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EXERCISING IMPARTIALITY TO FAVOR ARISTOTLE
AVICENNA AND "THE ACCOMPLISHED ANATOMISTS"
(*AŞHÂB AL-TAŞRÎH AL-MUḤASSİLŪNA*)

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Abstract. This article analyses Avicenna's *Ḥayawān* III, 1, which deals with the well-known disagreement between physicians and philosophers on the origination of blood vessels (arteries and veins) and nerves. However, the proposed analysis is not limited to this chapter and its main topic. The more general purpose of this article is to reconstruct the psycho-medical context in which Avicenna's exposition lies, that is, the soul's oneness and the consequent conditions for body ensoulment (i. e. the soul's need for a primary, unitary attachment to the body through the heart and the cardiac pneuma). The article then outlines the strategy through which Avicenna presents medical positions (heart, brain, and liver are all on an equal footing) that challenge his (and Aristotle's) anatomical model, which is coherent with his theory of the soul. In this connection, firstly, the article shows how Avicenna takes physicians' arguments apart in a philosophical context (he usually points at their logical shortcomings). Then, it clarifies the contribution of anatomy to determine the conditions of body ensoulment and, ultimately, how to reconcile medical practice with philosophical truths, if need be.

Résumé. Cet article analyse *Ḥayawān* III, 1 d'Avicenne, qui traite du désaccord bien connu entre médecins et philosophes sur l'origine des vaisseaux sanguins (artères et veines) et des nerfs. Cependant, l'analyse proposée ne se limite pas à ce chapitre et à son sujet principal. L'objectif plus général de cet article est de reconstruire le contexte psycho-médical dans lequel s'inscrit l'exposé d'Avicenne, c'est-à-dire l'unicité de l'âme et les conditions qui en découlent pour l'animation du corps (c'est-à-dire le besoin de l'âme d'un attachement primaire et unitaire au corps à travers le cœur et le pneuma cardiaque). L'article expose ensuite la stratégie par laquelle Avicenne présente des positions médicales (le cœur, le cerveau, et le foie sont tous aussi cruciaux) qui remettent en cause son modèle anatomique (et celui d'Aristote), lequel est cohérent avec sa théorie de l'âme. À cet égard, l'article montre tout d'abord comment Avicenne démonte les arguments des médecins dans un contexte philosophique (il souligne généralement leurs lacunes logiques). Ensuite, il clarifie l'apport de l'anatomie pour déterminer les conditions de l'animation du corps et, finalement, comment concilier la pratique médicale avec les vérités philosophiques, le cas échéant.

Aristo (011899)

Ibn Sina (090637)

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sis of which firmer conclusions can be drawn. These principles, however, are given to the physician by the philosopher, and this is Avicenna's insuperable bias. In the end, the concept of a medical discipline subordinated to higher (philosophical) principles inevitably ends up favoring the philosophical perspective (in other words, that of Aristotle). The topics that set philosophers against physicians are not (and cannot be) equally tackled by both groups because, ultimately, these are issues that are incumbent upon the philosopher to investigate with his own principles and theoretical tools. In the case of the origination of blood vessels and nerves, the philosophical principle at the basis of the investigation is the soul's oneness, in turn necessitating a single bodily organ to which it is firstly attached, that is, the heart. The formative faculty of the soul in the semen shapes the cardiac matter of the embryo, in which the principle of life primarily inheres. Then, all the other bodily organs are shaped by the formative faculty together with the vital faculty in the heart. Ultimately, all organs depend on the heart and derive from it, although it would be hazardous to speak of physical origination.

Philosophical principles thus guide the anatomist's hand, who cannot but corroborate the philosophical assumptions from which his activity has begun.

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AVICENNA ON HUMAN SELF-INTELLECTION

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Abstract. I argue that Avicenna allows for at least one case where we can intellectually grasp a particular individual as such: Each human intellect can intellect itself as numerically this one intellect without relying on any general notion or concept. This is because humans can retain their individuality when separated from their bodies. I discuss passages in which Avicenna appears to affirm and deny that humans can intellect themselves. I conclude that in contrast to the self-awareness that Avicenna showcases in his "floating human" thought experiment, human self-intellection is a rare achievement, and I explain how it differs from the more perfect self-intellection of the divine intellect.

Résumé. Je soutiens qu'Avicenne admet au moins un cas où il est possible pour notre intellect de saisir un individu particulier en soi : chaque intellect humain peut s'appréhender comme étant numériquement lui-même sans avoir recours à une notion ou un concept général. Car l'être humain préserve son identité lorsqu'il est séparé de son corps. Nous discutons des textes où Avicenne semble affirmer et nier qu'un être humain peut s'appréhender lui-même. Nous concluons que, contrairement à la conscience de soi qu'invoque Avicenne dans l'expérience de pensée de «l'homme volant», l'auto-intellection humaine est une réalisation rare et nous expliquons ce qui la distingue de l'auto-intellection plus complète de l'intellect divin.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Avicenna and many other Aristotelians, we grasp general concepts by means of our intellect, and we connect to particular individuals by means of our senses.¹ How clear cut is this division? Can we also intellect individuals in their individuality? That is, can we intellectually connect to numerically one individual, without identifying it exclusively in general terms? Would we be able to intellectually grasp the difference between two exactly similar individuals? I will argue that Avicenna allows for at least one such case: Each human intellect can intellect itself as numerically one and distinct, and when it does so, it does not rely on any general notion or concept.²

¹ Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Brill, 2014), p. 344.