CHAPTER 2

Avicenna and the phenomenon of self-awareness: the experiential basis of the flying man

Abū ʿAlī Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sīnā, the Latin Avicenna, is undoubtedly the most famous of the philosophers writing in Arabic and in the cultural context of Islam.[1] What is more, his fame is by and large deserved. By the death of the Persian polymath in 1037 following a series of failed attempts at curing an intestinal complaint, Arabic philosophy had reached a level of maturity at which the ancient inheritance had been digested into a system of thought that had proven, and would prove, capable of incorporating indigenous ideas, both critical and constructive, and was strong enough to penetrate most areas of Islamic learning.[2] In the subsequent centuries, authors in search of the *philosophical* stance would increasingly revisit Avicenna before Aristotle, the first teacher.

In this regard, it is relatively uncontroversial to state that Avicenna was a philosophical renovator. This, however, is not always readily apparent. Like most of his philosophical contemporaries, he holds on to the Peripatetic framework, with the Neoplatonic twist prominent in the late ancient philosophical schools, and does not aim at a shift of the philosophical paradigm. But within the received framework, he finds plenty of room to reformulate questions and responses, to develop arguments against novel problems, and to integrate new phenomena into the system.

The focus of the present study is precisely on such a point of new concerns. The type of self-awareness Avicenna introduces in his psychology did not have a ready-made locus of discussion in the Peripatetic framework. And in fact, as witnessed particularly by some of the posthumously collected correspondence investigated below, it did not always sit particularly well, and certainly not without significant conceptual revisions, in the systematic

[1] As a result, there are several introductions to his life, thought, and cultural milieu. For two excellent places to start, see Gutas 1988 and McGinnis 2010.

[2] For this "naturalization" of Avicennian thought, see Endress 1990, 30–37; Michot 2003a, 2003b; and Wisnovsky 2004b.

niche Avicenna envisioned for it. In light of the reluctance and straightforward opposition of some of his contemporaries, it seems warranted to say that the concept of self-awareness Avicenna introduces, as well as many of the means of describing its foundational phenomenon, was a philosophical novelty. This is not to say that he instigated the discussion out of nothing. Meryem Sebti[3] has unearthed arguments strikingly similar to Avicenna's in the so-called *Kitāb mu'ādhala al-nafs* ('The Book of the Castigation of Soul', a work of late ancient provenance that was likely a part of the Hermetic corpus),[4] and in the early ninth century Mu'tazilite Mu'ammar ibn 'Abbād al-Sulamī.[5] However, the systematic integration of these ideas into the philosophical tradition is, as far as I am able to tell, a genuinely Avicennian move. Avicenna's approach does have similarities with certain ancient discussions, for instance in Galen,[6] Plotinus and Augustine, but in the absence of obvious textual predecessors connections will remain speculative.

2.1 The purpose and basis of the flying man

Avicenna begins the discussion of the soul in the Shifā' by arguing that the soul is something the natural philosopher has to postulate due to the fact that she perceives life in the physical world about her. The animate processes and actions in which life appears to her – nutrition, growth, reproduction, perception and voluntary movement – are subject to such a great variation that they cannot be explained merely by recourse to the account of the general types of natural motion as described in physics. Thus, there must be a specific agent behind those actions, and that is what the natural philosopher calls soul (*nafs*).[7]

Having shown that there must be souls, Avicenna proceeds to consider the various traditional attempts at the definition of the term 'soul'. These considerations revolve around the necessity to make room in the definition for all the different kinds of entities that can function as souls. In the philosophical tradition, the soul has been defined as the capacity (*quwwa*) to act in the animate body, the potency (*quwwa*) to receive cognitive objects, and as the form (*ṣūra*) of the animate body. For Avicenna, all of these definitions are too limiting. The two senses of *quwwa* both pick up

[3] Sebti 2000, 118–119. [4] *Kitāb mu'ādhala al-nafs* 14, 112.
[5] An argument based on self-awareness is attributed to Mu'ammar in Jāḥiẓ, *al-Masā'il wa al-jawābāt li al-ma'rifa* 4, 51.
[6] Cf. Walzer 1954, especially 255–256. [7] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 4 Rahman.

one aspect of the soul's various responsibilities in relation to bodies but exclude others, and so neither can be a general definition applicable to all kinds of souls. Similarly, if we define the soul as a form in the strict technical sense of a hylomorphic principle which informs matter by inhering in it, we end up excluding from our definition those entities that do not inhere in matter but do function as souls in relation to it. Thus, if we want to include such obviously immaterial entities as the celestial souls in our definition, we cannot define the soul as a form.[8]

The definition Avicenna arrives at by excluding the alternatives is soul as perfection (*kamāl*) of the genus 'living body'. The actually existing soul perfects the genus by first bringing it into existence through the differentia specific to the actual soul, that is, as a vegetal, animal or human body.[9] Avicenna further specifies this definition by distinguishing between first and second perfection, or between 'that through which the species becomes an actual species, like the shape for the sword', and 'the actions and passions which follow from the species of the thing, like cutting for the sword'.[10] Since a living thing is alive already at the stage of first perfection, the soul in the most general sense must be a first perfection. By means of these argumentative moves Avicenna comes to define the soul as the 'first perfection of a natural organic body which performs the acts of life'.[11]

So far the moves, including the definition they have yielded as their conclusion, are of course perfectly familiar. However, it is important to note that for Avicenna 'soul' is a relational term, that is, it refers to the agent behind animate actions *insofar as* it is the agent of those actions and therefore has a relation to the body in which they take place. Thus, although the natural philosopher has to postulate the existence of something that functions as a soul, she will not thereby have made any assumptions about the nature of or the category proper to that thing as it is in itself.[12] If that thing happens to be a substance independent of the body which it animates, being a soul may be a mere accident to it, yet the natural philosopher will

[8] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 6–8 Rahman.

[9] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 6–8, 12 Rahman. Cf. I.5, 40 Rahman, which clarifies that the vegetative soul is the genus of the animal soul, and the animal soul the genus of the human soul. This sense of perfection is discussed in more general terms in *Shifā': al-Ilāhiyāt* V.3.8–9, 164–166; and V.6.2, 175–176.

[10] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 11 Rahman. Robert Wisnovsky (2003, 120–127) has found three different though reconcilable distinctions between first and second perfection in Avicenna. The present context is the primary locus for the distinction between form (first perfection) and function (second perfection). The other distinctions are between the principle of an activity (first perfection) and the activity itself (second perfection) and what can be considered foundational to the other two, between what is necessary for existence (first perfection) and what is necessary for existing well (second perfection).

[11] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 12 Rahman.

[12] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 4–5 Rahman.

nevertheless study it just in that regard, that is, as a soul that causes a particular kind of motion in the body.[13] But in spite of this qualification, Avicenna concludes the first chapter of the psychological section of the *Shifā'* by considering the question of whether the human soul as the thing which performs the animating acts proper to its relation with a human body is exhaustively grasped when it is understood as a soul. In other words, is the human soul, like the souls of plants and animals, a material form and therefore reducible to its animating agency, or does it, like the celestial souls, exist apart from these acts and independent of the body?

A demonstrated answer to this question will have to wait until the last book of the psychological section of the *Shifā'*. However, Avicenna decides to lay his cards on the table from the very beginning by presenting a so-called 'reminder' (*tanbīh*) or a 'pointer' (*ishāra*) towards the correct view.

> We have now come to know the meaning of the name bestowed on the thing that is called soul due to a relation it has, and so we should strive to apprehend the quiddity of this thing which has become a soul by the aforementioned consideration; in this place we must point towards (*nushīra*) establishing the existence of the soul that we have by means of a reminder (*al-tanbīh*) and a call for attention (*al-tadhkīr*), by a pointer that will be found apposite to the situation (*ishāratan sadīdata al-mawqi'*) by one who has the capacity to see the truth by himself without the need to educate him, prod him onwards, and divert him from fallacies.[14]

'Reminder' and 'pointer' are closely related technical terms which denote a call for attention to something one is vaguely or inexplicitly aware of but which tends to elude one's explicit attention. This 'indicative method'[15] can be used instead of a proper demonstration for educational purposes in order to have the student arrive at the necessary conclusion by herself and in the course of so doing understand the matter at hand more thoroughly than would be the case had the teacher given a ready-made demonstration that could be learnt by heart. But sometimes a reminder may be the only available method of argument, as for instance in the case of arguing for the first principles of all intellection. Since such principles are foundational to all acts of intellection, they cannot in turn be founded through a demonstration which relies on them. Instead, the only way to convince

[13] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 9–10 Rahman. [14] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 15–16 Rahman.

[15] See Gutas 1988, 307–311, with a focus on *ishāra*. Although there may be a nuanced difference in meaning between *ishāra* and *tanbih*, with *tanbīh* carrying connotations of correction whereas *ishāra* rather suggests that something is introduced that one has not hitherto considered, from the point of view of the present study the two terms can be considered synonymous. In any case, both terms figure in our text without an obvious difference in meaning.

one's interlocutor of their necessity is by indicating their presence in her thinking, that is, by reminding her that she in fact assumes their validity even when adopting a sceptical stance towards them.[16]

The reminder Avicenna applies in our context is of course the famous thought experiment of the flying or the floating man.[17] It is used to argue for the initial plausibility of the substance dualist view that there might be something to human being apart from embodied existence. In other words, it is intended to convince the reader who fails to see that the thing which is a soul for the human body can be something in itself, independent of its relation to the body, and it does this by showing that there is a feature in our experience that gives a clue of what the incorporeal existence could possibly consist in.

As a reminder the flying man is not presented as a demonstration or a definitive argument for the human soul's existence as an immaterial substance. Avicenna clearly thinks that substance dualism can be properly demonstrated, although not without a significant amount of additional knowledge, part of which will be acquired in the course of the psychological research we are presently initiating.[18] In that respect, the introductory chapter is not the proper place for a demonstrated answer. However, the reason to apply the method of reminding in the present context is very similar to that described in the case of the first principles of intellection. Avicenna uses the reminder to make us pay attention to something that is and has always been there for us but that we seldom take heed of. This new focus of attention is then suggested to be relevant to the question of whether the human soul is merely a soul or whether it exists in itself apart from this function.

These methodological remarks are important because once the flying man is read in this light it will be hard to deny that the argument hinges on evidence that is supposed to be phenomenally or experientially given. Although the argument may be *per impossibile*, it is still used to point out something present to the reader's experience instead of, say, a mere logical necessity or a transcendental condition for the possibility of something else. Indeed, later on in another instance of the flying man, Avicenna explicitly

[16] *Shifā': al-Ilāhiyāt* 1.5.1–5, 22–23. In the context, Marmura translates *tanbīh* as 'drawing attention'. For a similar claim in a psychological context, see *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.7, 257 Rahman.

[17] Avicenna himself does not use the title, and as far as I have been able to ascertain it is only used in secondary literature. The earliest instance seems to be Gilson 1929, 41. The thought experiment comes up in several occasions and in many different works of Avicenna. For a seminal overview of three instances, see Marmura 1986. Other passages are introduced in Hasse 2000, 81–82.

[18] The demonstration, which is based on the capacity for intellection inherent in the human soul, is first presented in *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.2, 209–216 Rahman; that is, in the last book of the work.

says that the evidence this reminder points towards 'is exemplified in myself' (*yakūna tamaththuluhu . . . fī nafsī*), but I need to be alerted to this example in myself because of my tendency to neglect it in favour of other, body-related contents of my experience.[19]

But in order finally to get to what it is that should be experientially given here, let us have a closer look at the reminder itself.

> So we say: one of us must imagine (*yatawahhama*) himself so that he is created all at once and perfect but his sight is veiled from seeing external [things], that he is created floating in the air or in a void so that the resistance of the air does not hit him – a hit he would have to sense – and that his limbs are separated from each other so that they do not meet or touch each other. [He must] then consider whether he affirms the existence of his self (*wujūda dhātihī*). He will not hesitate in affirming that his self exists (*li dhātihi mawjūdatan*), but he will not thereby affirm any of his limbs, any of his intestines, the heart or the brain, or any external thing. Rather, he will affirm his self (*dhātahu*) without affirming for it length, breadth or depth. If it were possible for him in that state to imagine (*yatakhayyala*) a hand or some other limb, he would not imagine it as part of his self (*dhātihī*) or a condition in his self (*sharṭan fī dhātihī*). You know that what is affirmed is different from what is not affirmed and what is confirmed is different from what is not confirmed.[20] Hence the self (*dhāt*) whose existence he has affirmed is specific to him in that it is he himself (*huwa bi 'aynihī*), different from his body and limbs which he has not affirmed. Thus, he who takes heed (*al-mutanabbih*) has the means to take heed of (*yatanabbaha*) the existence of the soul (*wujūdi al-nafs*) as something different from the body – indeed, as different from any body – and to know and be aware of it (*annahu 'ārifun bihi mustash'irun lahu*).[21]

The general idea of the argument is quite uncontroversial.[22] Evidently, the thought experiment aims at an analytical distinction of an aspect of

[19] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.7, 257 Rahman. Moreover, in his defence of the argument against Abū al-Qāsim al-Kirmānī's critical remarks, Avicenna explicitly says that it is based on the interlocutor's contemplation of his own state, which is something not everyone is capable of (see *Mubāḥathāt* III.58–59 Bīdārfar; Michot 1997, 170). The full importance of this point will be forcefully brought home once we get to explicate what Avicenna thinks self-awareness amounts to, for experiential familiarity with the phenomenon will then be a crucial criterion in our reconstruction of his concept of self-awareness. Whatever other features the concept will have, it must refer to something readily available in our own experience.

[20] I have chosen to follow Bakoš' reading of *al-muqarru bihi* and *yuqarru bihi* ('what is confirmed' and 'what is not confirmed', respectively) instead of Rahman's *al-maqraba* and *yaqrabuhu*. Orthographically very similar, both readings are supported by manuscript evidence.

[21] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1, 16 Rahman; 18–19 Bakoš.

[22] Indeed, there is a widespread consensus about how the thought experiment should be conducted (cf. Rahman 1952, 9–11; Galindo-Aguilar 1958; Arnaldez 1972; Marmura 1986; Druart 1988; Davidson 1992, 83; Hasse 2000, 80–87), although there are almost as many views about its purpose as there are scholars. For a concise overview of the different interpretations, see Hasse 2000, 86.

experience by means of an imaginative bracketing of other aspects of experience which tend to hide the one Avicenna wants us to pay attention to. Since he is interested in the question of whether we can find any experiential support for the idea that the human soul is independent from the body, and hence an immaterial substance, he starts by setting aside all those aspects of experience that involve the body or that require embodiment. The most obvious of these aspects is perception, and that is why the flying man is carefully described to be in a position where none of his senses is capable of transmitting any sensations to him. Even his sense of touch is rendered ineffective by ensuring that there are absolutely no impulses to the organ of touch from either his own body or the surrounding air. Secondly, since the flying man is supposed to be created immediately to his state, he cannot have any imaginative, estimative or memorative aspects of experience either. This is because all imagination, estimation and recollection are based on the prior appearance of sensory data, which these so-called internal senses (*al-ḥawāssu al-bāṭina*) then subject to their respective actions.[23] By the same token, this excludes all actual intellection as well, since, in Avicenna's empiristic epistemology, whatever human beings come to know, they will have acquired by means of an abstractive operation performed on sense perceptions, which thus are a necessary condition of human intellection as well.[24] Thus, the flying man has no objective content of experience whatsoever, no acts of perception, imagination or intellection, nothing.

Having imagined this state, I must then ask whether there is anything left to my experience. Avicenna states as obvious that my answer must be affirmative: I will still experience my own *dhāt* to exist, and I will have to affirm that this *dhāt* is me. In other words, *I myself* will still be there as something I am aware of. This, for Avicenna, points towards substance dualism insofar as it gives us a concrete experiential sense of what the existence of the thing that functions as our soul could possibly be in separation from the body of which it is the soul and connected to which it normally appears. When we consider the way in which Avicenna applies my awareness of myself as a pointer towards substance dualism, we have to conclude that he takes self-awareness to be a phenomenal feature of experience, not a mere transcendental or logical condition. Thus, in order to function as a pointer, self-awareness has to be accessible to each and every one of Avicenna's interlocutors as an uncontroversial constituent of

[23] *Shifā': al-nafs* I.5, 43–44 Rahman; see Chapter 1.2, 25–27.
[24] For Avicenna's cognitive psychology, see Chapter 1.2, 27–29.

experience, quite regardless of whether we ultimately agree that it has the suggestive power in favour of the substance dualism that Avicenna builds upon here.[25]

2.2 The validity and plausibility of the flying man

Although the ultimate goal of the present study is to understand what sort of phenomenon Avicenna casts in the pivotal role here, we should briefly consider whether the argument hinging on it is convincing, or even formally valid. This is particularly the case because, as many scholars have pointed out,[26] it seems to commit the rather blatant fallacy of proceeding from an epistemic or phenomenological distinction to a metaphysical one. For a contemporary reader versed in the philosophy of mind, this is obvious: the fact that the brain or the extended neural network of my body does not figure in the phenomenology of my first-personal experience does clearly not warrant the conclusion that my experience is metaphysically independent of them, for it is perfectly possible, even likely, that my experience is opaque in the sense that mere introspection will never reveal its physical foundation.

Indeed, if Avicenna intends the flying man to demonstrate the immateriality of the entity that functions as a soul in the human body, it is difficult not to judge the argument as fatally fallacious. Moreover, there are sound reasons for thinking that he may have intended the argument as at least a sketch for a complete demonstration. Ibn Kammūna, a thirteenth-century CE commentator, attempted to flesh it out into a syllogism,[27] and we

[25] Thus, my reconstruction of the argument's procedure is inverse to Marmura's (1986, 387–388), according to whom the flying man first makes us alert 'to the existence of the self as immaterial and subsequently to the experiential knowledge of this immaterial existence . . . In other words, we discern here two stages of knowing. The first is knowing *that* the self is immaterial, leading to the second, the experiential knowledge of one's self as an immaterial entity.' I find this order of procedure – that is, from a theoretical observation to experiential knowledge – problematic for two reasons. First of all, it is difficult to see how a piece of personal experiential knowledge, which Marmura suggests as the ultimate result of the thought experiment, would be a particularly relevant conclusion in the context of scientific psychology dealing with universal natural truths. Rather, it seems clear to me that Avicenna is interested in what the things that function as souls in human bodies are *in general*, even if he applies the particular case of the interlocutor's own soul as a means to reach the general conclusion. But more importantly, although we may come to learn something about our particular selves in the thought process, the experiential level must have been there from the very beginning as the basis of the entire argument. If there is no uncontroversial shared starting point to pay attention to by means of the flying man (a starting point which I argue Avicenna takes to be found in all human experience), he will be hung in thin air, indeed.

[26] For particularly lucid statements of this case, see Sebti 2000, 121–122; and Black 2008, 65.

[27] See Muehlethaler 2009.

cannot be certain that he was not thereby merely following a well-established line of interpretation. Furthermore, some of Avicenna's own descriptions of the 'indicative method' suggest that pointers and reminders should indeed be so fleshed out by the apt reader.[28] However, if we allow the flying man to be a less stringent application of the indicative method, the looming fallacy need not be fatal. In this reading, the argument is only designed to point towards the substance dualism Avicenna will eventually demonstrate by other means, or, to put it another way, give a concrete idea of what the existence of an immaterial human substance could be when separated from the body we commonly find it conjoined with. This would be achieved not by painting a narrative picture of an otherworldly type of existence, but rather by pointing out a plausible candidate in perfectly commonplace human experience. Avicenna could then meet the dissatisfied reader accusing him of the fallacy by simply recognizing that the argument does not work in her case and asking for some patience until the proper demonstration of the human substance's immateriality in the fifth book of *Shifā': Fī al-nafs*.[29]

But whatever the eventual verdict, the argument loses none of its relevance for our present purpose of reconstructing Avicenna's concept of self-awareness – as long as it is agreed that some kind of self-awareness, the precise nature of which remains to be determined, is pivotal to it. However, even this is controversial, for in one of the most extended studies of Avicenna's psychology, Dag Hasse has argued *in extenso* that the flying man is not about self-awareness in the first place, and a fortiori not based on a phenomenal feature of experience. According to him, reading *dhāt* as 'self', although linguistically legitimate, is not warranted by the context. This is first of all because the flying man recurs in *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.7, with an explicit reference to the passage from chapter I.1 that we have just

[28] Cf. *Ishārāt*, 1; and see Gutas 1988, 307–311.

[29] Two further fallacies have been detected in the flying man, neither of which is as striking as the one above. The first of these is perceived in Avicenna's procedure from the flying man's knowledge *that* he is to the knowledge of *what* he is, that is, from mere self-awareness to an awareness of the self as an immaterial substance, even though the flying man was supposed not to have any actual intellectual content (such as the concepts 'immaterial' and 'substance'). In my view, this alleged fallacy is based on a confusion between what the flying man is supposed to be aware of and what the performer of the thought experiment concludes on that basis. The latter is of course not required to lack actual intellection or to be unable to apply concepts to the awareness paid attention to by means of the thought experiment. The second fallacy (noted by Marmura 1986, 388) is claimed to lie in Avicenna's procedure from a hypothetical example to categorical ends. This may well be a fallacy, but if it is one, it is common to all thought experiments, and as such far beyond the confines of the present study. For an excellent extended discussion of the question of the validity of thought experiments in philosophical psychology, see Wilkes 1993, 1–48.

investigated but without a single occurrence of *dhāt*, having us instead affirm the existence of our 'thatness' (*annīya*), the bare fact that we are there.[30] Hasse suggests that this is also the sense in which we should understand *dhāt* in I.1, and so 'the common denominator of the two words is something unspecific like "core being".'[31] Secondly, Hasse thinks that since the context is concerned with what the soul is in itself, that is, its essence, in distinction from the soul-relation it has to the body, we should read *dhāt* as denoting 'essence'.[32] Thus, the text is concerned with the affirmation of an essence, or rather the existence of an essence, independent of the body to which it is related.[33] Hasse explicitly addresses the suggested possibility that Avicenna's use of *dhāt* is ambiguous and that the word means both 'essence' and 'self', but argues that it univocally stands for 'essence': 'To conclude, the Flying Man does not have "immediate access" to himself, nor is he "conscious of his existence" or "fully aware of his personal existence", nor does he "affirm his existence", but he affirms the existence of his core entity, his essence, while not affirming the existence of his body.'[34]

Obviously, if Hasse's categorical denial of the relevance of self-awareness to the flying man is correct, my claim that in the argument Avicenna relies on an explicit phenomenon of self-awareness will be completely unfounded. But let us pause to consider what argumentative power the thought experiment will have once we take the evidence of immediate self-awareness out of the equation. Having bracketed all objective content of experience, what grounds do I have for claiming that I am aware of my *essence*? What would awareness of essence in this case consist in? It cannot be awareness of the concept of human being, or any other concept my essence can be subsumed under, because all intellection was ruled out in the construction of the thought experiment. Since alternatives other than intellection are even harder to come by, it seems that without a reference to some kind of self-awareness, to the fact that *I* will still be there even though I am not aware of my body or indeed anything else at all, the thought experiment is unconvincing at best, downright incoherent at worst. This is not to say that my interpretation pushes Avicenna's attempt to argue for his substance

[30] The passage in question is *Shifāʾ: Fī al-nafs* V.7, 255 Rahman. I will quote and discuss the passage below in Chapter 4, 66–71.

[31] Hasse 2000, 83.

[32] Hasse 2000, 83. This of course accords with the frequent technical use of the term in philosophical Arabic. See Appendix, as well as Rahman 1991 and Goichon 1938, 134–139.

[33] Hasse 2000, 83–84.

[34] Hasse 2000, 86. The quotes of the interpretations Hasse rejects are, respectively, from Druart 1988, 34; Davidson 1992, 83; Pines 1970, 808; Rahman 1952, 10; and Marmura 1986, 387.

dualism beyond debate, but I do claim that the more charitable interpretation will in the very least retain some initial plausibility for the argument.

On the other hand, although the word *dhāt* does not appear in the flying man of *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.7, the context of the argument's application in that chapter makes the connection to self-awareness, if possible, even more prominent. The pressing question here is how to account for the fact that our experiences tend to be coherent and unified wholes of complex constituents in face of Avicenna's stringent distinctions between the cognitive and conative faculties responsible for those constituents. In other words, how is it possible that I smell freshly brewed coffee, develop a desire for a cup and stand up to fetch one, if the olfactory perception, the desire and the muscular movement are acts of distinct and unconnected faculties, which produce distinct and unconnected constituents of experience? Avicenna's strategy in the solution is to argue for the necessity of a single subject or agent behind the distinct acts, the inviolable unity of which will be sufficient to connect the acts to the sort of whole we recognize in our experience. He goes on to characterize 'this single thing in which these faculties are conjoined', the human soul, by appealing to the intuition of his interlocutors, saying that it is 'the thing that each of us sees as himself (*al-shay'u al-ladhī yarāhu kullun minnā dhātahu*)'.[35] In this general context, the flying man figures in a more specific argument against the claim that this 'thing that each of us sees as himself' is the body as a whole: since one can be aware of the unifying subject that one is oneself without being aware of the body (as the flying man is supposed to show), the body cannot be the unifying subject. Thus, contrary to what Hasse claims, once we have a look at the larger context of *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.7, we see that Avicenna *explicitly* refers to self-awareness, and precisely in a sense which he clearly believes is perfectly familiar to his readers from their own experience, in the immediate context of the flying man.

The fact that Avicenna speaks of knowing the existence of one's *annīya* in the flying man in *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.7 need not be a problem either, for *annīya* refers to the fact *that* (*anna*) a thing exists and can thus be translated as 'thatness'.[36] As a technical term, it is diametrically opposed to *māhīya*, which is derived from the question *mā huwa* (what is it?) and can be

[35] *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* V.7, 253 Rahman. The point is made more emphatically after the flying man at 256–257. I discuss the entire context in detail below in Chapter 4, 66–71. On the contexts of the two versions, see Marmura 1986, 385–390.

[36] See d'Alverny 1959, 73.

translated as 'quiddity' or 'whatness'.[37] Now, insofar as an essence that can be known is an answer to the question *what* and therefore a quiddity, it would seem that Hasse's argument for excluding the interpretation of *dhāt* as 'self' in the flying man of *Shifā': Fī al-nafs* I.1 falls through. For certainly the immediate awareness of the fact *that* one exists is cognitively less developed than the knowledge of *what* one is by essence. Moreover, knowing that one's essence *exists* certainly requires some sort of cognitive grasp of the essence, which brings us back to the problem we started with, that is, if we conceive of this grasp as a normal case of intellection, it will be incoherent with the peculiar conditions posed in the thought experiment.

Thus, I argue that Hasse's arguments are insufficient to rule out the most obvious interpretation of the flying man, that is, as an argument which hinges on the phenomenon of self-awareness. The fact that *dhāt* also means essence is something that Avicenna may not have seen necessary to rule out, for as I will argue later on, there is a sense in which awareness of oneself indeed is the existence of an individual essence. In light of texts in which this identification is most explicit,[38] the question rather becomes whether Avicenna even recognized a need for a rigorous distinction between the two senses of *dhāt*. If self-awareness is awareness of the very core of one's being, and if the very core of the being of anything is its essence which prevails unchanged in the flux of the various accidents appended to it, then the two indeed merge into one instead of excluding each other. In this sense, I am in agreement with Hasse's conclusion: the flying man does hinge on affirming the existence of one's essence as separated from the body. The difference is that I fail to see how that conclusion can be reached without the pivotal identification of awareness of that essence with self-awareness.

But in order to not run too far ahead, let us briefly summarize the main argument of the present section. I have claimed that a close reading of the thought experiment known as the flying man shows us, first, that Avicenna recognizes the phenomenon of self-awareness as something we all can recognize in our own experience. But what is more, it shows that Avicenna thinks this phenomenon has considerable psychological relevance. Indeed, considering the fact that self-awareness figures prominently in the introductory chapter of the psychological section of Avicenna's most

[37] In this light Avicenna's formulation that the flying man knows 'the existence of his thatness' may seem strangely redundant, for it could be explicated as knowing the existence of the fact that one exists, which is one step removed from knowing one's existence. However, I believe this can be explained by recourse to the frequent use of *anniya* in reference to the individual thing instead of its quiddity. Cf. d'Alverny 1959, 80–81.

[38] Cf. *Ta'liqāt*, 160–161. This text is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.2.

extensive philosophical *summa, and* that it provides the starting point for the investigation of the soul in perhaps his most independent mature work, *al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt,*[39] he must have perceived it as not having received its proper due from his predecessors in philosophical psychology. So far, however, we do not know what exactly Avicenna thinks self-awareness consists in, how it should be described, or whether it can be analysed or explained by recourse to more basic phenomena. All we have found out is that he believes that such a phenomenon can be determined and pointed to, and perhaps even expects it to be relatively uncontroversial once it has been sufficiently determined and distinguished from other features of common experience by such means as the flying man. Indeed, if we recall the suggested similarity between self-awareness and first intelligibles, it should be as obvious as the laws of the excluded middle or non-contradiction. Avicenna also suggests that as such a basic fact of human mental life, self-awareness provides a pointer towards the truth of psychological substance dualism. In fact, it can be argued that he may have cast it in an even more prominent role as an indispensable foundation for a *coherent* dualism.

[39] The third *namaṭ* of the second part of the *Ishārāt* (119 ff.), on the soul, begins with the flying man. See Chapter 4.2, 80.