n. 138. The reason might be that in the *Nafs* Avicenna does not develop a “véritable anthropologie de l’action”, as Sebtī argues (cf. Sebtī, “La distinction entre intellect pratique et intellect théorique”, p. 37). Or, perhaps, in psychology Avicenna reproduces Aristotle’s treatment of $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ in his *De an.*, III, 4–8, where the distinction between the theoretical and the practical intellect is just assumed (it is properly spelt out only in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 1, 1139a 3–15), and the $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ is presented as “a general intellectual capacity with a general object, perhaps *logos*, differentiated according to various specific kinds of object”. On this suggestion, see Johansen, *The Powers of Aristotle’s Soul*, in part. pp. 221–226.

⁹⁰ In the *Letter to Kiyā* Avicenna demonstrates that the thing in which universal intelligibles are conceived is indivisible and, therefore, incorporeal (120.14–15). There Avicenna apparently considers the intellect a sort of concomitant of the substance of the human soul (“The truth is that this [material] intellect is a disposition of the substance of the soul, not of any body, and that it accompanies the substance of the soul in every state”, 121.1–2, English translation in Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, p. 56); however, in what precedes (120.17–20) Avicenna says that in the last book of *De anima* Aristotle deals with “the faculties which accompany the soul in its survival only” (*al-quwā l-murāfiqa li-l-naḡs fi l-baqā*, 120.18), namely the intellectual faculties. Consequently, it seems that the substance of the human soul actually identifies with the intellectual faculties that in the human soul’s sublunary existence exist together with the other perishable faculties. For a similar argument and a sort of summary of the contents of *Nafs*, V, 2–4, see *Risāla fī l-kalām ‘alā l-naḡs al-nāfiqa*, in A. F. al-Ahwānī ed., *Aḡwāl al-naḡs*, Dār ihyā’ al-kutub al-‘arabiyya, Cairo 1371/1952, 196.9–14. The identification of the human soul with the intellect (‘*aql*) might have been suggested by

cenna's rejection of *quwwa* in the sense of *faculty*, and of *ṣūra / form* as terms to refer to the soul in *Nafs*, I, 1: they are not broad enough to encompass all instances of soul and, then, prevent from grasping what the human rational soul is.

5. COROLLARIES

The investigation of the human soul *in itself* as a self-subsistent entity is enriched and supplemented by the demonstration of its individual immortality in *Nafs*, V, 4. In spite of its temporal origination (*ḥudūt*) with the body,⁹¹ the human soul is said not to corrupt together with the corruption of the body because the human soul is not tied to it by any kind of relation where the corruption of the latter entails the subsequent corruption of the former.⁹² In addition to that, the human soul is said to be a simple substance (*ḡawhar basīṭ*) in which, unlike composite substances, the actuality to remain in existence is not combined with the potentiality to corrupt. In *Nafs*, V, 4 in the case of human soul we are then in the presence of the suspension of Aristotelian hylomorphism: although the human soul comes into existence together with the body, which is somehow responsible for its individuation, it does not corrupt together with the corruption of the body, and does not lose its individuality after its separation from it. However, this suspension is not surprising: as we have said at the beginning, Avicenna's investigation of the human soul *in itself* in its entirety goes far beyond the purposes of Aristotle's psychology and, consequently, there cannot be applied to it a model that was not elaborated to account for that kind of soul.

Even though it is clear to the reader that in the *Nafs* there is another investigation besides that of the soul *qua* operational principle in bodies, the transition from this to the *other* investigation is never explicitly pointed out. The reason has to be looked for in Avicenna's rigidly hierarchical system of science with the

Philoponus, who maintains that *soul* always designates an entity related to a bodily substratum, whereas the human soul in itself is (and is called) *intellect* (it is the only case in which a soul has a proper name). For this passage see n. 6 above.

⁹¹ See P. Adamson, "Correcting Plotinus: Soul's Relationship to Body in Avicenna's Commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*", in P. Adamson, H. Baltussen, M.W.F. Stone eds., *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries: in honor of Richard Sorabji*, 2 vols., Supplement to the Bulletin of the Institute Of Classical Studies 83.1-2, London, 2004, pp. 59–75; and T.-A. Druart, "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, 2000, pp. 259–273.

⁹² Their relationship is a *nisba*, not a *qubūl*, which entails the complete reception of one entity in another. See n. 24 above.

metaphysics at the top, outlined in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1–3, according to which metaphysics provides the foundation of any particular inquiry conducted by any particular science. In the case of psychology, being it part of natural philosophy *de iure*, it should limit to investigate the soul in connection with matter and motion, i. e. as the formal principle of the body, immanent to it, which accounts for its functional organization, and the activities observable therein. The psychological investigation would be therefore founded in metaphysics, since there the theoretical investigation of *form* is provided (*Ilāhiyyāt*, II) and, thus, the use of this notion in natural philosophy (*Samā' ṭabī'ī*, I, 2 as well as in *Nafs*, I, 3) turns to be metaphysically founded. However, a part of psychology inquiries into what is more similar to the celestial substances of metaphysics, than to the generable and corruptible bodies of natural philosophy.⁹³ What is more no metaphysical foundation of such an inquiry is provided; rather, metaphysics seems to assume the conclusion of this investigation. However, in metaphysics Avicenna seems not to be bothered by this disciplinary trespassing, which seems to be an exception to the scientific model he has outlined in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1; rather, at least in two occasions he seems to authorize it.⁹⁴ In psychology, by contrast, Avicenna seems to be worried by the possibility that psychology might transcend the boundaries of natural philosophy in which it is placed, and protrude into metaphysics. For this reason, the investigation of the immateriality of the human soul (V, 2), and

⁹³ Cf. n. 20 above. These angelic substances might be the celestial intellects, since in principle they are separated from the celestial souls, which are, by contrast, the perfection and the form of the celestial body, although, in his Italian translation of the *Ilāhiyyāt*, A. Bertolacci argues that for Avicenna the celestial intellect and the celestial soul are not absolutely distinguished. Cf. Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), *Libro della Guarigione. Le cose divine*, Utet, Torino 2007, p. 710, n. 72. That everything that apprehends intellectually something (*sc.* the human and the celestial intellect) is in itself separated from matter, is clearly established in *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 3, 401.7 [475.16–17]: “You have already known that everything that conceives (*ya'qilu*) [something] is separate in itself”.

⁹⁴ Cf. *Ilāhiyyāt*, III, 1, 93.5–10 [104.5–13]: “We say: we have already clarified the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of the substance and that it is predicated of what is separate, of body, of matter, and of form [*sc.* II, 1]. As to the body, proving its existence (*īḥbātuhu*) is superfluous. As to matter and form, we have already proved their existence (*qad aṭbatnāhumā*) [*sc.* II, 3–4]. As to what is separate, we have already proved its existence (*qad aṭbatnāhu*) by means of the potency that is close to act [*sc.* II, 4, and *Samā' ṭabī'ī*, IV, 15], and we will prove its existence (*wa-naḥnu nuṭbituhu*) again [*sc.* VIII–IX]. However, if you remember what we have said about the soul, it appears true to you [even now] the existence (*wuḡūd*) of a substance separate and incorporeal (*ḡawhar muḡāraq ḡayr ḡism*). It is convenient to pass now to verifying the [quiddities of] accidents and proving their existence”. *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 4, 408.16–18 [486.56–60]: “There is no doubt that here there are simple, separate intellects that come into beings together with the coming into being of the bodies of human beings, but do not corrupt [together with the corruption of bodies], rather endure [after the corruption of bodies]. And this has already become clear in natural sciences (*fī l-'ulūm al-ṭabī'iyya*) [*sc.* *Nafs*, V, 2 and 4]”.

of its individual immortality (V, 4) is somehow counterbalanced by reaffirming the necessity of the human soul's relationship with its body, and reiterating the main purpose of the investigation conducted in the *Nafs*.

As for the necessity of the human soul's relationship with its body, in *Nafs*, V, 3 Avicenna argues for the human soul's two-level need for such a relationship: at the *epistemological* level, it needs a body, namely a body of a certain kind (a human body) as an appropriate instrument to achieve intellectual knowledge (V, 3, 222.16–223.10 [104.22–105.39]), whereas, at the *metaphysical* level, it needs *its own* body since it is said to be its principle of individuation (V, 3, 223.11–225.10 [105.40–109.90]).

As for the main purpose of the investigation conducted in the *Nafs*, in V, 5 Avicenna seems to distinguish what is conceived as a *real possibility*, i. e. the human soul's independent existence (V, 2), from its *fulfilment*, and reiterates the focus of the *Nafs* in the very same manner he did at the beginning of the work (cf. *Nafs*, I, 1, 11.1–3): “Then, when this immersion [in the body] and this impediment [caused by the body] cease in our soul, the soul's intellection of these [things] is the most excellent of the soul's intellections, its clearest and its most pleasant. However, since our discourse here concerns only the state of the soul insofar as it is soul, namely insofar as it is associated with this [bodily] matter, we ought not to deal with the matter of the return of the soul [to the celestial realm] while we are dealing with nature, [but postpone this discussion] until we move to the sapiential discipline (*ilā l-ṣinā'a al-ḥikmiyya*) and there investigate the separate entities (*wa-nanzuru fīhā fī l-umūr al-mufāraqa*). As to the investigation in the natural discipline, it is peculiarly concerned with what is appropriate to natural things, namely the things having a relation to matter and motion (*al-umūr allatī lahā nisba ilā l-mādda wa-l-ḥaraka*)” (*Nafs*, V, 5, 238.1–9 [132.14–23]).

Although in *Nafs*, V, 2 it has been demonstrated that the human soul is capable of self-subsisting, the fulfilment of this possibility is deferred to the metaphysical dimension, that is, to the condition of actual separation from the body that the soul enjoys in the afterlife, to which *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX, 7 is devoted. The investigation conducted in *Nafs* is part of the investigation of nature (*wa-naḥnu mutakallimūna fī l-ṭabī'a*, ‘we are dealing with nature’); consequently, there the soul has to be investigated insofar as it is associated with matter and motion, that is, with the body, not insofar as it is an entity capable of separate existence, that investigation pertaining to metaphysics. Avicenna's statement sounds counterfactual: in *Nafs* he does demonstrate that the human soul is a separate substance; however, he prefers to directly reconnect the last part of his investigation of the soul, i. e. noetics, with *Nafs*, I, 1, and, more precisely, with the investigation of the *soul of*, in order to conform the investigation of every instance of sublunary soul to the

model provided at the beginning of his writing, according to which psychology perfectly fits with its being placed in natural philosophy.

Avicenna's attempt to integrate his investigation of the soul into the boundaries of natural philosophy culminates in *Nafs*, V, 7,⁹⁵ which seals Avicenna's investigation⁹⁶ by reaffirming a principle that has been provided in the prologue to the *Nafs*, and on which the unity of psychology is grounded: the unity of the notion of *soul*. In particular, in V, 7 Avicenna provides a survey of the opinions of his predecessors about the soul and its activities in order to ascertain whether the soul is one or many. His opinion is that, in spite of the multiplicity of its activities, the soul is one essence (*dāt wāhida*), performing several activities by means of the faculties that issue from it,⁹⁷ and it confers unity upon those activities.⁹⁸ In refuting the possibility that the whole body, or a part of it, is the bond (*ribāṭ*) that confers unity upon all the psychic faculties, the second version of the thought-experiment of the *Flying Man* occurs.⁹⁹ The second occurrence of the *Flying Man* in this context is extremely peculiar, and cannot be reduced to a mere repetition of what Avicenna has already affirmed at the end of *Nafs*, I, 1.

⁹⁵ For the theological debate on the nature of the human being acting as the polemic background of the second version of Avicenna's *Flying Man* argument, see the enlightening article Rashed, "Chose, *item* et distinction".

⁹⁶ The conclusive chapter of the *Nafs* is actually V, 8, where Avicenna deals with the pneuma, i. e. the vehicle of the soul, and serves as a bridge to the subsequent treatment of animals. Here, indeed, he refers four times to *al-Ḥayawān* (*De animalibus*), the eighth section of the natural part of the *Šifā'*: 264.5 [176.71] (*Ḥayawān*, XII, 2); 265.1 [177.95] (*Ḥayawān*, XIII, 3); 266.4 [179.27] (*Ḥayawān*, III, 1); 269.14–5 [185.26] (*Ḥayawān*, XV, 1).

⁹⁷ That the variety of the soul's activities derives from the variety of its faculties has been established in *Nafs*, I, 4 ([*Chapter*] *showing that the difference among the activities of the soul is due to the difference among its faculties*).

⁹⁸ This position is presented in V, 7, 251.1–3 [155.38–41], among other passages, while its validity is affirmed in V, 7, 252.13–15 [157.83–86].

⁹⁹ *Nafs*, V, 7, 255.6–15 [162.51–163.64]: "Let us, then, repeat what we have previously mentioned [cf. I, 1, 16.2–14], and say: a human being is created all at once, created with his limbs separated from each other, and he does not see his limbs, and [if] it happens that he does not touch them and they do not touch each other, and he does not hear any sound, he would ignore the existence of all his organs, but *he would know the existence of his [individual] essence* (*wuḡūd anniyyatihi*) as one thing, while ignoring all those [limbs].

What is itself ignored is not what is known.

These organs do not actually belong to us, like the garments which due to their constant adherence (*li-dawām luzūmihā*) to us have become for us as parts of ourselves. And when we imagine ourselves, we do not imagine [ourselves] naked, but we imagine [ourselves] as possessing clothed bodies. The reason for this is [their] constant adherence [to us], except that in the case of clothes we have become accustomed to stripping and putting them aside, [something] to which we are not accustomed in the case of organs. Thus, our belief that the organs are parts of us is more reliable than our belief that garments are parts of us".

Its purpose is therefore not to establish the incorporeal existence of the (rational) soul; rather, it aims to prove that the binding entity that bestows unity on all the psychic faculties in human beings is his essence (*anniyya*),¹⁰⁰ i. e. his soul, not his body. Nevertheless, the immateriality of the (rational) soul is inevitably brought into play: indeed, in *Nafs*, I, 1 Avicenna has shown that the constituents of the living substance are two, namely body and soul,¹⁰¹ and here he has ruled out the possibility that the binding entity is the body; consequently, the soul remains the only candidate for the role of *binding entity* which Avicenna is looking for and, therefore, it has to be different from the body, i. e. incorporeal.

The general context in which the second version of the thought-experiment is situated might suggest that, at the end of his investigation, Avicenna uses the same argument as the one he uses in *Nafs*, I, 1, but with a different purpose, namely in order to reaffirm the unity of the soul, which guarantees his investigation a proper, unitary subject, i. e. the sublunary soul. This might be the reason why in V, 7 the immateriality of the (rational) soul is just implied: Avicenna's major concern here is the unity of the soul insofar as it is the bond that gathers all the psychic faculties. The two versions of the thought-experiment of the *Flying Man* serve, then, two distinct purposes, the immateriality of the human rational soul, and the unity of sublunary soul, respectively.

6. CONCLUSION

In spite of their complementarity, two investigations have to be distinguished in the *Nafs*: (a) the investigation of the soul as a *relational* entity, always considered in connection with the body, and (b) the investigation of the human soul *in itself*, which identifies with the theoretical faculty, the only faculty surviving the severance of the body-soul relationship. The first, more Aristotelian investi-

¹⁰⁰ That the term *anniyya* should be translated here as *individual essence*, instead of *existence*, as happens, for instance, in the *Ilāhiyyāt*, has been shown by Amos Bertolacci in his "A Hidden Hapax Legomenon in Avicenna's *Metaphysics*. Considerations on the Use of *Anniyya* and *Ayyiyya* in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Kitāb al-Šifā'*", in A. M. I. van Oppenraay ed., with the collaboration of R. Fontaine, *The Letter before the Spirit. The Importance of Text Editions for the Study of the Reception of Aristotle*, Brill (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus 22), Leiden-Boston 2012, pp. 289–309. The occurrence of the term *anniyya* in psychology has been discussed at pp. 304–305, n. 40 and n. 41.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Nafs*, I, 1, 5.6–13 [16.90–17.00]: "The parts of the subsistence [of a living being], as you have known in [other] places [*sc.* *Samā'*, I, 2], are two: [a] a part through which the thing is what it is in actuality, and [b] a part through which the thing is what it is in potentiality, and is equivalent to the subject. [...] Indeed, the soul ought to be that by which plants and animals are plants and animals in actuality. And if [the principle belonging to the second division] is a body, then the form of the body is what we have said".

gation focuses on the *soul of* the body, as the principle that is responsible for the activities observable in natural, organic bodies, with which it does not identify. Avicenna infers the existence of this soul from the direct observation of the natural world, and then proves its substantiality by arguing that it is a form, that is, the principle that informs the bodily substratum, and enables it to perform a set of activities. The second investigation is less Aristotelian because, unlike the general approach to all sublunary souls that Aristotle exhibits in the *De anima*,¹⁰² it is limited to the human soul, and transcends the boundaries of Aristotelian psychology. This second investigation is about the human soul *in itself*, that is, the human soul insofar as it is capable of subsisting in a condition of isolation from the body, which falls outside the province of natural philosophy, where Aristotelian psychology is officially placed, and protrudes into metaphysics, to which the investigation of what is separate, namely capable of self-subsisting, pertains.¹⁰³ Avicenna proves the immaterial essence of the human soul through the notion of *al-infirād bi-qiwām al-dāt*, *isolated self-subsistence*, namely, by referring to its peculiar mode of existence, i. e. to its separate, incorporeal existence.

The first investigation is on the whole unproblematic in Avicenna's system of science, as it is outlined in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1–3: like all the other particular sciences, psychology investigates the soul not insofar as it is a substance (the investigation of substance and its divisions pertaining to metaphysics), but insofar as it has a certain characteristic, i. e. insofar it is the principle of activities in bodies.¹⁰⁴ As for the ascertainment of its quiddity in *Nafs*, I, 3, it can be considered a mere anticipation for propaedeutic reasons of the more general treatment of the substantiality of form in *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 1; consequently, no real conflict between a lower (psychology) and a higher science (metaphysics) is detectable.

By contrast, the second investigation raises the biggest problem: for in a particular science Avicenna investigates something, i. e. the human soul, from the point of view of its substance and, what is more, this investigation is not meta-

¹⁰² See *De an.*, I, 1, 402 b 1–5: σκεπτόν δὲ καὶ εἰ μεριστὴ ἢ ἀμερήϊς, καὶ πότερον ὁμοειδῆς ἅπανα ψυχὴ ἢ οὐ· εἰ δὲ μὴ ὁμοειδῆς, πότερον εἶδει διαφέρουσα ἢ γένει. νῦν μὲν γὰρ οἱ λέγοντες καὶ ζητοῦντες περὶ ψυχῆς περὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης μόνης εἰκόσιν ἐπικολεῖν.

¹⁰³ That also Aristotle seems to distinguish the human, rational soul from all the other sublunary souls, emerges at least three times in the *De anima*: II, 1, 413 a 3–5; II, 2, 413 b 24–7; II, 3, 415 a 11–12.

¹⁰⁴ See *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1, 5.18–6.1 [4.62–64]: “For the subject-matter of each science is something whose existence (*wuǧūd*) is admitted in that science, and of which only the states (*ahwāl*) are investigated. This has already been shown elsewhere [*sc. Burhān*, II, 6, 155.8–9]”. On this passage, see A. Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, in part. pp. 120–22.

physically founded but, rather, it founds the metaphysical discourse on the soul's afterlife and on the prophet's cognitive capacities. In this discourse metaphysics, like any other particular science, deals with the states (*aḥwāl*)¹⁰⁵ of something, whose quiddity has been ascertained elsewhere, i. e. in psychology. The different attitude that Avicenna exhibits concerning this disciplinary trespassing in psychology and metaphysics respectively have been already pointed out.

To conclude, we are in presence of a *shadowy area* of Avicenna's psychology and, in general, of his epistemology. The psychological treatment of the existence and the quiddity of the human soul seems to enjoy the same exceptional status of the metaphysical treatment of God, with which that of the soul shares in some similarities: in both sciences Avicenna deals with the existence and the quiddity of a part of their subject by contravening the rule that he posited in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2.¹⁰⁶ From this perspective one might wonder whether, according to Avicenna, the fact that a science ascertains the existence and the quiddity not of its subject in its entirety, but only of a part of it, is acceptable. However, if the case of the treatment of God in metaphysics is not particularly surprising, since there is no other science above metaphysics to which the ascertainment of the Necessary Existent could have pertained, the case of the treatment of the existence and the quiddity of the human soul in psychology is different, since it is a subordinate, special science, and one would have expected to find in metaphysics something more fundamental concerning all the soul than what is there in psychology.

¹⁰⁵ See n. 104 above.

¹⁰⁶ See n. 15 above.