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The Ontological Link between Body and Soul in Bahmanyār's *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*

Meryem Sebti

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In his book, *Validated knowledge (Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl)*, Bahmanyār Ibn al-Marzubān (d.458/1066), a first generation pupil of Avicenna, intended “to ascertain the validity” of the teacher’s philosophy following the arrangement of the *Dāneshnāme-ye Elābī (al-Ḥikma al-‘Alā’iyya)*. — However, in the part devoted to the study of the soul, which is the fourth section (*bāb*) of the second *maqāla* of the third book of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* he follows principally the structure of the *Kitāb al-Nafs* of the *Shifā’*, as I have shown elsewhere.¹

The three fundamental principles of Avicenna’s and Bahmanyār’s psychology concerning the ontological link between body and soul are the following:

- 1 There is only one human nature common to all men.
- 2 The soul does not pre-exist the body.
- 3 Things are distinct numerically in two different manners, either because each one of them belongs to a distinct species, or because multiplicity is an accident added to the essence owing to matter. Or, as Bahmanyār puts it:

“The human soul does not exist separate from bodies and then appear subsequently in a body. First, this is because one single thing cannot be separate and associated [with matter], as you know. Secondly, the multiplication (*takattur*) of the individuals of the species ‘soul’ is due to the qualities which lend it its individual characters (*mushakkbhiṣṣāt*): and these are extraneous, attached, and necessary concomitant accidents. The extraneous accidents occur to a thing through the mediation of matter. And the attached [accidents] are attached due to a temporal beginning; thus they come into existence. Therefore, the soul is preceded by matter.”²

I warmly thank Michael Chase for having kindly revised my English.

¹ Meryem Sebti, “Intellection, imagination et aperception de soi dans *le Livre du Résultat (kitāb al-Taḥṣīl)* de Bahmanyār Ibn al-Marzubān”, *Chōra* 3/4 (2006): 189–210. See also Jules Janssens’ “Bahmanyār Ibn Marzubān: a faithful Disciple of Ibn Sīnā?”, in *Before and After Avicenna*, ed. D. Reisman (Leiden-Boston: E.J. Brill, 2003), 177–197.

² Book III, *maqāla* 2, chap. 14, p. 823. All my references are to the edition of M. Muṭahharī, 2nd printing, (Tehran: Intishārāt-I Dānishgāh Tihārān, 1996). *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* is divided into three books, Logic, Metaphysics, and the Study of the Dispositions of the Essences of Beings (*aḥwāl a’yān al-mawjūdāt*).

However, despite the fact that Bahmanyār borrows these fundamental ontological principles from Avicenna, and reproduces the general structure of the *Kitāb al-naḥs*, he carries out some important modifications: first of all, the part devoted to the internal senses in the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* is more important than the one dedicated by Avicenna to this topic in his book. Secondly, the chapter on the theoretic intellect and the cogitative faculty belongs to the fifth part of the *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ* and is devoted to the immortal part of the human soul, the intellect- whereas, in the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, Bahmanyār includes this chapter in the part dedicated to the internal senses. Third, chapter 13 of Bahmanyār's treatise concerning the faculties of the soul, entitled "enumeration of the psychological faculties by classification", corresponds to chapter 5 of the first part of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-naḥs*. The study of the psychological faculties is thus studied by Avicenna in the part of his book devoted to the relationship between body and soul, while Bahmanyār studies it in the part dedicated to noetics.

The modifications introduced by Bahmanyār in the structure of the *Kitāb al-naḥs* of the *Šifāʾ* are meaningful: they reveal that he confers more importance upon the topic of sense knowledge, and also that he reduces the strict separation made by Avicenna between sense and intellectual knowledge, and finally that the question of the immortality of the soul is not as crucial for him as it was for the master. The question of the immortality of the soul is indeed a cornerstone of Avicenna's psychology, insofar as it influences dramatically his doctrine of knowledge. He considers that rational activity does not depend exclusively on corporeal faculties: rational human soul does not need necessarily the sensitive faculties to exercise its rational activity³; and this noetic principle founds the possibility of the survival of the rational soul after the death of the body. Considering now his psychological doctrine, he also carries out a strict distinction between corporeal sensitive faculties and rational incorporeal ones⁴. The affirmation of

Each book is also divided into several *maqālāt*. I refer only to the book and to the chapter. The most extensive development of Avicenna's theory of human soul is to be found in his *Al-Shifāʾ, Kitāb al-Naḥs*, eds. G. Anawati and S. Zayd, (Cairo, 1975). Concerning this specific issue, cf. V, 3, p. 198: "We say that human souls do not exist separated from bodies and then appear subsequently in them. This is so because human souls are similar with regard to species and concept. (. . .) They are not different with regard to quiddity and form, because their form is one". On the issue of the individuation of the soul by the body, see also the end of this chapter, particularly, p. 200.

³ For Avicenna, some men have a specific capacity called *ḥads* (intuition), which allow them to receive intellectual forms from the active intellect without the help of sensitive faculties. On the issue of *ḥads* (intuition), which is an intellectual intuition, see D. Gutas, "Intuition and Thinking: The Evolving Structure of Avicenna's Epistemology", in R. Wisnovsky (ed.), *Aspect of Avicenna*, Princeton, 2001, p. 1–138.

⁴ One of the key principles of Avicenna's epistemology is the following: only what is material can apprehend what is material, and what is immaterial can only be apprehended by an immaterial entity or faculty, see. *Al-Šifāʾ, Kitāb al-naḥs*, V, 2, p. 187. He states in his *Metaphysics (Šifāʾ, Ilāhiyyāt)*: "We have shown in other books that each sensible representation and each imaginative representation is apprehended inasmuch as it is either a sensory or imaginative representation by an organ that is divisible", see Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, ed. M. Marmura, Provo, Utah, 2005, VIII, 6, p. 288.

those two principles has an important doctrinal consequence: the unity of the psychic activity becomes difficult to assert. Aware of this issue, Bahmanyār will attempt to found this unity, trying throughout his treatise to explain how this unity is possible. He does so by reducing, on the one hand, the gap existing in Avicenna's theory of knowledge between sensitive and rational faculties, and by considering, on the other hand, that the foremost perception of the soul, the one that makes all the other possible, is self-consciousness, namely the reflexive movement by which the soul apprehends itself as the focus of all psychical activity — be it intellectual or sensitive.

I. The Doctrinal Background of Bahmanyār's Theory of the Soul

Bahmanyār starts the first chapter of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* by establishing that the names "soul" and "nature" do not refer to those realities as being substances, but insofar as they are the principles of activities, such as movement and perception. Thus, the study of the soul belongs to Physics:

"Soul and nature are two names for two things, not insofar as they are considered in their substances, but insofar as they are two principles for these activities. If we examine their categories, then we examine them as if they were essential accidents and not constitutive ones, as we have already mentioned in the Book of Demonstration. For this reason, the study of those principles belongs to Physics; because their examination insofar as they are a principle of motion, is an examination insofar as they both have a relation to matter and motion⁵."

We already find in Avicenna's *Kitāb al-naḥs*⁶ this distinction between the study of the soul insofar as it is the principle of movement and perception, and hence belongs to Physics and the study of the soul as a separate substance, and consequently as an object of Metaphysics. Avicenna also starts his *Kitāb al-naḥs* with this distinction.

However, Bahmanyār does not follow the master in the rest of this chapter. In the first chapter of the first book of his *Kitāb al-naḥs*, Avicenna makes a distinction between the human soul, on the one hand, and the vegetative and the animal soul on the other hand. After defining the soul "as the first perfection of a natural organic body capable of accomplishing the activities of life" (*kamālun auwalun li-ḡismin ṭabī' iyyin ālī labu an yaḥ' ala af' āla al-ḥayāt*)⁷, he makes clear that having given this definition, we still do not know whether the soul is a substance or not. He then establishes the substantiality of the vegetative and the animal souls by demonstrating that the soul cannot be a mere accident otherwise the bodies of living beings would not vanish when the soul vanishes. On the

⁵ Book III, *maqāla* 2, chap. 1, p. 724.

⁶ "We call 'soul' every principle from which proceed different activities that are neither uniform nor voluntary. This word is a name for this thing not with regard to its substance, but with regard to a relation it possesses". *Al-Šifā'*, *Kitāb al-naḥs*, I, 1, p. 5.

⁷ *Al-Šifā'*, *Kitāb al-naḥs*, I, 1, p. 10: this definition is taken up from Aristotle's *De Anima*, II, 1, 412 b 7.

other hand, to demonstrate the substantiality of the human soul, he invokes the argument called “the argument of the flying man” which concludes the first chapter of the *Kitāb al-naḥs*⁸. Avicenna concludes that the human soul is immaterial from the possibility man has to know himself directly and immediately without any recourse to sense perception. He deduces from the possibility of knowing its own self without knowing anything of its own bodily appearance, and without having ever heard about its own body, that the soul is necessarily an immaterial substance⁹.

Instead, Bahmanyār first determines that living bodies do have a “specific existence” (*ḥuṣūṣiyya wuḡūd*) and thus, “a specific activity” (*fa-in mā laysa labu ḥuṣūṣiyya wuḡūd lam yakun labu fil ḥāṣ*). He goes on to define the union between body and soul as a “unity in actuality” (*waḥdatu bi-l-fil*). He does not make a distinction between the human soul and the other species of souls nor does he take up Aristotle’s definition of the soul as the perfection of the body. He does not use the flying man argument to found the substantiality of the soul. To establish the substantiality of the soul (as soul and not as human soul), he uses the avicennian theory of corporeal forms. This theory is already clearly laid out in the metaphysical part of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*¹⁰.

For Avicenna, as well as for Bahmanyār, prime matter, *hayūlā*, is not made up of potentiality and actuality, but is a mere potentiality. When we say that it is a substance, it is only in a negative way, because it does not inhere in a substrate. Only the union between prime matter and corporeal form is a composition of potentiality and actuality: this composition is the condition of the existence of the material concrete being. Prime matter, or *hayūlā*, never exists without corporeal form, just as corporeal form never exists without prime matter. The corporeal form bestows the actuality on matter, namely the disposition of divisibility. The body as such does not have three dimensions in act: it can receive those dimensions only from the corporeal form, which is subsistent in act¹¹.

Corporeal form cannot be separated from the matter to which it gives the disposition of divisibility: this disposition constitutes the first characteristic of corporeity. The constitution of the body is achieved only when another form is added: this second form is the natural or specific form. The distinction between the specific form and the corporeal form can only be made in the realm of logic not in reality. When we consider

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 13. On the flying man argument, see Michael Marmura, “Avicenna’s ‘Flying man’ in Context”, in *The Monist* Vol. 69, No. 3, The Nature of the Soul (July, 1986), p. 383–395; see also, D. L. Black, “Avicenna on Self-Awareness and knowing that One knows”, in *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition: Science, Logic and Epistemology and their interactions*, ed. By S. Rahman, T. Street, and H. Tahiri, (Dordrecht: Springer Science, 2008), p. 63–87, and Lukas Muehlethaler, “Ibn Kammūna (D. 683/1284) on the Argument of the Flying man in Avicenna’s *Ishārāt* and al-Suhrawardī’s *Talwihāt*”, in *Avicenna and his Legacy. A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. By Y. Tzvi Langermann, (Turnhout: Brepols 2009), p. 179–203.

⁹ For the examination of this argument in the first chapter of *Kitāb al-Naḥs*, see Meryem Sebti, *Avicenne. L’âme humaine*, Paris, 2000, p. 117–124.

¹⁰ Book II, chap. 11, p. 331–339; chap. 12, p. 339–345 and also chap 13, p. 346–350.

¹¹ On this issue, see *Šifā’, Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 2–4, ed. Marmura, p. 48–70.

a living being, an animal for example, its soul, by which its body lives, perceives and moves, is also the form that makes its body what it is. It is thought possible to separate the generic idea of the body by means of estimative: which means to separate the idea of a matter that can receive the three dimensions from the idea of a house or of an animal: “Corporeal matter does not exist separate from form. Matter, hence, is rendered subsistent in act through form. Thus, when matter is abstracted [from form] in the estimative faculty, then what was done to it is [something] that does not hold in [external] existence”¹².

Therefore, for Avicenna the corporeal form doesn't bestow genuine actuality. Only corporeal matter (that is prime matter + corporeal form) to which the specific form has been added is in act. Avicenna writes in his *Metaphysics*: “It is thus impossible that matter should exist in actuality unless it is rendered subsistent by corporeal form”¹³. A singular being is subsistent in act through a single form.

Bahmanyār takes up this avicennian doctrine in his book, and states in the metaphysical part:

“Thus, it is clear that it is not true that the corporeal form is one in the bodies in which natural forms succeed one another. If this were so, it would be necessary that natural forms were accidents. It is also not possible that corporeal form constitutes matter alone nor that natural form constitutes matter alone. Therefore, we made clear that one matter cannot be constituted by two forms, but that it is necessary that corporeal form is first constituted by natural form, so that corporeal form is specified, and then matter is constituted. Body is a third notion which is unified by those three things: its unification is actual and not hypothetical¹⁴.”

In the fourth part of the *kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* devoted to the soul, Bahmanyār returns to this issue. He examines corporeity and its relationship to a unique substantial form. Unity in act, which is the unity that belongs to a living animal or to a vegetable, cannot be the unity of one of their parts, because those parts are necessarily in potentiality:

“Thus, it is clear that animals and plants have a particularity with regard to their bodies that does not belong to each one of their constituents. Thus, the constituents exist in them in potentiality, because for every thing whose unity is in actuality, its constituents are then in potentiality; in the same manner as the [number] ten is in actuality while its units exist in it in potentiality. The body may have a unity in actuality due to the conjunction and to the multiplicity of the constituents which are in potentiality. Thus, in contrast, it is not a unity by conjunction but a unity subsequent to the other sorts of unity we have already mentioned; so that every part is part of a single man or a single tree, and not part

¹² *Šifā', Ilābiyyāt*, II, 3, p. 62–63, trans. Marmura.

¹³ *Šifā', Ilābiyyāt*, II, 3, p. 59 trans. Marmura.

¹⁴ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, II, 11, p. 337.

of the conjunction of a single quantity. The unity which belongs to it is a unity of composition, or rather a unity in the sense of a relation to a single principle. Then, unity is in actuality¹⁵.”

The unity of the body is bestowed by a principle which orders the different elements toward one unique end (*ilā gāya wāḥida*). The cause of the unity is then an efficient cause as well as a final cause. This cause, for the living beings, is the soul:

“Thus, pure corporeity does not exist. The only thing that exists, as you know, is a body which is fire or a celestial sphere or a tree or a man. Every body has a natural constitutive form. Now, the constituent of the substance which is a body is a substance, hence, soul is a substance. When soul vanishes it is not true that this body remains existent, as well as when the form of fire vanishes, it is not true that the corporeity of fire remains¹⁶.”

Bahmanyār has already demonstrated in the Metaphysical part of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* that the entity that bestows actuality upon a body, which is a substance, must also be a substance:

“It is impossible that the body composed from matter and pure corporeal form would be something subsistent in actuality. Thus, such a body would be something like a genus, although it is not a real genus. Hence, it is necessary that [this body] is constituted and strengthened by something in actuality; something that has the function of the specific difference. What constitutes it in actuality must by necessity be integrated into its constitution, and it is the substance. This constituent is necessarily a substance, and this is what is called ‘natural form’¹⁷.”

Thus, the avicennian doctrine of the corporeal form allows Bahmanyār, in the first chapter of the psychological part of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, to establish the unity of the principle of living bodies and to establish its substantiality. The fact that Bahmanyār has omitted Avicenna’s definition of the soul as the perfection of a living body is meaningful. The concept of perfection is closely linked to the concept of actuality. The definition of the soul by the notion of perfection does not allow us to establish the substantiality of the human soul, as we have seen. It is only a generic definition of the soul. The doctrine of the corporeal form, in contrast, raises the issue of the unity of the union between prime matter, corporeal form and specific form, and does bring a solution to it. This is precisely the main concern of Bahmanyār’s psychological treatise: to provide a philosophical foundation for the actuality of the unity of two distinct substances: body and soul.

Indeed, the topic of the unity of the union of soul and body is one of the most critical of Avicenna’s psychology. At an ontological level, the doctrine of the unity of the corporeal form resolves this problem. However, knowing that the soul is the unifying

¹⁵ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* III, 1, p. 725–726.

¹⁶ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* III, 1, p. 727.

¹⁷ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, II, 11, p. 337.

principle of the living being, we still don't know the essence of this substance. The immaterial soul is distinct from its faculties or powers. For both philosophers, the soul is merely the principle of all its activities which are accomplished by the mediation of the faculties. Rigorously, the soul is not identical with any of its faculties, not even with the intellect. Activity does not belong to the essence of the soul, but is added to it like, existence, multiplicity or, unity: it is concomitant (*lāzim*) added to its essence.

Bahmanyār follows Avicenna in the sense that for him, the nature of the essence determines activity and not vice versa: it is not because a substance has intellection that it is immaterial; it is because it is immaterial that it has intellection. Activity is subsequent to the essence¹⁸. As Bahmanyār says in the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*:

“The soul has no activity by essence. All its activities are only due to its faculties”¹⁹

This ontological principle has an important consequence for the methodology of the psychological study: we cannot know the substance of the soul once we know its activity. We cannot infer from the fact that the soul has intellection that it is a separate and immaterial substance, because intellection is the act of one of the powers of the soul, namely the intellect. Bahmanyār, as Avicenna, clearly distinguishes the soul from its rational power or faculty. The human soul is an immaterial self-subsistent substance. Therefore, it can not be defined negatively as an intellectual power because an intellectual power is a mere potentiality that gradually acquires actuality, while the soul is a self-subsistent power; the intellectual power comes from it but cannot be identified with its essence:

“Know that the human soul, about which we said that it is one and that it manages those faculties, has the potency to grasp the intelligibles and to manage the corporeal faculties by nature, not by acquisition. However, the true essence of the soul is not that it has the potency to exercise both those [activities]. Indeed, ‘potency’ is a notion of privation, while souls exist in actuality. If the true essence of the soul was something in potentiality, then it could not act. It is thus necessary

¹⁸ The distinction between substance and its act can be found in Plotinus and in the Arabic *So called Theology of Aristotle*. For Plotinus, every spiritual substance being absolutely simple can merely be the cause of a single act. The question about how it is possible for an absolutely simple substance — as soul is- to be the principle of several acts is raised in the *So-Called Theology of Aristotle*, see *Uṭulūḡiyā Aristātālīs*, in *Aflūḡīn 'inda-l-'Arab*, ed. A. Badawī, Koweit, 1977, p. 32. The anonymous Commentary on the *De Anima* (see R. Arnzen, *Eine Verlorene Spätantike Paraphrase in Arabischer und Persischer Überlieferung*, Leiden, Brill, 1998), uses this distinction between the soul as a substance and its own act to establish that the soul is immortal. By its act, the soul can separate itself from matter. This capacity proves necessarily that the substance of the soul is immaterial, because the act cannot be superior to the substance, see Arnzen's edition, p. 219–221. Arnzen notes that this argument can be found in John Philoponus' commentary upon *Aristotle's De Anima* as well as in Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. G. Endress has also stressed that the origin of this argumentation is to be found in Philoponus, see Endress, “The New and improved Platonic Theology. Proclus Arabus and Arabic Islamic Philosophy”, in *Proclus et la Théologie platonicienne*, Actes du Colloque International de Louvain, (13–16 mai 1998), Louvain — Paris, 2000, p. 553–570, p. 568.

¹⁹ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 8, p. 783.

that it has the potency to exercise both those [activities] due to something that is added to its own essence; rather, by two dispositions: by one of them, the soul receives the benefit of the rational forms, as we will show later, and this disposition is called 'theoretical intellect'. By the other, the soul receives benefit from the body and manages its faculties, and it is called 'practical intellect' because it is through its intermediary that the soul exercises its activity. It is called 'intellect' only insofar as it is a disposition of the soul's essence and not a disposition in matter²⁰."

In this doctrinal context, it is not possible to know the essence of the soul from the activity of its faculties²¹. To know the soul, one must know its own substance. On the other hand, this ontological principle raises another issue concerning the unity of the psychical activity. All the physiological, perceptive and intellective faculties proceed from the soul which is conceived as a separate and self-subsistent substance (the soul is qualified as "*aṣl*" or "*sinḥ*", both meaning "origin" and "root")²². Thus, how is it possible to conceive the unity of psychic activity, when this activity is due to a large number of faculties, some corporeal and the others immaterial?

II. The Self-Consciousness Doctrine and the Unity of the Psychical Activity

Now that we have sketched the doctrinal background of Bahmanyār, we can follow his argumentation from the beginning. Having established in the first chapter of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* that perception and movement cannot be due to the body, but to something called "soul", Bahmanyār then shows that a unifying principle unites both substances. In the second chapter, he then tries to establish that this unifying principle cannot be a body or a corporeal mixture (*mizāğ*). Because corporeal mixture is capable of augmentation and diminution, while the psychic forms (*qiwā nafsāniyya*) and the soul are not, then the soul and the psychic forms cannot be a mixture:

²⁰ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 9, p. 789.

²¹ It is worth emphasizing that in the passage I have just quoted, Bahmanyār considers the soul's faculties as, being "temporary dispositions" of the soul, while in another passage, he seems to consider them as being "permanent dispositions" (*malaka*), see III, 15, p. 832: "We have shown that the intellectual forms insofar as they are the objects of an intellectual apprehension are preserved according to the way we already mentioned. This is because the soul possesses a permanent disposition through which it receives the benefit of the intellectual forms. It is well known that this permanent disposition is incorruptible by essence and does not have any cause of corruption after its separation [from the body]."

²² In the *Taḥṣīl*, one finds the qualification of the soul as "*aṣl*" chap. 14, p. 823 and as "*sinḥ*", chap. 15, p. 829. These two notions are present in Avicenna's psychological texts. Avicenna considers the soul as an absolutely immaterial and simple substance, or as an origin or a root from which all the faculties proceed. See for example, *Al-Ta'liqāt 'alā Ḥawāṣṣi Kitāb al-naḥṣ*, where Avicenna qualifies the soul as "*aṣl*" in several places (in *Aristū 'inda-l-'Arab*, ed. Badawi, Koweit, 1978, p. 90 for example. The fragment explained by Avicenna corresponds to *De anima*, I, 5, 411 b 5. See also *Šifā', Kitāb al-Nafs*, where he qualifies the soul as "*aṣl*" and "*sinḥ*", p. 206).

“Furthermore, you already know what mixture is, and that the form is not a mixture, because we already spoke about that. Mixture receives augmentation and diminution, but psychic faculties do not receive augmentation and diminution. Thus, they are not a mixture²³.”

Besides, given that man can grasp the intelligibles, and that the entity that perceives the intelligibles cannot be material, this entity that unifies all psychic activity cannot be a mixture:

“Man has a faculty that grasps the intellectual forms. We have already shown that the entity that grasps the intellectual forms cannot be corporeal. Thus, it is not correct that this faculty is a mixture²⁴.”

At this level of his argumentation, Bahmanyār introduces the notion of self-consciousness. Man has the consciousness of himself from the beginning to the end of his existence, while the mixture is unstable, and subject to modifications. On the other hand, man is identical to himself throughout his existence; therefore, the principle that maintains this identity must be stable. Then, he sets forth the argument which is the very core of his psychological doctrine. It is the argument that establishes that the soul has consciousness of itself by itself: this consciousness is identical with the soul's very existence:

“Furthermore, man has consciousness of himself from the beginning of his existence to his end as a single thing. Now, mixture is changing through temporal and accidental changes. Thus, [man] is not a mixture. If the pneuma's motion was due to a faculty related to mixture, then the motion would have only one direction, because one mixture has only one consequence²⁵.”

In the first part of the argument, Bahmanyār establishes that man has consciousness of himself throughout his existence as being the same, while mixtures are changing and unstable. Then, if man himself were a mixture, he could not have consciousness of himself as being one and the same throughout his existence. Besides, if the motion of the spirit (*rūḥ*) were a mixture, then this motion would be always in the same direction, because the mixture must be in one direction. The argument based on the soul's self-consciousness allows Bahmanyār to confirm the fact that the unifying principle is not a mixture. Then Bahmanyār introduces the argument that he qualifies as a « *bayān tanbīhī* » (an admonitory demonstration):

“He has established [the existence] of the soul in an admonitory demonstration by saying: it is not possible that man's self consciousness is acquired through

²³ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 2, p. 729.

²⁴ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 2, p. 733.

²⁵ *Ibid.*. In the *Mubāḥaṭāt*, we find a passage where a disciple asks to Avicenna how he can establish with certainty that what is perceived when we have consciousness of ourselves is not a mixture, see *Mubāḥaṭāt*, ed. M. Bīdārfar, Qum, 1371Š/1992, p. 243–244, n° 217. The same question is repeated p. 366, n° 1140.

acquisition and as something coming from outside so that, if self-consciousness of his existence did not come from one of his external senses, he would not have consciousness of himself. This is proved by the fact that if man does not know [the existence] of these organs, he still knows that he exists, and thus the known and the unknown are not one and the same thing. Man knows that what he is conscious of is not a heart nor a brain nor any of the organs. If man's self was one of the organs, then consciousness of this organ and self-consciousness would be one and the same thing. Now, the same thing cannot be from the same point of view the object of consciousness and not be the object of consciousness: things are not so. Thus, I know that I have a heart and a brain from a knowledge I acquired from audition and through experiences, but I do not acquire [from them] the fact that I know that I am myself²⁶."

Now that Bahmanyār has established that the unifying entity is a soul, he must ascertain its ontological status. However, identity between act and essence is possible only in God (Avicenna, *Šifā'*, *Metaphysics*, IX, 4)²⁷. Thus, since it is something that the soul possesses by itself, self-consciousness cannot be an act of the soul: it is ontologically identical with the soul's existence. This is why Bahmanyār adds just after the passage mentioned above:

"To sum up: he who believes that he has acquired self-consciousness from the senses is, in reality, an inanimate being. When you sleep, you have consciousness of what you are dreaming, but at the same time you do not have consciousness of anything belonging to your body. Thus, he who has consciousness of himself and that of which he has consciousness do not pertain to this whole [*i.e.* the totality of self-consciousness]²⁸."

For the human soul to exist and to have self-consciousness is the same thing. Self-consciousness is not an act added to the substance of the soul — we already saw that in that case this act would depend on a power, and would not belong to the soul itself. Bahmanyār stresses this important aspect of his doctrine throughout his treatise on the soul. For the human, self-consciousness is identical with its existence:

²⁶ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, II, p. 734–735. There is a very similar passage in the *Mubāḥaṭāt*, *Mubāḥaṭāt*, p. 59, n° 60 ("(. . .) Without dissection, the heart, the brain, the superior organ and the subordinate, none of them would be known. But before all that, [man] has consciousness of himself").

²⁷ *Šifā'*, *Ilābiyyāt*: "The first and essential act of the First Truth, however, is to intellectually apprehend His [own] essence, which in itself is the principle of the order of the good in existence. (. . .)The existence of what comes to exist by Him is by way a necessity of His existence and a necessary consequence of His existence — not [however] in [the sense] that His existence is for the sake of the existence of something other than Himself." ed. And transl. Marmura, p. 327.

²⁸ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 2, p. 735. This passage is also very similar to the following one from Avicenna's *Mubāḥaṭāt*: "(. . .) The judgement of such a man would be that of a mineral if he were to have consciousness of himself only when he opens his eyes for example. He would then see his external appearance, and then what he would have consciousness of would be himself. One does not apprehend anything, unless one has consciousness of himself as apprehending something", p. 58–59, n° 58.

“Furthermore, human soul has consciousness of itself. It is thus necessary that its existence be intellectual, as you know, so that its existence is the same as its perception of itself. For this reason, [the soul] never forgets its own self. As for the consciousness of consciousness of itself, it is equivalent to its existence. For this reason, it does not have consciousness of consciousness of itself. The situation concerning its consciousness of consciousness of itself is the same as when it grasps all the other things that it perceives from outside²⁹.” And he adds some pages later (chapter fifteen):

“Thus the life of the human soul, when we consider its essence, is nothing else than the perception of itself. For, perception of other things and their activities is due to corporeal faculties and intellectual faculties³⁰.”

The soul doesn't need any faculty to experience self-consciousness:

“Between [the soul] and itself there is no instrument, nor is there an instrument between it and its instrument; just as there is no instrument between itself and the fact that it apprehends intellectually, but this second case is absurd³¹.”

The soul, as a non-composed substance, has self-consciousness:

“If the soul were composite it would not have self-consciousness³².”

In the metaphysical part of his book, Bahmanyār has already shown that separated substances necessarily experience self-consciousness, and that this self-perception is identical with their existence:

“Given that the existence of the sensible and of the intelligible belongs by itself to the perceiver, and given that its existence, which belongs to the perceiver, is the same as its intelligibility or its perceptibility — as you already know — then it is not correct that that whose existence is not for itself is perceptible by itself. With regard to that which perceives itself, its existence is then necessarily the same as its self perception. Every thing whose existence is for itself has the perception of itself, since its existence is identical with its existence insofar as it is perceived. Thus, concerning things that perceive themselves, it is not correct [to think] that they are linked to matter, otherwise their existence would belong to something else. With regard to things that are separated from matter, they must perceive themselves, otherwise their existences would belong to something else. Everything that is

²⁹ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 12, p. 807–808. The distinction between self-consciousness and consciousness of this self-consciousness is also in Avicenna, see *al-Talīqāt*, where Avicenna returns to this discussion in several passages on this distinction. He establishes that while self-consciousness is innate, self-consciousness of self-consciousness is acquired, *al-Talīqāt*, ed. Badawi, Cairo, 1973, p. 30.

³⁰ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 15, p. 832.

³¹ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 12, p. 808. Avicenna states in the *Mubāḥaṭāt* that there is no intermediary (*mutawassit*) between soul and its consciousness of itself, see *Mubāḥaṭāt*, ed. M. Bidārfar, Qum, 1371Š/1992, n° 292, p. 120.

³² *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 15, p. 829.

veiled to itself because of the association with matter does not perceive itself. What confirms this is the fact that corporeal sensitive faculties like vision, touch, taste and smell do not perceive themselves³³.”

This principle had allowed Bahmanyār to establish the immateriality and the substantiality of the human soul in the metaphysical part of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*. His demonstration is based on the ontological principle according to which immaterial substances are transparent to themselves. As far as their reflexive act is concerned, the object and the subject of knowledge are identical. This reflexivity is specific to the immaterial substances, which do not depend on anything outside themselves (it is to be stressed that this principle is not easily compatible with a noetics in which— as in Avicenna’s and Bahmanyār’s doctrine concerning the human intellect — the intelligibles are received from outside). This ontological principle goes back to the neoplatonic *Kitāb al-īdāh li-arīṭūtālīs fī-l-ḥayr al-maḥḍ*³⁴.

The function of the argument of self-consciousness here is not to prove the substantiality of the soul. Instead, Bahmanyār’s main concern in the psychological part of the *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* is to found the unity of psychic activity, which, as we have stressed, is not easy to apprehend in an ontological system that conceives man as the result of the union of two different substances — one corporeal and the other immaterial — and in addition conceives the activity of this immaterial substance as due to numerous faculties added to its essence. Thus, we observe a shift in Bahmanyār’s psychological doctrine when we compare it to Avicenna’s. For Avicenna, the main concern is for the philosopher to found the immateriality and the separability of the human soul on the one hand, and to justify philosophically on the other hand the union between a corporeal substance — the body — and an immaterial substance — the soul; both of those issues being fundamental in the eschatological perspective that underlies Avicenna’s psychology. For Bahmanyār the main issue is the question of the unity of psychic activity, without which we cannot found the possibility of human knowledge.

This is the reason why, just after having evoked the argument of self-consciousness in the second chapter of the psychological part of the *Kitāb al-taḥṣīl*, Bahmanyār, to the following objection that asks: if the person who perceives his own self is immaterial why then do we say “I enter here and I went out from here,”³⁵ answers: “If someone objects: since what perceives itself is not a body, what is then the meaning of our saying: “I came in there and I went out there”?”

This objection stresses the difficulty in founding the unity of the person and of its psychic activity in a system where the soul is conceived as a separate principle, from

³³ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, II, chap. 1, p. 493–494.

³⁴ *Kitāb al-īdāh li-arīṭūtālīs fī-l-ḥayr al-maḥḍ*, in *Al-Aflātūniyyatu al-muḥḍaṭatu ‘inda-l-arab*, ed. Badawi, Koweit, 1977: “Every one who knows his essence comes back through fully to himself”, p. 16. See also, p. 10 and p. 27.

³⁵ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 2, p. 735.

which all the faculties emanate, the sensitive as well as the intellective. In his answer, Bahmanyār states that the act by which the human soul has consciousness of itself as both an intellective and a sensitive entity, is the act that founds the unity of psychic activity and the possibility of human knowledge:

“Also, we have the perception of our essence and we perceive our body simultaneously, and it is a natural simultaneity due to the fact that one single perception is composed from two perceptions, as if a single specie resulted from soul and body. As when you say ‘I wrote’ when only your hand wrote, or when you say ‘I saw’ when the seeing belongs only to the eye, or ‘I moved my foot while walking’ when this property belongs only to the foot. However, soul does not have an act by itself; it has activities only in so far as it has faculties. Its faculties are like natural dispositions for it and they are related to it by act, whereas potentiality is united to it. Entering and departure are due to the body by itself, but both are related to the principle that is the soul, given that it has a body³⁶.”

The reflexive act of the soul is indeed the act that unifies all of psychical activity. This is why Bahmanyār states again, after the passage above:

“You already know that the vegetative soul which is in man, along with the other faculties, are all faculties of a single principle. Thus, what is constitutive of the species of animals is the soul which is this [particular] faculty — I mean the vegetative one — and it is one of the faculties of man. Furthermore, soul is united with its faculties, rather, the totality of the whole [composed] with the body is one single thing in actuality³⁷.”

Or, as he writes farther, in a chapter devoted to the internal senses: self-consciousness unites the whole psychic activity:

“Even though the number of faculties is important, this is a multiplicity by accident³⁸ and it has a unity in act, as we said about the unity of what exists, and about the unity of the bodies of animals and plants, despite the fact that they have many organs and mixture in potentiality. For this reason, self-consciousness and consciousness of the body are one and the same thing³⁹.”

It is thus the reflexive act of the human soul that founds the unity and the individuality of the psychic activity. This is why, when Bahmanyār refutes the thesis of the transmigration of souls (*tanāsuh*), he again uses the argument of soul's reflexivity:

“Every body requires by itself a soul that comes to existence for it and is attached to it. So, there will be two souls for the same body or many souls, but every animated being has by itself the consciousness of one single soul, and it is the one that manages and governs the body that belongs to this animated being. If

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 735–736.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, III, 2, p. 738.

³⁸ I have chosen the reading of the critical apparatus.

³⁹ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 10, p. 797.

there were another soul there, it wouldn't have any function in this body, and the animated being wouldn't have any consciousness of this soul. Thus, this soul wouldn't have any relation with [this] body⁴⁰.”

In all these passages, Bahmanyār manages to base the unity of the psychical activity upon self-consciousness. He takes up Avicenna's doctrine according to which the soul is the self, that is, the unifying principle of all psychic activity⁴¹. However, this doctrine takes on another aspect in the pupil's psychology. In Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Šifā'*, the issue of the unity of psychological activity is raised only at the end of the fifth book and last book, devoted to noetics. In his book, Avicenna tries first to found the union between two radically distinct substances, body and soul and to preserve at the same time the immateriality of the human soul (this in book I), then, in book II and III, he enumerates the many activities of the soul, then in book IV, he describes the activity of the internal senses to raise, at last, in book V — dedicated to noetics — the issue of the unity of the psychic activity, whether sensitive or intellectual.

Bahmanyār drastically changes this account. The issue of the unity of psychic activity becomes crucial for him. He reinterprets this doctrine, and tries to overcome the difficulty of founding the unity of psychic activity in Avicenna's doctrine. This difficulty is mainly due to the fact that Avicenna establishes a very strict distinction between sensitive and intellectual activity on the one hand, and considers on the other hand that the soul is a separate and inalterable principle. The pupil will bend the sense of Avicenna's doctrine by reducing considerably the master's strict distinction between thinking in images and pure theoretical thinking. He establishes between the imaginative faculties and the intellective ones a much closer bond than Avicenna had ever done. If human soul can perceive itself, it is because, according to Bahmanyār, when I have the apperception of any activity of mine, even the most ordinary, like moving my foot for example, this representation sends me back to the foundational activity by which I perceive myself as the focus of all psychic activity. For Bahmanyār, the sensible image is an imitation of the intelligible form. He establishes in his theory of knowledge a close bond between the activity of the internal senses, particularly those of imagination and of the intellect. Going so far as to say that when the imagination ceases its own activity, then the intellect is not able to exercise its own proper activity. The affirmation of this reliance of the intellect on imagination is not compatible with Avicenna's theory of knowledge. We already saw that Avicenna considers in some cases that thanks to the disposition called “*ḥads*”, namely, « intuition », man is able to grasp the middle term of a syllogism without any help of the sensitive faculties. Bahmanyār, on the other hand, stresses the necessity of using imagination in the process of thinking⁴²:

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III, 14, p. 826.

⁴¹ *Šifā'*, *Kitāb al-naḥs*, V, 7, p. 226.

⁴² We can recognize an Aristotelian theory here, *De anima* 431 a 17 and *De memoria* 449b31.

“(. . .) As, in this life, our soul does not have the ability to apprehend intellectually all things together and all at once, as when we apprehend something intellectually, we have to associate imagination — but imagination does not imagine all things at once. It is well known that it is not possible for us to apprehend something intellectually unless we associate imagination, so that we imagine this thing also insofar as two perceptions are [united] in one perception, in such a way that neither of them can be separated from the other. It is similar for us, when we see something and when the unification of the two perceptions occurs in the common sense. We cannot distinguish in us what occurs in the organ of vision from what occurs in the common sense, unless we learn it from an intermediary: then we learn that vision happens through apprehension by the common sense. I do not say that what is apprehended intellectually insofar as it is apprehended intellectually, is apprehended by imagination, but [I say] that we apprehend by imagination what can be related by imagination, like geometrical forms. We also apprehend by imagination a name which cannot be related by imagination, like the name of the Necessary Existent by essence. Thus, when imagination becomes weak or is inactive and when we cannot imagine something, we cannot apprehend it intellectually, either. And it is not because the intellect becomes weak, as when we cannot apprehend something by our senses in this situation because the senses are inactive⁴³.”

Bahmanyār abolishes the strict distinction made by Avicenna between thinking by images and theoretical thought. By so doing, he tries to found the unity of psychic activity on a sounder basis than the master. For him, the sensitive image is not only a propaedeutic activity that disposes the intellect to receive the intelligible forms from the agent intellect; it is an indispensable phase of noetic thought:

“The intellectual faculty is not created perfect at first, rather, what exists in the beginning is a material intellect, and its other dispositions occur only through the mediation of the senses”⁴⁴

The importance bestowed by Bahmanyār to the senses in the process of thinking constitutes a dramatic shift compare to Avicenna’s theory of knowledge. It shows us that the disciple is not only faithful to the master but instead, having pinpointed the difficulties of his master’s theory, he tried to solve them by proposing a new paradigm of knowledge.

Conclusion

Taking up Avicenna’s developments on the topic of self-consciousness in the *Talīqāt* where we read that for human soul, self-consciousness and existence are identical, Bahmanyār states that the only activity that belongs to the soul qua substance is self-consciousness. This reflexive activity founds psychic activity, both sensitive and intellectual. Self-consciousness becomes the main element of Bahmanyār’s theory of

⁴³ *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, III, 11, p. 813–814.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, III, 15, p. 832.

knowledge. On the other hand, he reduces the hiatus present in Avicenna's psychological doctrine of knowledge between sensitive and intellectual faculties, and confers a predominant function to the faculty of imagination. It seems that Bahmanyār was prompted to carry out this shift in Avicenna's theory of knowledge in order to overcome the doctrinal problems due, on the one hand, to the strict ontological distinction between the substance of the soul and the substance of the body and, on the other side, to the rigorous separation between theoretical thinking and sensitive thinking. By placing the reflexivity of the soul at the core of his doctrine of knowledge, Bahmanyār prefigures the tremendous importance of this theory in the *iṣrāqī* philosophy.