

Reaction to Jari Kaukua, ‘Avicenna and the phenomenon of self-awareness: the experiential basis of the flying man’, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy, Avicenna and Beyond*, CUP (2015)

That the ‘flying (or floating) man’ of Avicenna (*Ibn Sina*, d.1037)¹ materially establishes the concept of self-awareness in Islamic thought is fundamental not just to this chapter, but Jari Kaukua’s entire volume². Such motivation may conceivably explain why he devotes nearly half of it (chapter)³ to debunking the interpretations of Dag N. Hasse (b.1969), who emphatically posits that the ‘flying man’ has nothing to do with self-awareness whatsoever⁴. Kaukua observes, “obviously if Hasse’s categorical denial of the relevance of self-awareness to the flying man is correct, my claim that Avicenna relies on an explicit phenomenon of self-awareness will be completely unfounded”⁵. Yet I would have preferred a caveat in the chapter’s title, which could have been provided by the addition of the words, “in *al-Shifa*” (the Healing), which is both Avicenna’s magnum opus⁶ and the work to which the majority of Kaukua’s references pertain. The ‘flying man’ was significantly elaborated by Avicenna in later works; *al-Ta’liqat* (the Annotations) and *al-Mubahathat* (the Discussions)⁷. Both are excluded, with the exception of a footnoted *al-Mubahathat*⁸, yet both contain expansions and refinements that produce convincing counter not just to Kaukua’s nemesis Hasse but also the other chief objection Kaukua introduces to his own view, namely the “blatant fallacy of

¹ Grandmaster of Islamic philosophy, doctor, polymath who left an extraordinarily enduring philosophical and medical legacy in all Abrahamic thought streams not just Islam see e.g. Lukas Muehlethaler’s ‘Ibn Kammūna on the argument of the Flying Man in Avicenna’s *Iṣārāt* and al-Suhrawardī’s *Talwīhāt*’, *Avicenna and his Legacy, A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, Y. Tyzi Langermann (ed.), Brepols, (2009) p179–203, (Ibn Kammūna was Jewish), Rollen Edward Houser, ‘Avicenna, ‘Aliquī’ and Thomas Aquinas’ Doctrine of Creation’ *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2013, pp. 17–55.

² Kaukua remarks in ‘Introduction’, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy, Avicenna and Beyond*, CUP (2015) p3, on its significance as “a particular way of describing and conceiving of the self and self-awareness that emerges explicitly for the first time in Islamic philosophy in the psychological writings [of Avicenna]”,

³ Jari Kaukua, ‘Avicenna and the phenomenon of self-awareness: the experiential basis of the flying man’, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy, Avicenna and Beyond*, CUP (2015), Section 2.2, ‘The validity and plausibility of the flying man’ in pp 37–42,

⁴ Ibid., pp 38–41. Hasse’s *Avicenna’s De anima in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul*, London and Turin: The Warburg Institute and Nino Aragno Editore (2000), arguments found specifically in ‘Avicenna on Abstraction’ pp 39–72.

⁵ Ibid., p39

⁶ A huge work consisting of approximately twenty-two volumes, roughly divided into four arenas: Logic, Physics, Mathematics and Metaphysics, covering the nature of the soul, God, and wider topics such as music and motion. Avicenna was a prolific author, final numbers for his oeuvre are frequently reconciled at around three hundred works; see excellent guide in Shams Inati, ‘Ibn Sina’, Leaman Nasr (ed.s) *History of Islamic Philosophy*. Routledge (2007) p231–246

⁷ See further Ahmed Alwishah, ‘Ibn Sīnā on Floating Man Arguments’, *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* (2013) pp32–53

⁸ Kaukua, n3, this article, p35, fn19.

[Avicenna] proceeding from an epistemic or phenomenological distinction to a metaphysical one”⁹. Metaphorically one might call this exclusion ‘shooting oneself in the foot’, philosophically one might call it exactly the same. Although one can hardly doubt Kaukua’s expertise on the subject, Taneli Kukkonen notes Kaukua’s status in a revived field of scholarship surrounding the ‘flying man’¹⁰, helping to position Avicenna as a forefather of modern psychology and studies of consciousness¹¹, yet Kaukua seems to have gone to war with Hasse, without winning on behalf of Avicenna first¹².

What Kaukua does do well is present the rationale¹³ behind Avicenna’s “famous thought experiment”¹⁴ of the ‘flying man’, remaining faithful to the flow of *al-Shifa* itself, i.e. counselling against rushing to conclusions of basic substance dualism, prior to the experiment being presented¹⁵, although that is the direction and ultimate conclusion¹⁶. Avicenna, whilst semi-satisfied with a view of the soul (*nafs*) as perfecting agent, is frustrated by Aristotelian limitations, adjudging *quwwa* (potency, specifically in cognate terms) or *sura* (animate form) too limiting to allow for “immaterial entities such as celestial souls”¹⁷. He (Avicenna) thus sets out to prove that the soul exists substantively independent from the body. In simple terms, if metaphysics is the ‘science (*ilm*) of the knowledge of things as they are really are’¹⁸,

⁹ Ibid., p37

¹⁰ Taneli Kukkonen, Sources of the Self in the Arabic Tradition. Remarks on the Avicennan Turn. Kaukua Ekenberg (ed.s) *Subjectivity Selfhood in Medieval Early Modern Philosophy*, Springer (2016), p38 placing Deborah Black and Ahmed Alwishah alongside who are both further referenced in this article

¹¹ See also Peter Adamson and Fedor Nenevich, ‘The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna’s Flying Man Argument’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, (2018), 4(2), pp147-164 who cite Kaukua’s personal contribution; “It [the flying man] has recently been hailed as a major contribution to the theory of self-awareness [by Kaukua]”, in p162, and generally Amber Haque, Psychology from Islamic Perspective: Contributions of Early Muslim Scholars and Challenges to Contemporary Muslim Psychologists. *Journal of Religion and Health* 43, 357–377 (2004)

¹² A major strategic mistake according to Sun Tzu, “Thus it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory”, *The Art of War*, c5 v15, Lionel Giles (ed) Gutenberg, 2004 p45

¹³ Kaukua, n3, this article, p31-32

¹⁴ “From the twelfth century CE onwards, most philosophical authors will begin their discussion of the human soul, sometimes even their entire psychology, with the famous thought experiment of the flying man”, Kaukua, n3, this article, in ‘Introduction’, p4

¹⁵ Kaukua, n3, this article, p35, which Kaukua reproduces verbatim from Avicenna, *Al-Shifa*, ‘Fi al Nafs’ 1.1

¹⁶ Ibid., p41

¹⁷ Ibid., p32

¹⁸ Common with the Islamic tradition, expressed over and over by philosophers, theologians and jurists alike, and whilst there are sometimes significant variances over emphasis on existents or existence this integration of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought as science, the study of ‘things’ which include ‘divine things’, can be found in Al-Kindi (d.873), Al-Ghazali (d.1111), Ibn al-Arabi (d.1240), Mulla Sadra (d.1641) and notably for Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi (d.930) see Rollen Edward Houser, ‘Essence and Existence in Ibn Sina’, Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy, Routledge (2016). Ibn Sina uses it in *Al-Shifa* (The Healing), see Shams Inati, n6, this article, p233, (although all have taken what they believed to be ‘Aristotle’ from the falsely attributed *Uthūliqīyā Aristūṭālīs* which is now known to be closer to Porphyry’s version of Plotinus’ Enneads).

the ‘flying man’ is Avicenna’s attempt to present knowledge of a thing *as it really is*¹⁹ - the ‘thing’ in this case being the soul-self which is substantively distinct from the body, and he wants this knowledge not just revealed speculatively, which is covered above, but as a self-evident truth²⁰. However it is shortly after this brilliantly succinct abridgement of some fairly complex contemplation by Avicenna, that Kaukua starts minimising rather than summarising.

A hallmark of many an Avicennan text is the use of ‘pointers’ and ‘reminders’, indeed the terms become the title for his seminal work *al-Kitab al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* (The Book of Pointers and Reminders), which is the only other title to appear in the chapter’s main text²¹. Both Avicenna, and Kaukua make clear the flying man experiment is a *tanbih* (reminder)²² - a pointer (*isharat*) is toward something one does not yet know, a *tanbih* directs one’s attention to something already known, but perhaps not actively recognised. Bizarrely Kaukua relegates them to ‘interchangeable’ status in a footnote²³. As Peter Adamson and Fedor Benevich observe; “Avicenna is trying to draw our attention to something we already know, if only tacitly, namely, that we are always aware of our soul in a way that does not involve being aware of the body”²⁴, an argument that could have further buttressed Kaukua’s response to Hasse that he removes by this relegation.

Hasse’s arguments are from his *Avicenna’s De Anima in the Latin West* which focuses on the scholastic implications of the ‘flying man’, and those reproduced by Kaukua rest on the premise that Avicenna did not mean ‘self’ in his use of the Arabic *dhat*, but that it “unequivocally stands for essence”²⁵. Hasse recognises that Avicenna is “ambiguous”²⁶ in his use of the term *dhat*, and whilst this is a weakness that Kaukua pursues, there are two problems with his approach. Firstly, he informs that *dhat* is replaced by *anniya* (‘thatness’) in

¹⁹ Kaukua, n3, this article p33. There is much scholarly support to the idea that the 17th Century Cartesian traces roots to the ‘Islamic Golden Age’ see further Andrew R. Platt, *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press (2020).

²⁰ Kaukua, n3, this article, p33

²¹ At the end, *ibid.*, p41

²² *Ibid.*, p33

²³ *Ibid.*, p33, fn15 and not for the first time does Kaukua demonstrate awareness of aspects to his argument that he does not pursue, see n8, this article

²⁴ Peter Adamson and Fedor Nenevich cite Kaukua’s personal contribution; “It [the flying man] has recently been hailed as a major contribution to the theory of self-awareness [by Kaukua]”, in ‘The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna’s Flying Man Argument’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, (2018), 4(2), pp147-164. p162

²⁵ Kaukua, n2, this article, p39

²⁶ *Ibid.*

later references to ‘the flying man’ within *al-Shifa*²⁷ as an explanation as to why Hasse is incorrect. Except it is not. Possibly one of Avicenna’s most famed contributions to philosophy in general is that everything (other than God) has “an essence (*dhat*) or quiddity (*mahiyya*) through which it is what it is”²⁸ with attributes which either belong or are accidental to the essence. Whilst quiddity (whatness) does not necessitate *anniya* (thatness), the reverse is untrue in Avicennan metaphysics (although quiddity can exist without *anniya*)²⁹. Secondly, Avicenna establishes a direct relationship between the self and awareness of it as *essential*, Ahmed Alwishah traces the beginning of this argument to *al-Taliqat*³⁰ and, as Peter Adamson observes, by the time Avicenna writes *al-Mubahathat* this is developed into first order awareness which is essential and a second order which is epistemic.³¹ Not only do Avicenna’s own augmentations defeat Hasse, but a basic rebuttal to Kaukua’s “blatant fallacy” is begun. Enclosing his argument within Avicenna’s wider oeuvre could have enabled Kaukua to eradicate this ‘*dhat* debate’ as unnecessary in the first place, and facilitated a stronger argument for Kaukua’s self awareness³² as an existence condition rather than what remains, which is the body *not* being an existence condition³³.

Finally, turning to the experiment itself³⁴; “One of us *must* imagine” being deprived of all senses, “floating” as if “in a void”, then “*must* consider whether he affirms the existence of himself”. Whilst commonly viewed as third party observation, i.e. you or I imagine that man floating in a void, I firmly believe that Avicenna is positing a first person experience³⁵, supported by his “one of us” opening statement, that the ‘*musts*’ are effectively instructions, the fact that he clearly explains it is a *tanbih* (reminder) therefore it is capable of being understood by anyone if given the appropriate power to recollect that which is forgotten, and

²⁷ Ibid., pp38-39

²⁸ Peter Adamson and Fedor Nenevich, ‘The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna’s Flying Man Argument’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, (2018), 4(2), pp147-164. p155

²⁹ Ahmed Alwishah, ‘Ibn Sīnā on Floating Man Arguments’, *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* (2013) pp32-53 esp. pp 54 -55

³⁰ Ibid., p62

³¹ Ibid., p69-71. Taneli Kukkonen explains it thus, “a first order primitive form of self-awareness [that] is ineradicable and constitutes the the bedrock of our continuous stream of consciousness” continuing that this first order accounts “for our very existence as individual and unitary beings” and “a second order, self-reflective form of awareness available to us as human beings”, Taneli Kukkonen, *Sources of the Self in the Arabic Tradition. Remarks on the Avicennan Turn*. Kaukua Ekenberg (ed.s) *Subjectivity Selfhood in Medieval Early Modern Philosophy*, Springer (2016), p37-38

³² See further, Deborah L. Black, n4, this article, ‘Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing that One Knows’, *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition*, Springer (2008) pp 63-87

³³ See further Peter Adamson and Fedor Nenevich, ‘The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna’s Flying Man Argument’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, (2018), 4(2), pp147-164

³⁴ Kaukua, n3 this article, p35

³⁵ I am not alone, see Peter Adamson and Fedor Nenevich, ‘The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna’s Flying Man Argument’, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, (2018), 4(2), pp147-164 esp. p150

that such an interpretation fits within his metaphysical ambition to demonstrate ‘self-evident truths’. Avicenna states that such process is one whereby “he will affirm his self” which is “different from his body and his limbs that he has not affirmed”. Although Kaukua does refer to himself in this first person application of the experiment he then states that it is “per impossible”³⁶ at the same time noting that it is supposed to be experientially persuasive beyond “a mere logical necessity or transcendental condition”³⁷. This for me is why Avicenna was so delighted with his experiment, it is something that can be recognised as ‘true’ without recourse to transmitted knowledge by the individual³⁸, and whilst additional development may challenge, it gives him a *de facto* beginning, and lends additional support to the development of a concept that withstands Avicennan metaphysical test³⁹. I think that is all Kaukua’s chapter is, a beginning, for the rest of his work, and he has attempted to remove Hasse as a threat too early for this chapter to sit *per ipsum*, a conclusion supported by Kaukua himself, unironically, in a footnote⁴⁰.

³⁶ Kaukua, n3, this article, p34

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kaukua, n3, this article, p34 although as Adamson and Fedor note, this depends upon the ‘perspicacity’ of the individual, Adamson and Fedor, n33, this article

³⁹ An extension of the arguments provided by Adamson and Alwishah above.

⁴⁰ Kaukua, n3 and n8, this article, p35, fn19

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(2) Reaction to Sayed Hossein Nasr & Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, Nasr & Aminrazavi (ed.s), *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia. vol. v. From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century*, I.B. Tauris (2015)

Can Ṣadr ad-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā, d. c. 1635 - 1640)⁴¹, entered in Routledge’s Encyclopedia of Philosophy as “the single most important and influential philosopher in the Muslim world in the last four hundred years”⁴², be adequately showcased in sixty pages of excerpts from only three of his forty-plus extant sources⁴³? Furthermore, if Mullā Ṣadrā is “the grand synthesiser of nearly a millennium of Islamic thought”⁴⁴, who “continues to dominate the Islamic philosophical scene in Persia to this day”⁴⁵, and thus a nexus both of preceding and proceeding Islamic thought⁴⁶, a second question arises. Can one appreciate his work without foreknowledge of the *Ishraqi* (illumination) school, Sunni and Shi’i *kalam* (theology), Akbarian⁴⁷ *irfan* (gnostic theory), the Qur’an, Hadith and the *falsafa* (philosophy) of the *mashsha’i* (Islamic thought in Peripatetic tradition)⁴⁸ - elements he is recognised as synthesising?

The answer to both questions is affirmative, somewhat remarkably given the enormity of the task it requests but aided by both clever extraction on Sayyed Hossein Nasr’s part and Mullā Ṣadrā’s style - that being a self-imposed internal dialogic enquiry, challenging his concepts logically from others’ perspectives then framing each of his responses according to

⁴¹ Mullā Ṣadrā takes his more common name from his honorific title *Sadr al Muta’allihin* - ‘Foremost amongst the Theosophers’

⁴² John Cooper, Mulla Sadra (Sadr al-Din Muhammad al-Shirazi) (1571/2–1640), 1998, Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Taylor and Francis (1998)

⁴³ Sayed Hossein Nasr & Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, Nasr & Aminrazavi (ed.s), *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia. vol. v. From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century*, I.B. Tauris (2015) p.163. For a structured breakdown of Mullā Ṣadrā’s works see Janis Esots, ‘The Gnostic of Shiraz. Mulla Sadra and His Transcendent Wisdom.’ *Patterns of Wisdom in Safavid Iran. The Philosophical School of Isfahan and the Gnostic of Shiraz*. I.B. Tauris (2021)

⁴⁴ Sayed Hossein Nasr & Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, Nasr & Aminrazavi (ed.s), *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia. vol. v. From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century*, I.B. Tauris (2015) p.164

⁴⁵ Nasr, *ibid.*, p165, observing “Ayatollah Khomeini taught the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā for decades”, see further, Alexander Knysh, ‘Irfan Revisited. Khomeini and the Legacy of Islamic Mystical Philosophy.’ *Middle East Journal*, 46. 4 (1992)

⁴⁶ Nasr, *ibid.*, p165, noting Mullā Ṣadrā’s significant impact in the Muslim East, and p166, moreover that there is no doubt Mullā Ṣadrā is now a central figure in the field of Islamic philosophical studies in both East and West, despite not being introduced to Western scholarship until the 1960s.

⁴⁷ ‘Akbarian’ taking its name from the Sufi honorific ‘*Shaykh al-Akbar*’ or ‘the Greatest Master’ awarded to polymath and mystic Ibn al-Arabi (d.1240) thus describing thought associated there not to be confused with that related to the Twelver Shi’i Akhbaris

⁴⁸ Nasr, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, this article, p164

“principles”, “rules”, “arguments” and “proofs”⁴⁹. It is perhaps a more straightforward ‘yes’ to the first; ‘is Mullā Ṣadrā is justly presented?’ He is. The selections from his magnum opus, *al-Asfār al-‘aqliyyah al-arba‘ah*, The Four (Intellectual) Journeys, the *Kitāb al-Masha‘ir*, (Book of Metaphysical Penetrations), and a Treatise on The Unification of the Intellector and the Intellected, the *Risālah fī ittiḥād al-‘aqli wa’l-ma‘quūl*, certainly showcase, in both nature and scope, Mullā Ṣadrā’s school of thought, ‘*al hikmah al muta‘aliyah*, (literally ‘the wisdom of the transcendence’). Frequently transliterated as ‘the transcendent theosophy’⁵⁰, it is an astonishing example of the type of ontological and metaphysical *Weltanschauung* focusing on *wujud* (being, existence), epistemologically combining the mystical and theoretical, that flourished within Islamic tradition⁵¹.

Indeed *Al-Asfār al-‘aqliyyah al-arba‘ah* (Four Journeys), the “most advanced text of Islamic philosophy”⁵², clearly defines this unitive epistemology, laying the foundation for understanding all three selections (underscoring the wisdom of Nasr’s choices and their order). For Mullā Ṣadrā, metaphysics is the ‘Divine Science’⁵³, whereby *hikmat* (wisdom) is man’s “noblest” outcome⁵⁴ and the “perfecting action” of the soul⁵⁵ - the consummate balance of the speculative material mental faculty elevated beyond its organic limits by practical spiritual discipline⁵⁶. To a certain extent he echoes the positions of Suhrawardi (d.1198) and Ibn al-Arabi (d.1240), and shares commonality with Al-Ghazali (d.1111), who despite often erroneously seen as the death-knell for Islamic philosophy⁵⁷ justified, like Mullā Ṣadrā, Sufi

⁴⁹ Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, this article, in *al-Asfār al-‘aqliyyah*, p170, represented throughout and a pattern he takes to its extreme conclusion in the second extract, *al-Kitāb al-Masha‘ir*, pp191-202, which he wrote as a series of Q&A

⁵⁰ Nasr, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, this article., p164.

⁵¹ Ibid., p164. The French ‘*theosophie*’ was first sequestered by Henry Corbin (d. 1978) see Sayyed Hossein Nasr, ‘The meaning and concept of philosophy in Islam’, Leaman, Nasr (ed.s) *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Routledge (2007) p23. It is not related to the organisation founded (c. 1875) by Helen Blavatsky (d.1891) with the same name, yet the monist and emanationist position of Theosophy finds parallels within the Islamic thought which have led their study under Aldous Huxley’s banner of “perennial tradition” associated with Nasr, see Patrick Laude, ‘Seyyed Hossein Nasr in the Context of the Perennialist School’, Mohammad H. Faghfoory, (ed.). *Beacon of Knowledge: Essays in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Fons Vitae (2003)

⁵² Nasr, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, p163. Surviving works cover both *naqli* (transmitted knowledge) and *aqli* (intellectual thesising) subject matters. The former includes his “longest by an Islamic philosopher” commentary on the Qur’an, and classifications of Sufi practices. On the *aqli/naqli* distinction further William Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*, Oneworld (2007) ‘Introduction’ ppviii - xi and also n22, this article

⁵³ Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, *al-Asfār al-‘aqliyyah*, p170

⁵⁴ Mullā Ṣadrā uses the term ‘noble’ frequently, particularly in the *Al-Asfar*, *ibid.*, pp169-190,

⁵⁵ Ibid., esp. in ‘On definition of the soul’ p172-177

⁵⁶ A theme of *al-Asfār al-‘aqliyyah*, yet the ontological implications are explored exhaustively in the third text, Mullā Ṣadrā, *ibid.*, *Ittiḥād al-‘aqli wa’l-ma‘quūl* notably p211 and pp218-221 ‘repudiating objections’

⁵⁷ This false attribution to Al-Ghazali is often due to simple misunderstanding of the title of one of his most renowned treatises, *al-Tahafut al-Falasifah*, The Incoherence of The Philosophers, where he outright objected to only three of the more famous philosophical positions on eternity of the world, God’s knowledge of particulars

practices that facilitated intellectual enlightenment through divine inspiration *alongside* rationalisation⁵⁸. This epistemology facilitates “the fulfilment of the human soul through knowledge of realities... as they really are”⁵⁹ and whilst many Westerners may balk at the prospect of spirituality as a practical contributor⁶⁰, for Mullā Ṣadrā any approach which denies its role is futile, boldly stating that “to understand all this [metaphysics], the heart’s insight must rise from the plane of certain knowledge to the plane of certainty itself”⁶¹.

The above hints at the more complex ‘yes’ to the second question, whether one can read Mullā Ṣadrā without foreknowledge of that he assimilates, and has two aspects. First, proffering new perspectives in *wujud* (being), *asalah* (principality), *tashkik* (gradation⁶²) and *al-harakah al-jawhariyyah* (substantial motion), understanding their “newness”, it is not necessary in itself to understand his conceptualisations. Secondly, and although synthesis is the correct term, it would be wrong to assume this implies wholehearted adoption of any of his predecessor’s ideas. If one imagines the works those he references, which include Empedocles (d.c. 443-434 BC), Aristotle⁶³ (d., 322 BC), Plato (d.384 BC), Alexander of Aphrodisias, (d. Unknown, 3rd Century BC commentator on Aristotle), Ibn Sina (Averroes) (d.1198), Suhrawardi, and Ibn al-Arabi *et al*, as a buffet, he chooses elements from each platter, contemplating their compatibility, carefully creating a dish for himself that he already envisages. Even elements he outright rejects, he admires with respectful consideration first⁶⁴, proving his worth as one that undoubtedly “drives the final nail in the coffin of Ernest

and denial of bodily resurrection. He was actually pro-rationalisation, in its place, but the title of that work has meant that many “threw the baby out with the bath water” concerning his views.

⁵⁸ Nasr, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, this article, p163. Also like Al-Ghazali, Mulla Sadra rallied against more antinomian Sufi practices and worship of Saints, whilst forcefully supporting its true role for spiritual and intellectual illumination, see further Carole Hillenbrand, ‘Al-Ghazālī. In Praise of Sufism.’ Ridgeon (ed.) Routledge Handbook on Sufism. Routledge (2020) p66

⁵⁹ Mullā Ṣadrā ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, this article, *al-Asfār al-‘āqliyyah*, p168

⁶⁰ A reaction William Chittick brilliantly observes using Ibn Tufayl’s (d.1185) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, ‘Alive, Son of Awake’, see William Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*, Oneworld (2007) p35 where Chittick addresses Ibn Yazqan’s confusion, “that the modern learned classes imagine they know all sorts of things, but in fact know nothing...have no certainty about anything. Since all their information is of the transmitted variety” read in conjunction with understanding of the intellect as *qalb* ‘heart’, see also p71. This concentration on *aqli*, see n12, this article or ‘self-evident’ i.e. heart based truths are the obsession not just here in Mullā Ṣadrā, e.g. but in his famous mystic counterparts Ibn al-Arabi and Suhrawardi see esp. Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, this article, *Ittiḥād al-‘āqli wa’l-ma’quūl* p207

⁶¹ Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, *al-Asfār al-‘āqliyyah*, p183

⁶² Whereas Suhrawardi applied this to Light, Mulla Sadra applied to Being. Whether there is an essential distinction would be a huge study in its own right.

⁶³ Whilst he undoubtedly makes reference to Aristotelian concepts notably in his discussions of the soul as perfection of a body of matter, see Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’ n.4, p.174 which he ultimately disagrees with, it is a common issue that the well-used source of Aristotle in the early and middle age Islamic philosophy was the *Uthūlūjiyyā Arisṭūṭālīs* (Aristotelian Philosophy) now known not to be Aristotle’s work at all but Porphyry’s (d. 305) version of Plotinus’ (d.270) *Enneads*, see also Nasr’s footnotes, Nasr, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’ n.4, p179.

⁶⁴ A exemplar of this approach lies in the second text, Book of Metaphysical Penetrations, in his deconstruction of Ibn Sina (Averroes)’ approach to quiddity and essence Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’ n.4, this article, *Kitāb al-Masha’ir*, pp193-4

Renan's (d. 1892) infamous thesis that philosophy in the Islamic lands disappeared after Averroes⁶⁵. Thus acquaintanceship with the works he assimilates is not absolutely necessary, but their recognition is valuable part of appreciating, with warranted awe, the intellectual gymnastics Mullā Ṣadrā performs.

Having established the spiritual significance of metaphysical questions in *Al-Asfār al-‘āqliyyah al-arba‘ah* (Four Journeys)⁶⁶, he turns his attention to the nature of the soul. Providing great example of this buffet approach, he distils an array of philosophical concepts; he leans on Platonic forms, Neoplatonic emanation and Aristotelian and Ibn Sinian notions of the soul's journey of perfection⁶⁷, whilst simultaneously deconstructing their reliance on duality, presenting instead the logical extension of his unitive epistemology to existence itself⁶⁸. He maintains some of their features through the addition of, and perhaps as his most unique contribution, that of substantial or, more accurately, trans-substantial, motion⁶⁹. Such unity completes his concern that 'Being' rather than 'beings' is the true pursuit of metaphysics⁷⁰. Taken purely as a phenomenological approach one might view this a pre-emptive position (by some three hundred years) of Martin Heidegger's (d.1976) concept of *Dasein* (experience of being), and equally, as the route to knowledge and its "self-evident"⁷¹ truths appears so forcefully throughout, to Pierre Hadot's (d.2010) arguments of a return to the earliest Hellenistic thinkers whereby true philosophy is not only systematic speculation but "a [spiritual] way of life"⁷².

At times he describes existence in a manner one might find akin to the *tao* or *prana*-like using the term 'life force'⁷³, (although it is important in such comparisons to remember that it is a monist emanationism), but such comparisons help understanding his arguments regarding

⁶⁵ Muhammed U. Faruque, 'An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol. 5: From the School of Shiraz to the Twentieth Century, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi, 2015. London: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies' *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, Winter 2016 · Vol. IX · No. 1, p98

⁶⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā, 'Mullā Ṣadrā', n4, *al-Asfār al-‘āqliyyah*, p168; "from creation to Truth; ...through Truth in the Truth; the third is a reverse of the third; and the fourth is the reverse of the second in a sense, since it is through the Truth in creation" - meaning, the first is realisation of the Truth from a position of ignorance, the second is seeing the Truth from that awareness, the third is seeing the Truth with the eyes of the Truth and the fourth is seeing creation from that perspective of all there is.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p176-8

⁶⁸ He writes, "Wisdom is the essence of being" before proceeding to "dispense" with any enquiry into being qua being as nonsensical, Mullā Ṣadrā, *ibid.*, p170 and p172

⁶⁹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *ibid.*, p175 establishing propensity, elaborated pp184-5, detailed in 'Examining the Proof that the Motion Occurs in the Category of Substance' pp186-188

⁷⁰ "The subject of metaphysics then is absolute being", *ibid.*, p171

⁷¹ Ibid., p173

⁷² See further Azadpur, M., Is "Islamic" Philosophy Islamic. Cornell Safi (ed.s) *Voices of Islam* (vol. v.). Praeger (2007) p.24

⁷³ Mullā Ṣadrā, 'Mullā Ṣadrā', n4, *al-Asfār al-‘āqliyyah*, p173

substantial motion as corporeal “flowing, ever renewed nature”⁷⁴ with “an aspect which is constant, continuous and permanent”⁷⁵ later on. It’s a relationship clouded rather than clarified in places however; perhaps in his desire to address questions from all angles, the role of agency to explain when motion and its renewal is possible⁷⁶ is an issue he never truly resolves⁷⁷ within the *al-Asfār* here.

However that resolution begins to form on wading through the ‘Q&A’s set out in *al-Kitāb al-Mashā‘ir*, (*Metaphysical Penetrations*) singling out Ibn Sinian⁷⁸ and Ishraqi⁷⁹ accounts to outrightly reject quiddity as ‘a receptacle’⁸⁰, obviating Surawardhi’s doctrine of the principality of essence (itself dependent on Ibn Sina) whilst simultaneously adopting ideas of *Ishraqi* ‘gradation of light’ to Being⁸¹. By the time we reach the *Ittiḥād al-‘aqli wa’l-ma’quūl*, (Unification of Intellect and Intellected) this non-dual dismantling of quiddity and essence is fully established as nothing more than “mental constructs”⁸², and his theories in favour of existence as a holistic relational unified phenomenon, albeit a monistic one, is complete. He appears to resolve the earlier anomalies thus; “like the parts of motion and time, some of whose existence necessitate the non-existence of the other”⁸³ as an explanation of the actuality and potentiality of existence⁸⁴.

Nasr has gathered in one small place, a great sense of that which underpins the mind and works of Mullā Ṣadrā. I hope that I have done justice in one tiny place both to the logic and insightfulness of Nasr’s selection, and provided a glimpse of my own into Mullā Ṣadrā’s philosophical mastery. I was reminded of Albert Einstein “being is a part of the whole, called by us “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion”⁸⁵.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p188

⁷⁵ Ibid., p188

⁷⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, *al-Asfār al-‘aqliyyah*, p185

⁷⁷ Ibid., p188

⁷⁸ Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, *al-Kitāb al-Mashā‘ir* p193

⁷⁹ Ibid., p199

⁸⁰ Ibid., p194

⁸¹ For a ‘slimmed down’ version of this argument Mohammed Rustom, ‘Eschatology, Psychology, and Imagination in Mulla Sadra Shirazi’s Commentary on the Hadith of Awakening’, *Journal of Islam & Science*, Vol 5, no.1 (2007) provides principle if not specific support.

⁸² Mullā Ṣadrā, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, *Ittiḥād al-‘aqli wa’l-ma’quūl*, p209

⁸³ In the previous section Mulla Sadra provides clear guidance on conceptualising non-existence as not a thing in itself, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, n4, this article, *al-Kitāb al-Mashā‘ir*, p191

⁸⁴ ‘Mullā Ṣadrā’, *ibid.*, *Ittiḥād al-‘aqli wa’l-ma’quūl*, p207

⁸⁵ Albert Einstein, *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein*, Alice Calaprice (ed), Princeton University Press (2011) p339

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(3) Reaction to Muhammad ‘Abduh, ‘Laws Should Change in Accordance with the Conditions of Nations and The Theology of Unity’, Kurzman (ed.), *Modernist Islam 1840-1940, A Sourcebook*, OUP (2002)

Of the ‘*Theology of Unity*’⁸⁶, Oliver Schabrodt notes that a “superficial look at the structure, contents and discourse of the treatise suggests that it provides a modernist Sunni theological catechism” whilst a “closer look, however, reveals the continuation and re-articulation of mystical and philosophical”⁸⁷. I am inclined to agree. Moreover I believe this principle can be applied to ‘*Laws Should Change in Accordance with the Conditions of Nations*’⁸⁸; superficially it appears to suggest an argument for secularism. Yet on more conscientious inspection, it presents a far deeper engagement of the forces for change engendered through elevated intellectual development which is derived through the religiosity of the Qur’an, not in the traditionalist, literal sense which will be taken up by one of Mihammad ‘Abduh’s chief disciples, Rashi Rida (d.1935) later, but through a deeper call to *ijtihad*. To take a definition of *ijtihad* maintained only within legal parameters of *fiqh* (law) as ‘independent reasoning’ would be a disservice to ‘Abduh’s application, which includes this *and* what is more akin to that found in the works of Muhammad Iqbal (d.1938)⁸⁹ or Abdolkarim Souroush (b.1945)⁹⁰; “forms of living whereby people become deeply (i.e., spiritually) concerned about their own, perhaps unwarranted practices”⁹¹ ergo an ethical as well as legal position. Apropos, I cannot hold, therefore, with Elie Kedourie’s argument that Muhammad ‘Abduh (d.1905), nor his profoundly influential mentor, Al-Afghani (d.1897), were not religious for any reason other than political expediency⁹². Whilst on the surface the selected texts may appear to deal with different issues, the solution he shares in both is the same: elevated thought⁹³.

⁸⁶ Muhammad ‘Abduh, ‘Laws Should Change in Accordance with the Conditions of Nations and The Theology of Unity’, Kurzman (ed.), *Modernist Islam 1840-1940, A Sourcebook*, OUP (2002) pp 54-60

⁸⁷ Oliver Scharbrodt, ‘Abduh and the Discourse of Islamic Reform.’ Muhammad ‘Abduh. *Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity*, I.B. Tauris (2022) p181

⁸⁸ ‘Abduh, n1, this article, pp 50-54

⁸⁹ See Nuraan Davids and Yusef Waghid, ‘Muhammad Iqbal’s Conception of *Ijtihad* and Its Implications for Democratic Education’ *Democratic Education and Muslim Philosophy*, Palgrave Pivot (2019) pp 99 -107

⁹⁰ See Hossein Dabbagh, ‘Epistemology of religion and phenomenology of revelation in post-revolutionary Iran: The case of Abdolkarim Soroush’ *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 2023, Vol. 49(10) 1244–1261 (2022)

⁹¹ Davids and Waghid, n4, this article, ‘Abstract’

⁹² Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and ‘Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activisms in Modern Islam*, London, Frank Cass (1966). His own teacher at Al-Azhar, Sheikh Muhammad ‘Ilish (d. 1882), who accused ‘Abduh of “innovating and bastardizing [sic] Islam” see Samira Haj, ‘An Islamic Reconfiguration of Colonial Modernity - Muhammad ‘Abduh.’ *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition. Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*, Stanford University Press (2009), p80

⁹³ ‘Abduh, this article, n1, pp 51,53, 54, 55, 58, 60

Thus to view ‘Abduh’s pedagogy in a narrow or very ‘Western’ framework of rationalisation defeats this wider perspective and exposes ambiguities that for him were simply not present⁹⁴. It is true that ‘Abduh heavily criticised Sufi *tariqas* for contributing to diminishing rational thought⁹⁵ but to say he was purely rationalist⁹⁶ belies the nature of his mystical inclinations from a youthful Sufi conversion through his great-uncle⁹⁷ and Al Afghani, who, whilst pretending otherwise, was actually Iranian and therefore well versed in *irfan* (the body of theoretical and philosophical Shi’i gnostic knowledge notably including the teachings of Mulla Sadra, d.1641)⁹⁸ in which he schooled ‘Abduh⁹⁹.

Abduh’s general dialectic is a passionate one: the Islam he witnesses most frequently is not the Islam espoused in the Quran; it has been warped by man, philosopher, theologian, jurist and *ulama*¹⁰⁰ alike by misunderstanding, ignorance and deliberate misuse by those in power. His reform is based the absolute lack of contradiction between Islam and scientific advancement, the antithesis of Lord Cromer’s infamous “Islam cannot be reformed”¹⁰¹, whereby he views the Qur’an’s purpose as establishing the basis for intellectual growth. This determined desire for learning and knowledge of Islam’s ‘true roots’ over its *prima facie* rejection or resistance to modernisation, blame for which he lays squarely at the feet of *taqlid* (blind imitation, juxtaposed to *ijtihad*) is ‘Abduh’s legacy, and both texts are littered with evidence of the Abduh’s frustrations with the status quo¹⁰². Thus in *Laws*, and notwithstanding a remarkable aptitude for motivational psychology¹⁰³, compassionate jurisprudence and egalitarian education, he is advocating teaching of the need for law as

⁹⁴ Haj, n7, this article, pp 67 - 108

⁹⁵ Jacqueline G. Brinton, ‘6. Sha‘rawi and Sufism in Egypt’ *Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt*, Berkeley: University of California Press, (2015) pp. 132-155

⁹⁶ Fazlur Rahman in ‘Intellectual Modernism’, *Islam*, (2nd ed.) University of Chicago Press, (1979) pp 212 -234

⁹⁷ Shayk Darwish al-Khadir of the Shadliyya Tariqa, see further Olive Scharbrodt ‘The Salafiyya and Sufism: Muhammad ‘Abduh and his Risālat al-Wāridāt (Treatise on Mystical Inspirations)’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 2007, 70 (1), pp89-115, esp. 90-94.

⁹⁸ Al-Afghani was more than mentor, and it is suggested that the *murshid* (spiritual guide/teacher) and *murid* (student) relationship was cultivated by ‘Abduh with regard to al-Afghani as a direct response to his Sufi conversion, Nikki R. Keddie, ‘Afghānī, Jamāl al-Dīn’. In Ibrahim Kalin (ed.). *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2014).

⁹⁹As Scharbrodt also states; “the mystico-philosophical instructions he [‘Abduh] received as a young man...shaped the [his] doctrinal discourse”, Scharbrodt, n2, this article, p175

¹⁰⁰ ‘Abduh, n1, this article, in *Laws* pp 52-53, in *Unity* pp 55-58

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p70

¹⁰² He observes the “scattered mess” of the Egyptian legal system, it being “insufficient, too general... in an unclear style”, *ibid.*, p53, due, at least in part, to the failure to “take in account the level of intelligence of the those for whom laws are to be instituted, so that people will not find them unclear, incomprehensible” *ibid.*, p51, in *Laws* whilst in *Unity* he provides an exhausting exclamative list of questions on the disparity and hypocrisy between the aims of the religion and its application, ultimately bemoaning the lack of curiosity of the natural world, “supposing thereby God is pleased with ignorance and a neglect of study of His marvelous handiwork?” *ibid.*, pp 59-60

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp 51-53

opposed to unmindful imposition¹⁰⁴, the organic relationship of law, lawlessness and law-abidance¹⁰⁵, and transparency in obligatory legislation¹⁰⁶. He outlines that “the purpose of instituting laws is to prevent that which disturbs order, disrupts the structure of society, harms individual interests and detracts from public welfare”¹⁰⁷, and that by necessity they are driven by need identified by a nation, and further that the ‘conditions of nations’ are a collective reflection of knowledge “in accordance with [their] power of theoretical investigation and level of thought”¹⁰⁸, continuing that “unless fortune provides the chance to ascend to a higher level of rational examination and a more elevated plane of thought”¹⁰⁹. As he grapples with twin aspects of human motivation to abide by law, and the motivations and failures of those who impose it¹¹⁰, ‘fortune’ can arrive in the form of the “divine hand of Providence”¹¹¹ or be deliberately facilitated through effective leadership which includes education¹¹². France is given as the exemplar of a nation who benefited from a “shift” from an “absolute” to a “restricted” monarchy ending as an admirable “free republic”¹¹³.

Hence it is easy to jump to this as an argument for secularisation, that is the ‘superficial’ conclusion. Rather than viewing his reference to France being a call for secularism, the focus can fall to the example of France raising its own levels of consciousness, as “by learning what their true obligations were, they were able to overcome all the outside forces that had stood between them and attainment of their desires”¹¹⁴. This deeper reading is supported firstly by the fact that he is absolutely clear that France’s achievement of the right ‘condition of nation’ is due to one of those changes in fortune: “the increase in their level of thought and their new awareness of the need to ascend to a state higher than their present one”¹¹⁵. Secondly, there is a very powerful introduction to *Laws* explicitly stating that “God the sublime entrusted humanity two powers”¹¹⁶, the practical and theoretical (i.e. action and thought), on the basis we might use them and thus reach our “perfection”, with the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p51

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p53

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp52-53

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p52

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p51

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp 50-52

¹¹¹ Ibid., p52

¹¹² Ibid., p53

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p 53. Arguments for ‘religious democracy’ have been continued by a number of leading scholars, today’s most notable example being Souroush see n5, this article and K. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi Foody, chapter 8, ‘Islam, Democracy and Religious Pluralism’, *Islam and dissent in postrevolutionary Iran: Abdolkarim Souroush, religious politics and democratic reform*, IBT Tauris, (2012)

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p53

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p50

“perfection of the first dependent on the perfection of the second”¹¹⁷. This is a revealing statement with obvious philosophical, Sadrian and Sufi¹¹⁸ roots. It is both a disclosure of ‘Abduh himself¹¹⁹ and establishes an umbrella for *Laws* being *de facto* about raising awareness of the individual within society so that society itself is raised¹²⁰. Furthermore, in stating that the French learnt of their “true obligations”, the link back to the principles of *Unity* occurs.

There, the ‘true obligations’ of the Muslim are those set down in the Qur’an, that “espoused the high role of reason”¹²¹. Egypt’s ascension from its ignorance and repression is not to copy the Europeans, but to become re-empowered by proper understanding of their own duty as Muslims, that being one of *ijtihad*. Reversing the decline of ‘elevated thought’ it is thus the job of education for ‘Abduh, to achieve this and more importantly the role of governance to both hold itself to these principles and lead the general populace in their practical application as the means to “ascend to a higher level of rational examination and a more elevated plane of thought”¹²², and that without such a combination nations remain paralysed by the past. His programme¹²³ had three core aims: the reform of Islam to its true roots, those he saw not just aligned with modernisation but proactively facilitated from a Quranic basis, reconsideration of the Arabic language for effectively communicating that position, and clarity of people’s rights in relation to their government¹²⁴. Noting somewhat sadly, “these muslims who stand on the threshold of science see their faith as a kind of old garment in which it is embarrassing to appear, while those who deceive themselves that they have pretension to be religious and orthodox believers in its doctrines regard reason as devil and science as supposition”¹²⁵. ‘Abduh lived in an era of suffocating British colonial rule whilst at the same time admiring Europe’s commitment to scientific progress in education, science and moral values and matched only with certitude that the Qur’an has the answers, but there is neither

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p50

¹¹⁸ Ibn Sina (d.1037) first extrapolated Aristotelian and Neo-platonic concepts of perfection as the purpose of the soul into an Islamic framework, ideas which have been consistently interwoven through Sufism and Islamic mystical philosophy for example in Ibn al-Arabi’s (d.1240) *Fusus al Hikam*, synthesised most strongly in Mulla Sadra’s (d.1641) theosophy, see n13, this article

¹¹⁹ See n12-14, this article

¹²⁰ Remarkably similar arguments have been made by Sayyid Hossein Nasr, ISLAM, SCIENCE AND MUSLIMS Sayyid Hossein Nasr in Conversation with Muzaffar Iqbal, *Islam & Science*, Vol. 1 (June 2003) No. 1 pp 5 -27

¹²¹ ‘Adduh, n1, this article, p58

¹²² Ibid., p51

¹²³ “Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s programme, according to his own statement was: 1. the reform of the Muslim religion by bringing it back to its original condition; 2. the renovation of the Arabic language; 3. the recognition of the rights of the people in relation to the government”, Schacht, J, ‘Muḥammad ‘Abduh’, In P. Bearman (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, Brill, (2012)

¹²⁴ ‘Adduh, n1, this article, p51

¹²⁵ Ibid., p60

fundamentalism nor ‘Westernisation’ here. For ‘Abduh, Modernisation is wholly and truly an Islamic affair, from the educated individual, through society and beyond.

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