UDC: 128 Авицена 28-187.5 Авицена DOI: 10.5937/kom1802069H Original scientific paper

# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AVICENNA'S PROOFS OF THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF HUMAN REINCARNATION

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The topic of reincarnation is one that has been discussed in a number of different fields, under different headings and with different methods. For example, this topic has been discussed in philosophy in relation to the soul. This is because reincarnation implies that a soul is transferred from one body to another. When philosophers discuss reincarnation, they do so by using reason. However, this topic has also been discussed in theology, in the section concerned with the Afterlife. This is because sometimes reincarnation is presented as an alternative to the concept of Ma'ad - the reattachment of human souls to their bodies in another world, with the purpose of being judged and recompensed for the actions they did in this world. When theologians treat this topic, they do so from a rational-religious perspective. For the most part, Muslim scholars have denied the possibility of reincarnation. However, some of them say that it is something that is rationally impossible. Others say that it is rationally possible but does not occur – as religion tells us. Generally, philosophers were of the opinion that reincarnation is something that is rationally impossible. They have presented many philosophical proofs to substantiate this claim. One of the philosophers who discussed this subject at length was Avicenna. He was adamant about the impossibility of reincarnation and presented some complicated rational proofs for this matter. One of the proofs provided by Avicenna was one in which he presented a number of different scenarios in which this phenomenon might occur. Avicenna proved that all of these scenarios are impossible. As a result, reincarnation must also be impossible. In another proof, Avicenna said that reincarnation is something that goes against intuition and would lead to one person's being two people. There are numerous problems with both of Avicenna's proofs and therefore they must be rejected or reconstructed. This article seeks to present these proofs in a structured manner and then to critique them.

Keywords: reincarnation, Avicenna, reason, after-life, soul

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#### Introduction

### Avicenna's Philosophy of the Soul

Before we can begin examining Avicenna's proofs for the impossibility of reincarnation, it is necessary to mention first a few general points regarding his philosophy of the soul. It is possible to summarize Avicenna's views regarding the soul in a series of axioms, which we will mention hereunder (Obudiyyat 2010: 178–196). Of course, it is not possible to examine each one of these in detail here, since this is not the immediate subject of this paper. Nevertheless, having a brief understanding of these points will help us to understand better where he is coming from in the proofs that will be mentioned later on. It deserves to be mentioned that before Mulla Sadra there was no philosopher who dealt with this topic in a more detailed manner than Avicenna. Of course, many of the points mentioned hereunder are not limited to the human soul; rather, they include the vegetative and the animal souls as well.

- 1. The soul in contrast to inanimate physical bodies is an agent whose actions are not uniform.
- 2. Just as chemical properties are not capable of being reduced to the properties of simple physical bodies (rather, they stem from a specific form), vital actions such as nutrition, growth, reproduction, sensation, voluntary movement and the comprehension of universals are not capable of being reduced to the properties of inanimate physical bodies.
- 3. The soul is a substance, not an accident.
- 4. The soul is essentially immaterial. Of course, in the view of Avicenna, this is a property that is limited to human souls. Thus, according to Avicenna, vegetative and animal souls are material in nature. It deserves to be mentioned that this is one of the main differences between the philosophy of Avicenna and Mulla Sadra.
- 5. The faculties of the human soul that it shares with animals are material in nature. This is again one of the places where Mulla Sadra diverges with Avicenna.
- 6. The soul is simple, in the sense that it is not a reality that possesses numerous degrees. Mulla Sadra disagrees with Avicenna on this point.
- 7. The soul needs the body to act.

- 8. The soul is generated in time, i.e. it is not eternal.
- 9. The generation of the body is what causes the generation of the soul. Therefore, the soul is generated at the moment the body is generated.
- 10. The capacity of the body for the soul is generated when a specific temperament (*mizaj*) for that particular soul is generated in that body.
- 11. When the soul combines with the body, a natural species is formed.
- 12. The true and immediate body of the soul is the "vaporous spirit".
- 13. The soul and the body are not united in a manner that would lead to its materiality; rather, this "unity" simply refers to the reciprocal influence that each of them has upon the other and to their mutual dependency.
- 14. The body is only accidentally the cause of the soul, i.e. the body is neither the agent of the soul nor the goal of its creation. The agent of the soul is an immaterial "Intellect".
- 15. The soul does not need the body for its subsistence. Of course, this is a distinction of human souls according to Avicenna and is one of the areas in which Mulla Sadra disagrees with this philosopher.
- 16. The number of souls is always equal to the number of bodies.
- 17. The soul is only capable of changing in its accidents. This is also one of the important disagreements between Avicenna and Mulla Sadra.
- 18. The connection of the soul and the body is what allows the soul to have the capacity to receive accidents.
- 19. The essence of the soul is immaterial in both its generation and its subsistence. This is also one of the principle disagreements between Avicenna and Mulla Sadra.
- 20. The relation of the soul with the body is not essential for the existence of the soul.
- 21. The soul has faculties by means of which it influences the vaporous spirit in the same way that it influences the body by means of the vaporous spirit.
- 22. The primary act of the human soul is intellection, i.e. the comprehension of universal knowledge and it only indirectly performs the actions that the faculties perform in a direct manner. This means that the soul is *aware* of what the eye, for example, sees. Nevertheless, it does not mean that it actually *sees* it. This is also one of the main disagreements between Avicenna and Mulla Sadra.

#### Reincarnation

### The Importance of the Discussion on Reincarnation

Reincarnation is an important topic for discussion that has many philosophical and theological repercussions. One of the most important areas in which the conclusions of this discussion manifest themselves is the discussion on the Resurrection. This is because if someone believes that souls continue to be reincarnated in other bodies in this world, then it would imply that he is rejecting the Qur'anic concept of the Afterlife. This is because according to the *Qur'an*, the rewards or punishments that souls will receive after they die will not occur in this world. What is more, according to the *Qur'an*, in that new world, souls will be rejoined with their material bodies. In effect, this is a type of "reincarnation" (i.e. an attachment of a soul that has been separated from one body to another). Thus, if we want to believe firmly in the Qur'anic concept of the Afterlife, we have no recourse but to prove the impossibility of some forms of reincarnation and the possibility of some others (Fayyazi 2010: 432).

### Definition

Avicenna defines reincarnation in the following manner: "Reincarnation implies that a human soul which has departed from one body attaches itself to another body" (Avicenna 1984: 108). In another place, Avicenna defines reincarnation in the following manner: "It implies that a soul returns to its body after death" (Avicenna 1983: 122).

Apparently, these are not definitions for reincarnation in the unconditional meaning of the term. Rather, the first is the definition of the reincarnation in which the soul that has departed attaches itself to a body that is different from the one that it departed from. However, the second definition seeks to illuminate the reincarnation in which the departed soul attaches itself to the very body that it departed from.

Of course, there is another type of reincarnation called "spiritual reincarnation" (*tanasukh malakuti*). This is a term that Mulla Sadra coined and he was of the opinion that the Ancient Greek philosophers actually believed in this form of reincarnation. He defines it in the following manner: "It is that the human soul is manifested in a form that is harmonious with its intentions, habits and actions" (Mulla Sadra Shairazi 1996: 48). Of course, since this type of reincarnation falls outside of the scope of this paper, we will say nothing further about it.

### The various Categories of Reincarnation

It is possible to divide reincarnation into the following categories, based upon the nature of the body that the soul is reincarnated in (of course, this is based upon the 1<sup>st</sup> definition of Avicenna):

- 1. Descending Reincarnation: This occurs when the soul that has departed one body enters a body that is less noble than the previous one, as it would occur if the soul of a human entered the body of a lion.
- 2. Ascending Reincarnation: This occurs when the soul that has departed a body enters a body that is nobler than the previous one, as it would occur if the soul of a lion entered the body of a human being.
- 3. Similar Reincarnation: This occurs when the new body is similar to the previous one, as it would occur if the soul of a human being entered the body of another human being (Fayyazi 2010: 442).

### Views Regarding Reincarnation

There are three basic views regarding reincarnation. The majority of Muslim philosophers and theologians are of the opinion that it is impossible. Of course, some of these are of the opinion that reincarnation is unconditionally impossible, while some others are of the opinion that certain categories of reincarnation are impossible while others are possible. Outside of the Muslim world, there are many faiths that believe that reincarnation is something necessary. Many Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras, Plato, Empedocles and Socrates, also believed in reincarnation. Traces of this belief are also found within Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. According to Sheikh al-Ishraq Suhrawardi, the belief in reincarnation was also prevalent among the philosophers of Babylonia, Persia, India and China (Shirazi 2005: 479). Some contemporary Muslim philosophers are of the opinion that reincarnation is something possible but not necessary. In other words, there is no philosophical proof that it is impossible. However, a specific type of reincarnation will not occur, i.e. the one that is a substitute for the Qur'anic conception of the Afterlife (Fayyazi 2010: 444). In any case, Avicenna was of the belief that reincarnation is impossible. In this paper we will examine his proofs of this claim.

# Avicenna's 1st Proof of the Impossibility of Reincarnation

This proof comes in the form of an exceptive syllogism, the minor premise of which is a conjunctive conditional proposition. The antecedent of this

conditional proposition is a real disjunctive conditional proposition that is composed of the different scenarios in which reincarnation can occur. There are a number of different scenarios in which reincarnation can occur – regardless of the type of the body into which the soul is reincarnated. Since all of these are impossible, we can conclude that reincarnation is also impossible (Tusi 2004: III/357). There are a total of 12 scenarios in which reincarnation can occur. We will look at each one of these scenarios independently and see why each of them is impossible. Those scenarios are the following:

1.

In the first case, the soul attaches to the second body at the time the capacity of the first body for the soul finishes, i.e. at the time of death. There are a number of different manners in which this can play out:

#### 1.1.

In one case, a second body that has the capacity for a soul is generated at the very time when the soul detaches from the first body. This can be divided into a number of cases:

### 1.1.1.

In the first case, the number of new bodies that are generated is equal to the number of souls that detach from their previous bodies. So, in this case the first body to which the soul was connected loses the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, bodies are created. Each of these bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies that are created is equal to the number of bodies that decomposes.

The problem with this scenario is that it goes against what we see in the world. In other words, this scenario implies that the number of people who die is always equal to the number of those who are born in the world. We see that this is not the case. The idea that this goes against the factual evidence proves that it is wrong.

#### 1.1.2.

The number of souls is greater than the number of bodies that are generated: There are a number of possibilities here:

#### 1.1.2.1.

All of the detached souls are similar in that all of them deserve a body. They all have the capacity to attach to a body. Here, there are three possibilities:

#### 1.1.2.1.1.

It is possible for more than one of these souls attach to one body: So, in this case the first body or bodies to which the soul or souls was or were attached lose(s) the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, new bodies are created. Each of these new bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies that are created is smaller than the number of souls that have detached from the previous bodies. Also, the souls that have detached are similar to one another in that all of them deserve and want to connect to a new body. In other words, they all have the capacity to attach to one of the new bodies. Finally, more than one soul attaches to one body.

The problem with this scenario is that it would imply that one person is more than one person. The reason for this is that the soul is what specifies the individual and separates him from other individuals. Thus, if we said that one body has more than one soul, it would mean that one individual is two individuals. This is clearly impossible.

Aside from this, if one body had more than one soul, it would clearly be felt by each one of them. The reason for this is that it is possible for each one of those souls to make conflicting and contradicting intentions with respect to their shared body. Thus, each one of them would feel that someone else is hindering it from moving its body as it desires. However, this is not so. None of us feels that this is true. This option is thus clearly impossible.

Another objection that might be leveled here is the following: If there were 8 souls and 5 bodies, then – based upon this scenario – there would be three bodies to each of which only one soul was attached and there would be two bodies to which more than one soul was attached. However, there would be no reason why the first set of bodies only had one soul and the second set had more than one and not vice versa. In other words, here one of two equally possibilities is occurring without a due reason. This is clearly impossible.

#### 1.1.2.1.2.

In this scenario, none of them are able to connect to a body since they vie with one another for it and each of them prevents the other from attaching to the new body. So, in this case the first body or bodies to which the soul or souls was or were attached lose(s) the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, new bodies are created. Each of these new bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies that are created is smaller than the number of souls that have detached from the previous bodies. Also, the souls that have detached

are similar to one another in that all of them deserve and want to connect to a new body. In other words, they all have the capacity to attach to one of the new bodies. However, the view with one another for a body and each of them prevents the other from attaching to the new body.

The problem with this scenario is that it goes against the assumption that souls will be recompensed for their deeds by means of reincarnation.

#### 1.1.2.1.3.

Some of them attach to a body and some of them do not – even though the ones who do not attach to a body actually deserve to attach to a body. So, in this case the first body or bodies to which the soul or souls was or were attached lose(s) the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, new bodies are created. Each of these new bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies that are created is smaller than the number of souls that have detached from the previous bodies. Also, the souls that have detached are similar to one another in that all of them deserve and want to connect to a new body. In other words, they all have the capacity to attach to one of the new bodies. However, some of them connect to the new bodies and some do not.

The problem with this scenario is that it is impossible since it would imply that something occurs without a cause. In other words, even though all of them deserve to attach to a body, only some of them attach. Under the assumption, none of them deserve this more than others.

#### 1.1.2.2.

In this case, some of these detached souls do not deserve a new body: In this case, these souls would not be reincarnated in new bodies. So, in this case, the first body or bodies to which the soul or souls was or were attached lose(s) the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, new bodies are created. Each of these new bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies is smaller than the number of detached souls. However, not all of these souls deserve a body.

The problem with this scenario is that it goes against the assumption that all souls will be recompensed for their actions by means of reincarnation.

#### 1.1.3.

In this case, the number of new bodies that are generated is greater than the number of souls: There are three possibilities here:

#### 1.1.3.1.

One soul attaches to more than one body. So, in this case the first body or bodies to which the soul or souls was or were attached lose(s) the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, new bodies are created. Each of these new bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies that are created is greater than the number of souls that have detached from the previous bodies. Also, one soul attaches to more than one body.

The problem with this scenario is that it would mean that if one body experienced something, the soul inside the other body would also feel it. This goes against what we intuitively feel. I do not have knowledge of what some other body experiences and my experiences are limited to what occurs in my own body.

#### 1.1.3.2.

Some bodies do not obtain a soul. So, in this case the first body or bodies to which the soul or souls was or were attached lose(s) the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, new bodies are created. Each of these new bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies that are created is greater than the number of souls that have detached from the previous bodies. Also, some of these new bodies do not obtain a soul.

This would imply that even though these bodies deserve a soul, they are not given one. This is impossible since God does not withhold His bounty from a being that deserves it.

#### 1.1.3.3.

A new soul is given to some bodies and the others receive old souls. So, in this case the first body or bodies to which the soul or souls was or were attached lose(s) the capacity for this connection. At that very moment, new bodies are created. Each of these new bodies has the capacity for a connection to a soul. Also, the soul connects to a new body the moment that it detaches from the previous one. What is more, the number of bodies that are created is greater than the number of souls that have detached from the previous bodies. However, some of these bodies are given old souls and some are given new ones.

This is also impossible as it implies that one of two options is chosen without a due reason. Why should some bodies be given a new soul and other bodies given old souls when they all are similar in terms of their capacity?

#### 1.2.

In the second case, the second body is generated before the first body loses the capacity for the soul. Then, when the first body loses the capacity for the soul, the latter detaches itself from it and attaches to the second body. There are two ways in which this can happen:

#### 1.2.1.

The second body remains without a soul until the soul of the first body attaches to it. So, in this case, the second body is generated before the first body loses the capacity for the soul. However, it did not have any soul at that time. Then, when the first body loses the capacity for the soul, the latter detaches itself from it and attaches to the second body.

This is impossible as it would imply that, even though the second body has the capacity for a soul, one is not given to it.

#### 1.2.2.

The second body is given a soul and then when the soul detaches from the first body this soul also attaches to it. So, the second body is generated before the first body loses the capacity for the soul. At that time it already had a soul. Then, when the first body loses the capacity for its soul, the latter detaches itself from it and attaches to the second body.

This is impossible as it would lead to one body having more than one soul. It would imply that one person is two people. This is a contradiction.

2.

In this case, the soul of the first body attaches to the second body before the first body loses the capacity for the attachment of the soul. In other words, the first body still has the capacity for the soul but the latter is taken away from it and given to the second.

This is impossible as it implies that God withholds His bounty from a being even though the being in question deserves it.

3.

In the third case, the soul detaches from the first body after it loses the capacity for the attachment of the soul. Then, after some time, it attaches to the second body.

This is impossible since it means that the soul can remain without a body for some time. If this is possible for a portion of time, then it is also possible for eternity. In this case, reincarnation is not something absolutely necessary.

### Objections to Avicenna's 1st Proof

Now that we have seen Avicenna's first proof of the impossibility of reincarnation, let us look at some of the objections that might be leveled against it.

### 1st Objection

The first objection that can be leveled against this argument is that it is rhetorical in nature, not demonstrative. This is due to the following premise:

"This goes against what we see in the world. In other words, this scenario implies that the number of people who die is always equal to the number of those who are born in the world. We see that this is not the case. The idea that this goes against the factual evidence proves that it is wrong."

There is no factual data that proves in a definite manner than the number of beings that die is *always* unequal to those who are born. At most, we might be able to say that this has not occurred at a *specific period of time*. However, even if we assume that this is true, all this does is prove that the reincarnation of all human souls has not *occurred* at a specific period of time. It cannot prove the *impossibility* of reincarnation at that time or that it did not occur at others. At most, it is possible for someone to claim that it is *highly unlikely* for the number of people who die to be equal to that of those who are born. However, this would make this argument rhetorical and it would cease to be a demonstration. What is more, there is no way to even prove in a definite manner that the number of beings who are born is not equal to that of those who die at a specific point in time. This is because we are unaware of the remotest parts of the Universe. Thus, this proof cannot even definitely prove the idea that the reincarnation of some souls at some points in time has not occurred.

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Objection

This objection is directed to the following part of the argument:

"Some of them attach to a body and some of them do not – even though the ones who do not attach to a body actually deserve to attach to a body... This is impossible since it would imply that *something occurs without a cause* [a due reason]. In other words, even though all of them deserve to attach to a body, only some of them attach to a body – without a due reason. Under the assumption, none of them deserve this more than others."

The basis of this objection is that it is impossible for only one of a number of equal possibilities to occur. In other words, if there are a number of equal possibilities, either all of them have to occur or none of them can occur. It is impossible for one of them to occur and not the others.

In order for this objection to be clarified, it is necessary to mention something by way of passing. The term "al-tarjih bi la murajjih" (i.e. prevalence without a reason) is a term that has at least four different meanings. Some philosophers are of the opinion that only some of these are impossible (Fayyazi 2010: 343–344). Those meanings are the following:

- 1. A possible being's occurring without a cause. This is something the impossibility of which all philosophers agree upon.
- 2. A possible being's occurring without an agent (*fa'il*). This is also something that is unanimously impossible.
- 3. A possible being's occurring without a motive. This is something that is impossible in the view of the Peripatetic philosophers and Allamah Tabatabai. This is because these individuals are of the opinion that all agents regardless of whether they have knowledge and free-will or not have motives in their actions and cannot do anything without an efficient cause. That is why some philosophers are of the opinion that only agents with free-will and knowledge have motives in their actions that too in those actions that stem from this knowledge and free-will. Thus, natural agents do not have motives in their actions. Also, those actions of voluntary agents that stem from their desire to satisfy the agents' passions may lack a motive. In other words, it is possible for an agent that possesses free-will to act contrary to his motives without this endangering his free-will.
- 4. A possible being possesses a cause, an agent and a motive. However, the motive that the agent seeks to achieve by means of this possible being may also equally be achieved by means of another possible being. Some philosophers are of the opinion that if there are a number of equal ways to achieve one motive, then the agent cannot perform any one of them in particular. Rather, he will not perform any of them. Or, if it is possible, he will do all of them. However, some contemporary philosophers are of the opinion that it is actually possible for an agent in such a situation to perform one of these actions to the detriment of another. Say that a person is hungry and wants to satiate his hunger by means of eating bread. Here, eating bread is the action, the satisfaction of hunger is the motive behind the action, and the hungry person is the agent. However, this agent may achieve

this motive by means of a number of pieces of bread. In the opinion of the majority of philosophers, in this situation, the hungry person cannot eat one of the pieces of bread to the detriment of another. Rather, he would not be able to eat any of them. However, some philosophers say that this is possible.

Keeping this in mind, it is possible to say that in the opinion of these philosophers this scenario is not impossible. In other words, it is possible for God to attach some of these souls to bodies and not others even though all of them equally deserve to have a body (Ibid.: 504).

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Objection

This objection is directed at the following part of the argument:

"In this case, some of these souls do not deserve a new body... In this case, these souls would not be reincarnated. This goes against the assumption that *all* souls will be recompensed for their actions by means of reincarnation."

Even if we assume that this is impossible, at most it would imply that it is impossible for all souls to be reincarnated since in some cases some souls remain without a body – which goes against the assumption. However, it does prove that it is impossible for some souls to be reincarnated – since in this case, this scenario would not go against the initial assumption and one of the options of the antecedent would not be invalidated. As a result, one could not conclude the invalidity of the precedent of the minor premise of the argument and the argument would lack logical definitiveness (Ibid.).

### 4th Objection

This objection is directed at this part of the argument:

"One soul attaches to more than one body... This would mean that if one body experienced something, the soul in the other body would also feel it. This goes against what we intuitively feel. I do not have knowledge of what some other body experiences and my experiences are limited to what occurs in my own body."

It is possible to level two objections at this matter.

- 1. First of all, all that this proves is that experience shows us that this has not occurred. In other words, people do not feel what occurs in other bodies. However, this does not show that this is something impossible. Therefore, at most it would prove that reincarnation has not occurred. However, it does not show that it is impossible. This is why this argument seeks to prove the impossibility of reincarnation (Ibid.).
- 2. Secondly, at most, this proof would be able to prove that reincarnation has not occurred for all souls. Since, there are some souls that do not feel what is occurring in other bodies. However, it cannot prove that it has not occurred for some souls since we have no way of verifying what all souls feel or do not feel.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Objection

This objection is directed at the following part of the argument:

"A new soul is given to some bodies and the others receive the old souls... This is also impossible as it implies that one of two options is chosen without a due reason. Why should some bodies be given a new soul and other bodies given old souls [when they are all equal]?"

The scenario is not impossible for the same reason that we mentioned in the  $2^{\rm nd}$  objection.

# 6th Objection

This objection is directed towards the following part of the argument:

"In the third case, the soul detaches from the first body after it loses the capacity for the attachment of the soul. Then, after some time, it attaches to the second body. This is impossible since it means that the soul can remain without a body for some time. If this is possible for a portion of time, then it is also possible for eternity. In this case, reincarnation is not something absolutely necessary."

The objection that can be leveled at this part of the argument is that if it is worded in this way, at most the argument would prove that reincarnation is *not necessary*. However, it would be incapable of proving that reincarnation is *impossible*. Thus, the argument is incapable of achieving what it intended to achieve in the first place, i.e. the impossibility of reincarnation (Ibid.: 505).

# Avicenna's 2<sup>nd</sup> Proof for the Impossibility of Reincarnation: The Unity of the Individual

This is a proof that was relied upon by the ancient philosophers as well as by those who came after them (Avicenna 1979: 189; 1984: 108; 1996: 318). However, before we can present this proof, it is necessary to mention something by way of introduction. This is concerned with the agent of the soul as well as with the role that the body plays in the generation of the soul. First, we will inquire into the agent of the soul. Avicenna is of the opinion that the agent of the soul is an immaterial Intellect, i.e. an agent that is free from matter in both its essence and in its actions. The proof that he presents to substantiate this claim can be formulated in the following manner:

Minor premise: If the agent of the soul was not an immaterial Intellect, then it would be material in nature. If it was material in nature, then it would either be matter itself or a physical body or a material form or a material accident or a soul.

Major premise: However, it is impossible for the agent of the soul to be any of these things.

Conclusion: The agent of the soul is an immaterial Intellect.

In order to understand the minor premise of this argument it is necessary to remember that, according to Avicenna, the beings of the universe can be divided into the following categories as far as their being material or immaterial is concerned: They are either completely immaterial (i.e. in their essence and actions) or not (i.e. they are material). A material being can also, in turn, be divided into the following categories: Either it is matter itself or it is not. If a material being is not matter, then either it only relies upon matter in order to act (i.e. the soul) or it does not (i.e. it relies upon matter both in its essence and in its actions). The second category can also be divided into two categories, since it is either composed of matter and form (i.e. the physical body) or not, but rather it inheres in matter. The second category, in turn, can also be divided into two categories. This is because it is either a substance (i.e. the material form) or not, in which case it is an accident (i.e. the material accident).

Now that the minor premise of this argument has been verified, we can turn to the major premise. Avicenna proves its truth in two ways.

Minor premise: If the agent of the soul was a material being, then it would have to establish a spatial position with it before it could have an effect upon it.

Major premise: However, it is impossible for it to establish a spatial position with the soul before it has an effect upon it.

Conclusion: the agent of the soul is not a material being.

The minor premise of this argument can be proven in the following manner:

Minor premise: If the agent of the soul was a material being but *did not* need to establish a spatial position with the soul before it had an effect upon it, then it would also not need a spatial position in order to exist.

Major premise: However, it does need a spatial position in order to exist. Conclusion: If the agent of the soul was a material being, then it would have to establish a spatial position with the soul before it could have an effect upon it.

The major premise of the argument can be proven in the following manner:

Minor premise: Before the agent of the soul has an effect upon it, the soul does not exist.

Major premise: Things that do not exist do not have a spatial position with anything.

Conclusion: Before the agent of the soul has an effect upon it, the soul does not have a spatial position with respect to anything.

The second way that Avicenna proves that it is impossible for the soul to be created by a material being is the following:

Minor premise: The agent of the soul has a higher degree of existence than its effect (i.e. the soul).

Major premise: No material being has a higher degree of existence than the soul – since it is either equal in the intensity of its existence to the soul – like another soul – or it is weaker than the soul – as is the case with matter, the material form, the material accident and the physical body.

Conclusion: The agent of the soul is not a material being.

This is how Avicenna proves that it is impossible for the agent of the soul to be a material being. Rather, it must be an immaterial Intellect. From this Avicenna concludes that if the soul is generated at a specific time, then this is not because its agent did not have the power to create it before that time. Otherwise, it would imply that its agent is subject to change and material in nature. This goes against the assumption. Then why is it that the soul

is created at a specific point in time? It is due to the fact that the soul is a material being that needs the body in order to act. Thus, without a body the soul would not be able to act. It would thus be in a state of recess, i.e. a state in which it did not do anything. This is impossible. So, until the body is not ready, the soul cannot be created.

All of what has been said so far is a precursor to the following conclusion that Avicenna seeks to draw from the abovementioned premises: Once the body is ready, the immaterial Intellect must create a soul for it. This is because at that moment both of the components of its complete cause exist and when the complete cause exists the existence of the effect becomes necessary. Keeping this in mind, we can now turn to Avicenna's second argument for the impossibility of reincarnation. It is possible to formulate this argument in the structure of an exceptive syllogism.

Minor premise: If reincarnation was possible, then it would mean that more than one soul would be able to attach to one body at the same time.

Major premise: However, this is impossible. Conclusion: Reincarnation is impossible.

The necessary connection between the precedent and the antecedent of the minor premise of this argument can easily be understood when we remember the introduction mentioned above. Once the body is ready, the immaterial Intellect cannot withhold a soul from it. The incorrectness of the antecedent of this argument can be proven in two manners.

First of all, it is something that goes against intuition. In other words, all of us intuitively feel that we are only one individual, not more than one.

Secondly, if more than one soul attached to one body then it would mean that one body was more than one body – since the individuation of the body and its actuality stems from the soul. However, this is a contradiction. Thus, more than one soul cannot attach to one body.

# Objections to the Avicenna's 2nd Proof:

It is possible to mention 4 major objections to this argument. They are the following:

# 1st Objection:

There are various types of reincarnation. In this argument, one of these types has been mentioned and rejected. This is the reincarnation where the soul of a dead human being attaches itself to the body of a newborn that is prepared to receive a new soul. However, this is not the only type of reincarnation. Another type of reincarnation is when the body of the very deceased person whose soul wants to be reincarnated is reconstructed in this world only to be reunited with the soul it had. This is also an instance of reincarnation but the proof does not reject it since once the body is reconstructed, it only has the capacity for its own soul and not a new one. So, only one soul attaches to it, i.e. the one that it previously had. Thus, this argument – assuming that is sound from other points of view – cannot prove the impossibility of all of the categories of reincarnation (Fayyazi 2010: 459).

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Objection:

Apparently, this proof rests upon the idea that the new soul that is created at the time of the creation of the body must attach itself to the body. Since the old soul also attaches itself to the new body at this time, it leads to two souls regulating one body. However, there is nothing within the argument itself that necessitates the idea that this new soul *must* attach itself to this body. It seems that the argument is taking this for granted. The soul attaches itself to the body since it needs it in order to act. Avicenna seems to take it for granted that the soul *must* act. However, there is no reason – at least as far as it can be gathered from this argument – for us to say that it must act and therefore attach itself to the new body. Thus, there is the possibility that it is created at the time of the new body but does not attach itself to it (or even created before the creation of the new body). Thus, the problem of one person being two people does not occur.

At the most, it is possible for Avicenna to say that this would lead to a recess of the soul, i.e. the soul would be a being that is not doing anything if it does not attach to the body. However, the proofs for the impossibility of a recess in existence simply state that it is impossible for a being to be created without any purpose whatsoever. However, the case at hand would not definitely lead to such a thing as it is possible that after some time, the old soul detached itself from the new body and the new soul attached itself to it. Once it attached itself to the new body, it could begin acting as it wished. In this case, reincarnation would have occurred without the occurrence of the impossible recess. What is more, there are some actions of the soul that do not require the body, such as the soul's ability to know itself. Thus, even at the time of its genesis, before it has attached to the new body, its existence may have some purpose (Ibid.: 353).

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Objection:

Something also deserves to be said regarding the manner in which Avicenna rejects the idea that more than one soul can be attached to one body. He did this in two ways: by resorting to intuition and by stating that the individuation of the body depends upon the soul. Both of these proofs are problematic.

First of all, even if we assume that intuition tells us that there is only one soul within everybody, at the most this would lead to the conclusion that reincarnation has not occurred. That is why we are attempting to prove the impossibility of reincarnation, not the fact that it has not occurred. What is more, we have no way of knowing what every human being intuitively feels within himself as far as the number of people he is. Therefore, this line of thinking cannot even show that reincarnation has not occurred in anyone at all. Finally, intuition simply shows us that when we want to act with our bodies in a certain manner, nothing within us stops us from doing so. Apparently, this argument seeks to imply that if there was more than one soul, they would conflict with one another and sometimes some of them would prevent the others from acting upon the body the way it did not desire. However, this is not something that we intuitively feel. While this is true, it does not prove that if there were more than one soul in the body under question they would have to oppose one another in the way they regulated the body. Apparently, the possibility that they would always decide the same thing as far as the regulation of the body is concerned is simply spurned because it is too far-fetched. However, that would detract us from the epistemological value of the argument and make it rhetorical in nature (Ibid.: 459).

Secondly, the individuation of the body is secured by means of the vegetative soul, not the immaterial human soul. Thus, at the most, this proof would be able to prove the impossibility of the reincarnation of vegetative souls. However, this conclusion is not in harmony with the claim that the proof seeks to substantiate, i.e. the absolute impossibility of reincarnation. What is more, none of the individuals who believe in reincarnation says that it occurs for the vegetative soul. This is because this soul is material in nature and nothing material is capable of subsisting without the matter in which it inheres. Thus, it is incapable of being transferred from one body to another (Ibid.). Thus, this proof does not really disprove the claims of those who believe in reincarnation.

# 4<sup>th</sup> Objection:

Apparently, this argument rests upon the idea that once the complete cause of some phenomenon comes into existence, the existence of that effect becomes necessary. However, this is something that not all philosophers agree upon. Some philosophers are of the opinion that the necessity of the effect at the time of the existence of the cause is only for those effects whose agents lack free-will. If the agent of an effect possesses free will, it is possible for it to choose not to create its effect even though all of the other factors in its existence are present. If this is correct, then it is possible for God – who possesses free will – to choose not to create the new soul for the new body and as a result the problem of two souls for one body will not occur (Mir Jafari Miyandehi 1978: 117–127).

#### Conclusion

Now that we have presented both of Avicenna's arguments for the impossibility of reincarnation and that we have critiqued them, it is possible to conclude that neither of them has the capability to prove his claim. At most, they can prove that reincarnation is something that has not occurred for some specific individuals at some specific times. However, they cannot prove that it is something that is impossible for all human souls.

Received: October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Accepted: November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

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