

Abdelkader Al Ghouz (ed.)

Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century

Bonn University Press



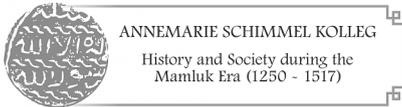


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Not That Simple: Avicenna, Rāzī, and Ṭūsī on the Incorruptibility of the Human Soul at *Ishārāt* VII.6*

There is no doubt that Avicenna's influence on the post-classical 12th century philosophical tradition was ubiquitous and received in sophisticated and critically diverse ways. One area in which this is especially the case is *ilm al-naḥs* (the study of the soul) – a discipline the *shaykh al-rā'īs* developed in systematic and novel ways. To get a sense of the critical manner in which 12th century philosophers dealt with the Avicennian heritage in this area, I look here at one particular issue which is the subject of the sixth chapter of the seventh *namaṭ* of the shaykh's *Kitāb al-Ishārāt*. I look at that issue as it was engaged with by the two most important commentators on that work, namely, Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 606/1210) and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274).¹ *Ishārāt* VII.6 has to do with the post-mortem subsistence of the human soul; the shaykh will argue there for the following thesis:

No human soul can cease to be

On Avicennian principles, this conclusion is based on two properties of the human soul; first, that it is simple, and two, that it is self-subsistent. Below, section (II), we will consider how exactly these properties function in the argument that is supposed to establish the thesis above.

Fakhr al-Dīn will reject, if not the thesis, than at least the Avicennian argument for it, raising two main difficulties for the shaykh. The first objection has to do with the possibility of the soul's being composed in such a way that only one part of it persists, from which it would then follow that the soul as a whole can cease to

* My thanks to Peter Adamson and Amirhossein Zadyousefi for helpful discussion about the content of this paper.

1 In what follows, I will be using the following editions: Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-Tanbihāt*, ed. Mojtabā Zāre ī, (Qom: 1387). From here on out, I refer to this work as *Ishārāt*, followed by *namaṭ*, chapter, and page numbers); Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, ed. Najafzāde (Tehrān: 1375, vol. 2–3). From here on out, I refer to this work as *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, followed by *namaṭ*, chapter, and page number. Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, ed. Hasanzāde Amolī (Qom: 1391, vol. 2–3). From here on out, I refer to this work as *Ḥall Mushkilāt*, followed by *namaṭ*, chapter, and page numbers. All translations are mine.

exist. This is an objection to the soul's simplicity property. The second difficulty Rāzī raises is more acute, namely, that VII.6's argument has not shown that the consequent of the following conditional (which we will call BC) is false:

(BC): if the body can serve as a condition for the soul's possible generation, then it can serve as a condition for its possible corruption

This is an objection to the self-subsistence property of the human soul.² Naṣīr al-Dīn, on the other hand, will defend, successfully in my view, VII.6's argument against both objections. A key strategy of the defense will be to draw on premises established in earlier parts of the *Ishārāt*, all the while dialectically refining the shaykh's remarks in the process. In doing this, Ṭūsī's engagement with VII.6 is, on the whole, more holistic and consistent with Avicennian principles than is Rāzī's. But I say 'on the whole' and not 'entirely', because, as we will see, in his response to BC, Ṭūsī's analysis presupposes the truth of a crucial premise the shaykh does not treat anywhere prior to VII.6. That premise concerns the temporal origination (*ḥudūth*) of the human soul.³

With that said, let me stop and state how we'll proceed. The discussion that follows will be divided into three sections; the first section (I) will introduce VII.6's argument by clarifying the background which it presupposes (but of which it is independent). Section (II) will be about Rāzī's and Ṭūsī's expositions of *Ishārāt* VII.6. Finally, section (III) will be devoted to their critical engagement with it in its own right.

1. Background

As I said, *Ishārāt* VII.6 is meant to justify the thesis that:

No human soul can cease to be

Now insofar as corruption designates³ a kind of change, the question about the soul's corruption amounts to the question of whether it is susceptible to a particular sort of change. But change, on the shaykh's view, must be understood on a hylomorphic model. And thus, the claim about the soul's incorruptibility must be understood against the background of Avicenna's broader philosophy of nature

2 The source of this second objection is probably Sharaf al-Dīn Mas'ūdī (d. circa 600/1204). See his *al-Mabāḥith wa'l-Shukūk 'alā'l-Ishārāt* ch. 14, pp. 285–286, ed. A. Shihadeh (Leiden; Boston: Brill 2016). Also, see Ayman Shihadeh, *Doubts on Avicenna: a study and edition of Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī's commentary on the Ishārāt* (Leiden; Boston: Brill 2016).

3 For an extensive treatment of this particular issue, see Seyed N. Mousavian and Seyed H.S. Mostafavi 'Avicenna on the Origination of the Human Soul' in *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 2017, vol. 5, pp. 41–86.

– specifically, his hylomorphic analysis of change. Accordingly, I here first briefly set out the main elements of that account relevant to the issue at hand, and then turn to the argument at *Ishārāt* VII.6.

1.1. Hylomorphic Change

In the Aristo-Avicennian (A-A) system, hylomorphism is, primarily, a view about the constitution of every day material objects.⁴ Secondly, it is general explanation of the changes that these objects undergo. The view states that the changes, no less than the existence of those material objects, presuppose principles.⁵

The principles involved in the existence of a material object are two: form and matter.⁶ Consider for illustrative purposes a white robe. On (A-A), the white robe is a composite in two ways. First, it is a composite of flannel, which is what functions as ‘matter’ here, and what can be called ‘robe-ness’, which is what functions as the ‘form’. The second way the white robe is a composite of the robe and the (accidental) property of whiteness. The first kind of composition is called substantial, the second is accidental.

The principles involved in the changes material objects undergo are three: the former two, plus privation.⁷ Consider again the white robe, which becomes black. The robe is what that undergoes the change, and in that sense functions as the ‘matter’ of the change. Without it, there would be nothing we could say that changed. The blackness that comes to be, which the robe as matter comes to possess, is the ‘form’. This form is what the robe as the matter of the change has a potential for before the change. Without it, there would be nothing we could say that something changed *to*. Finally, with the robe’s being white is associated a

4 It states that such objects are complex entities and their complexity, in a fundamental way, consists of principles or factors. For Avicenna’s general characterization of his hylomorphic doctrine, see *The Healing; Physics* I.2, ed. and tr. Jon McGinnis (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2009). From here on out as *Physics*, followed by book, chapter, paragraph, and page number.

5 *Physics* I.2.3, 14.

6 The formal factor is that which explains why the body is *actually* some way; as such, the form itself is of two types: either substantial or accidental. The former explains why the body is actually a given *kind* of body – like the way being a robe explains why some flannel is a robe; and the latter is that which explains why the robe is modified in some way – e. g., why the robe is white or soft, where whiteness and softness are accidental forms. The material factor, on the other hand, is that which explains why something, e. g., the flannel, is potentially a certain, other type of thing, i. e., a robe.

7 *Ibid.*, I.2.12, 18.

privation of the blackness it will come to be characterized by. Without it, there would be nothing we could say something changed *from*.⁸

The above example is a case of accidental change; for the ‘form’ involved in it is an accidental form. But if suppose that some flannel, when acted on it some way, comes to be a robe, the same principles of matter, form, and privation apply here too, though the form that comes to be in this case i.e., what we’ve called ‘robeness’, is a substantial form.⁹ On the shaykh’s view, neither type of form, *F*, can exist unless they exist in something else, *s*. In general, then, the following theses about the coming-to-be and passing-away of such forms are true:

1. For a form, *F*, to come to be is for something, *s*, to come to be *F*

And correlatively,

2. For a form, *F*, to cease to be is for something, *s*, to cease to be *F*

Finally, there’s the form-matter composite itself, which as noted was either substantial or accidental. The former, in our example, the robe, and the latter ‘the white-robe’. Clearly, both types of composites also come to be and passes away. But, in their case, it’s not true that they can’t exist unless in something else. However, even so, the following theses are still true of them due to their being constituted of (hylomorphic) parts:

3. For something, *s*, to come to be is for something, *F*, to come to be for something else, *M*

And correlatively,

4. For something, *s*, to cease to be is for something, *F*, to cease to be for something else, *M*

Now on the (A-A) account, human beings are material substances, though of a special sort, i.e., they are animate bodies. As *bodies*, they are, like all bodies, hylomorphic composites; as *animate*, they differ from other bodies by the possession of soul, where soul is understood as the principle of the activities char-

8 That is to say, it isn’t the whiteness of the robe qua whiteness that’s relevant in the explanation of change but qua privation of the incoming blackness; in other words, as long as the robe is white, it lacks (and so there’s a privation of) blackness. And it is because it lacks blackness (by actually being white) that it can change so as to acquire blackness.

9 Again, not strictly speaking but for purposes of illustration. Changes involving such substantial forms are called generation (*kawn*) or corruption (*fasād*), depending on the perspective taken, i.e., whether we’re considering what *comes to be* or what *ceases to be* as a result of the change. For example, suppose the robe is burnt and ashes result. Qua the coming to be of the ashes, the change is a generation, and qua the ceasing to be of the robe, it is a corruption.

10 Avicenna, *The Healing; Psychology* 1.1, 15, ed. H. Amoli (Tehrān: 1386). Recall that the

acteristic of them qua living. This is why, according to the shaykh, one can truly characterize, in a sense, the soul of living beings as a formal principle.¹⁰

Given all that, we are then in a better position to understand just what the contention about the soul's incorruptibility at VII.6 amounts to. For human beings, as hylomorphic composites, undeniably undergo various sorts of changes – among others, they come to be (generation) and they pass away (corruption) – so the question is whether the soul in their case is the sort of thing that can be subject to such changes. That is, since, on the basis of the above, we see that Avicenna recognizes two conditions for something to be corruptible – namely, that

- (a) it consist of something, *F*, that exists in something else, *M*, or that
- (b) it itself exist in something else, *M*

where the first way i. e., (a), is true of composites, and the second way i. e., (b), is true of forms, one may legitimately wonder whether any of these two ways is possibly true of the human soul itself. The question is all the more pressing, as we'll see Fakhr al-Dīn insist when raising his objection BC (section III), since the shaykh is committed to the claim that one of the two ways noted above for something *to come to be* i. e., option (3), is actually true of human souls. So the asymmetry, assuming there is one, demands an explanation.

2. Rāzī's and Ṭūsī's Exposition of *Ishārāt* VII.6

Having set out the background, let us now turn to *Ishārāt* VII.6. In this section, I first (in II.1) clarify, basing myself on the two commentators, the presuppositions of VII.6's argument; then (in II.2), I go on to consider how Rāzī and Ṭūsī explicate VII.6's argument.

2.1.

The shaykh labels *Ishārāt* VII.6 a 'complement' (*takmila*) to the pointers immediately preceding it. According to Fakhr al-Dīn, VII.6 is a 'complement' in that it is supposed to fulfill a purpose that Avicenna had set for himself earlier at VII.1, but from which he had to digress. Rāzī explains:

(substantial) form on the hylomorphic model is that which explains why something is actually a given kind of entity; and what accounts for why something is actually a living being – a giraffe, say – is its soul. So 'form' and 'soul' are extensionally equivalent in material animate entities.

He only named this chapter ‘a complement to these pointers’ because his goal in the first pointer of this *namaṭ* was to show the soul’s subsistence. Consequently, for the sake of that goal, there was a need to show its independence from the body. And so after he finished showing that in the earlier chapters, he wished in this chapter to return to that goal of proving the soul’s subsistence. Undoubtedly, then, this chapter is like a complement to what has passed.¹¹

Ṭūsī is in agreement with Rāzī that in the argument here at VII.6, the shaykh is tying up loose strings in the earlier VII.1 by

[...] coming back to perfecting the argument for [the soul’s] subsistence on the basis of its essential perfections after the separation of the body.¹²

So, as far as how the two commentators see things, the line of thought stretching between VII.1 and VII.6 goes something like this: first, at VII.1, the shaykh sets out to prove that the human soul subsists post-mortem. But to do this, he needs to show first why it has an existence of its own, not dependent on the body’s existence (we’ll see why below). So throughout VII.2–5, he offers arguments for the soul’s independence from the body in terms of an activity or perfection that it has per se or of itself. Finally, on the basis of the considerations adduced in VII.2–5, the shaykh returns, in VII.6, to the goal of VII.1 and now supplements (*takmila*) it with an argument to fully secure it.

Let us now look at this argument. As I said, the claim is to establish is:

No human soul can cease to be

However, this is ambiguous between:

- I) No human soul can cease to be after the death the body, and
- II) No human soul can cease to be at all (*muṭlaqan*)

So is VII.6 supposed to show (I) or (II)? The shaykh for his part recognizes the difference the two claims.¹³ I submit that VII.6 is meant to establish the stronger (II), the reason being that it entails I (but not vice versa). So if claim II is established, then I is also established.

Here then is the gist of *Ishārāt* VII.6’s argument for II:

[T1] A complement (*takmila*) to these pointers: [1.1] Know from this (*min hādihā*) that it belongs to the intellecting substance in us to cognize of itself (*bi-dhātih*). [1.2] Now

11 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 524.

12 Ṭūsī, *Hall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 882.

13 When treating the same issue in his longer works e.g., *The Healing; Psychology* V.4, he offers two distinct arguments for these two distinct theses. The distinction between (I) and (II) goes back to Plato, at *Phaedo* 86d–88b (in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, Ind. Hackett: 1997).

because it is an *aṣl*, it will not be a composite of a potentiality receptive to corruption conjoined (*muqārana*) to a potentiality for subsisting.¹⁴

And if the human soul is not receptive to corruption, the argument implies, then this is just to say it cannot cease to be. Therefore, the human soul is incorruptible.

The argument, given its conciseness, presupposes a lot. The dependence on earlier parts of the *Ishārāt* is flagged at [1.1]; both Rāzī and Ṭūsī take the referent of the *min hādā* ('from this') clause to be the considerations the shaykh had just raised throughout *Ishārāt* VII.2–5 for the soul's intellectual activity being independent of material instruments. Both commentators take it that the claim in [1.1], i. e., that the soul's intellectual activity is an activity it has per se or 'of itself' (*bi-dhātih*), is a conclusion that follows from those considerations.¹⁵

Then in [1.2] the shaykh calls the soul an '*aṣl*'. This term is crucial in that it serves as the argument's middle term (as we'll see more clearly in a second), so let us unpack what it means. Our commentators explain that for the human soul to be an *aṣl* is for it to have two properties:

- i) simplicity (*basāta*)

by which is meant an absence of hylomorphic composition, and

- ii) self-subsistence (*qiyām bi-nafsih*)

by which is meant non-inherence in something else, where inherence is a type of existential dependence.¹⁶ From here on out, let '§' stand for the property of being an *aṣl*, understood as the conjunction of properties (i)-(ii).

There's an immediate relation between the claim in [1.1] and [1.2]'s claim that the soul is §. As I understand the shaykh, the relation between the two for him is one of entailment; that is, having an activity independent of matter (= to cognize *bi-dhātih*) entails being § in the above sense. The entailment relation between having an independent activity and being § is in turn secured by the independence of activity being a consequence of an independent existence for the thing that has the activity. So the inferential relations should be conceived as follows:

independent activity → independent being → §

14 Avicenna, *Ishārāt* VII.6, 324. The division of the text by numbers in square brackets is my own. In all his major works, Avicenna offers substantially the same argument. The most detailed version is in *The Healing; Psychology* V.4, 295–297. For some of the other versions, see e.g., *Kitāb al-Najāt; Physics* VI.9, 383–386, ed. Dānishpazhuh (Tehrān: 1387), and *Al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'ād* ch.8, 143–144, ed. A. Nūrānī (Tehrān: 1363).

15 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 524; Ṭūsī, *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 882.

16 *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 528; *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 882.

And to have an independent existence is just to *not* exist in something else i. e., as in an underlying substrate. The thought, then, is: if x has an activity of its own i. e., independent from matter, x is existentially independent of matter; and if x is independent of matter in being, then x is simple and self-subsistent i. e., an $\$$. That the soul satisfies being an $\$$ was, again, the burden of *Ishārāt* VII.2–5 to demonstrate, so we take it as established at VII.6.

2.2.

Granted the above, the shaykh’s argument at T1 (let us call it MA from now on) can then more precisely be captured in the following syllogism – First Figure, second mood:

Every human soul is $\$$
 Nothing that is $\$$ can cease to be
 Therefore, no human soul can cease to be

MA’s universal affirmative (*mawjiba kulliyya*) minor premise, as noted, is derived from *Ishārāt* VII.2–5. And its universal negative (*sālība kulliyya*) major, or a premise equivalent to it, is presupposed in what is specifically said at [1.2], the claim there being something like the following conditional:

If the soul is $\$$, then it cannot cease to be

And the truth of this premise presupposes the truth of:

Nothing that is $\$$ can cease to be

Which is just the universal negative major of MA’s syllogism.

Having shown at T1 that the human soul can’t fail to cease to be, the shaykh then regiments the argument. He does this in two ways; first, by claiming (in [1.3] below) that even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that MA’s universal affirmative minor is false, its conclusion would still go through. He writes:

[1.3] If, though, it [i. e., the human soul] is taken not as an $[\$]$, but rather as if a composite of something like matter and something like form, we apply the argument to the $[\$]$ among [the composite soul’s] parts.¹⁷

Rāzī’s first objection will be to this move at [1.3]. Whether the argument here goes through will depend on certain other premises of course – premises that Ṭūsī will supply. Below in section III, we shall consider in detail both the Rāzian objection to [1.3] and the Ṭūsian response.

¹⁷ Avicenna, *Ishārāt* VII.6, 324

The second way the shaykh regiments T1's MA argument is by resolving a dialectical objection which assumes that simplicity is a sufficient condition for incorruptibility. He writes:

[1.4] With accidents, their existence is in their subjects, and so their potential for corruption and generation is in their subjects, though there's no composition in them.¹⁸

The worry addressed here, as Ṭūsī notes, is that since there are things that are simple – in the sense of not being hylomorphic composites – but are nevertheless subject to corruption, e.g., accidental and substantial forms themselves – why can't, one may ask, the soul be like that?¹⁹ The answer to this should by now be clear; namely, the truth of the universal negative major above. For that premise states that incorruptibility requires *both* simplicity and self-subsistence; but though accidental and substantial forms are simple in the required way, they can't exist, as explained above in section I, without existing in something else.

Finally, in [1.5] we get the upshot of the argumentation in the preceding [1.2–4]:

[1.5] And if that's the case, then things like this [i.e., like the human soul] are not in themselves receptive to corruption after their necessitation by their causes and their subsistence through them.

Let us now go back to VII.6's MA argument and consider how our two commentators parse it. MA stated:

Every human soul is §
 Nothing that is § can cease to be
 Therefore, no human soul can cease to be

Recall that being an § means being both (i) simple and (ii) self-subsistent. Now clearly, MA's major premise i.e.

Nothing that is § can cease to be

is the crucial one. How does the shaykh justify it? According to Fakhr al-Dīn, the pivot of VII.6's MA argument is the following thesis (call it PM):

PM: Every temporal event (*ḥādith*) has matter that precedes it

PM is a claim the shaykh had established earlier at *Ishārāt* V.6.²⁰ In saying that the major premise of MA depends on PM, Rāzī means to say that insofar as a thing's coming to be (or generation) and ceasing to be (or corruption) are events, PM

18 Ibid., 324

19 Ṭūsī, *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 883.

20 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 526.

applies i. e., such events must involve something which functions as matter, so that:

If x comes to be, x has matter that precedes it

and likewise:

If x ceases to be, x has matter that precedes it

And so taking the truth of the PM thesis for granted, and applying it to cases of corruption, we can say that (PM-C):

PM-C: Everything, x , which ceases to be has matter that precedes it

Where the expression 'has matter' means:

There exists something, s , which is the bearer of the possibility of x to cease to be

If so, then, on Rāzī's understanding of the MA argument, the supposition that the human soul can cease to be will entail, as clarified below, that the soul is not an \dot{S} .

Rāzī explains:

[T2] So we say that if the soul admits of corruption, then the possibility of the occurrence of that corruption obtains (*hāṣil*) prior the occurrence of that corruption. That possibility inevitably has a substrate; and it is impossible that its substrate be the soul itself (*dhāt al-nafs*). For the substrate of the possibility of a thing is such that it necessarily remains with the realization of that thing. However, the soul does not remain with the realization of its corruption. And therefore, the substrate of that possibility is not the soul but rather its matter.²¹

The argument at T2 goes something like this:

Everything that possibly ceases to be has matter
 The soul possibly ceases to be (assumption)
 Therefore, the soul has matter

The truth of the PM-C premise presupposes that:

Nothing can be the matter, qua bearer, of its own possibility to cease to be

Rāzī appeals to a well-founded Avicennian principle as the reason for this, namely:

[...] what receives something (*al-qābil*) necessarily remains with what is received (*al-maqbūl*).²²

21 Ibid., 526.

22 Avicenna, *Physics* III.9.3, 339 (tr. J. McGinnis, modified). *The Healing; Metaphysics* IV.2.28, 141, ed. and tr. M. Marmura (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005).

But the soul, when it receives corruption i. e., when its possibility to cease to be is actualized, does not remain; for, self-evidently, nothing is such that it remains when it in fact corrupts. Hence, there must then exist something, *s*, which functions as the matter qua bearer of the soul's possibility to cease to be and which remains with the realization of that possibility. Therefore, the soul has matter (in the sense specified above). But if it has matter, then for the duration of the soul's actual existence, the relation of that matter to the soul will be either one of (1) constitution or (2) a subject of inherence. Whatever the case, the soul's property of being an \mathcal{S} is violated; for if (1), human soul will not be simple – being then composed of this matter and something else, *F*. And if (2), the human soul will not be able to exist unless in that subject. Both of these conclusions contradict the result of *Ishārāt* VII.2–5. This is how Rāzī parses *Ishārāt* VII.6's T1 argument.

Ṭūsī's take on the argument at T1 is more perspicuous than Rāzī's. Like the latter, he thinks the claim presupposed there is MA's major premise:

Nothing that is \mathcal{S} can cease to be

The reason for that, Naṣīr al-Dīn explains, is because there's nothing in the \mathcal{S} that would function as the ground or bearer of the potential for something else to come to be – which is, as we've seen in section I, what corruption as a change on (A-A) amounts to. So as Ṭūsī understands VII.6, the goal there is to show the failure of anything that is an \mathcal{S} to consist of two distinct elements or factors that are related as a state (*ḥāl*) to that of which it is the state i. e., its substrate (*maḥall*). So such an entity would lack any potency for corruption and wouldn't be the sort of thing that can possibly cease to be. Ṭūsī comments on T1's argument as follows:

[T3] Every temporally subsisting existent [e.g., *x*] that is such as to corrupt is, before corruption, actually subsistent and potentially corrupted. Now, the actuality of subsistence is other than the potentiality of corruption. Otherwise, everything that subsists possibly corrupts and everything that possibly corrupts subsists. Therefore, they are due to two different factors [in *x*]. But it is impossible for what is an [\mathcal{S}] to contain two different things; for it is simple.²³

To actually exist is not the same as to potentially cease to exist. Otherwise, anything characterized by the one would ipso facto be characterized by the other; but that's clearly false. For example, supposing God exists, He, being necessary, isn't the sort of thing that can possibly corrupt. But if it's possible that there be a being that exist but doesn't have the potential to corrupt, then 'actual existence' and 'potential nonexistence' are distinct features of an object. If that's true, then this claim holds:

²³ Ṭūsī, *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 882–883.

For all x , if x exists at t and potentially ceases-to-be at t' , there's some factor, call it e , in virtue of which x has actual existence at t and some other factor, call it e' , in virtue of which x is potentially non-existent after t'

Thus, because actual existence and potential nonexistence are really different, their causal factors, e and e' , are really different. And therefore, x would consist of two really distinct factors, e and e' ; as such, x wouldn't be an $\$$.

Here, however, one may object to the Ṭūsian argument at T3; for all that argument shows is that 'actuality of subsistence' and 'potentiality of corruption' are distinct attributes, but it doesn't show that they cannot have a single bearer or subject. Hence, it's possible, the objector may insist, that

[...] the subject of both attributes is a single thing, but the multiplicity of attributes is in terms of potency and actuality – in the sense that a single subject in actuality possesses one attribute and that very same subject in potentiality possesses another.²⁴

Applied to the case of the human soul, the objection states: possibly, the soul itself, even though simple, is the bearer of both the attribute of actual subsistence and the attribute of potential corruption.

The answer to this should be clear from the Avicennian principle we saw Rāzī appeal to in his analysis of T1 – namely, the one from *Physics* III.3.9, which stated:

If x has a potential, F , for y , then x must subsist with the actualization of F

If so, then it's not possible for the human soul to be that which possesses both attributes; for, as already noted, when its potentiality for corruption is realized, it doesn't survive the process, which then means it is not the thing which had the potentiality in the first place.

Ṭūsī then concludes his analysis:

[T4] If it's then established that the soul is either an $\$$ or possesses an $\$$, then neither it, nor what is similar to it in not having composition in it and not inhering in something else, is such as to admit corruption. And hence, subsistence and the potentiality of corruption cannot both be combined in that which is simple. If the former obtains, then the latter does not. Therefore, it's not possible for the soul to corrupt.²⁵

In sum, as a simple, non-inhering entity, there can't possibly be some factor in the soul which accounts for its potential corruption. In other words, to put in terms of the hylomorphic account of change outlined in section I, neither of the two ways for a thing to corrupt apply to the human soul; it neither (a) consists of some factor, F , that exists in something else, M , nor (b) does it itself exist in something else, M . And hence, it will be impossible for the soul, once it exists, to ever fail to exist. This is just to say it would be incorruptible.

24 Ḥassan Malekshāhī, *Tarjume va Sharḥ Ishārāt va Tanbihāt*, p. 379.

25 *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 884.

With that said, let me now pause and briefly take stock before turning to section III. Again, the main argument (MA) we extracted from *Ishārāt* VII.6 was:

Every human soul is §
 Nothing that is § can cease to be
 Therefore, no human soul can cease to be

I noted that the universal negative major was its key premise. And we've seen the justification for in terms of the analysis offered by Rāzī and Ṭūsī. We can summarize the result of that in the following argument – stated in the First Figure, second mood:

Everything that can cease to be has matter
 Nothing that has matter is §
 Therefore, nothing that can cease to be is §

The universal affirmative minor of this argument is based on *Ishārāt* V.6. Its universal negative major is true by definition; for, as we've learned above, the simplicity condition for being an § excludes having matter. The conclusion of the argument converts to:

Nothing that is § can cease to be

Which is just the major premise of the MA argument of VII.6.

This, then, constitutes the extent of our two commentators' exposition of *Ishārāt* VII.6. I now turn to their assessment of it.

3. Rāzī's and Ṭūsī's Critical Engagement with *Ishārāt* VII.6

Fakhr al-Dīn raises two main objections to VII.6. The first is specific to what Avicenna had said at [1.3] above (in section II.2), arguing that the reasoning implicit there isn't sufficient to get us the soul's survival. The second objection, i. e., BC, is more general:

BC: just as the body, according to Avicenna, grounds the soul's possible origination, it can likewise ground the possibility of its cessation

In his response to the first, Ṭūsī will argue that Rāzī fails to consider premises the shaykh established earlier which anticipate and resolve the objection. In his response to BC, Ṭūsī will argue that the objection betrays a failure to understand the precise sense in which the soul is temporally originated according to the shaykh. Let us now take up the objections and responses.

Recall that at [1.3], the shaykh had argued that even if we, for the sake of argument, grant the opponent that the human soul *is* a kind of composite, and

therefore not simple, the conclusion about its incorruptibility would still go through. That argument went as follows:

[1.3] If, though, [the human soul] is taken not as an [§], but rather as if a composite of something like matter and something like form, we apply the argument to the [§] among [the composite soul's] parts.²⁶

That is, suppose the human soul is a composite of some formal factor, *F*, joined to some other factor, *M*, where the *M*-factor functions as matter. And suppose further that the soul ceases to be when factor *F* ceases to be conjoined to factor *M*. Rāzī then fleshes out the reasoning implicit in [1.3] like this:

[T5] [Then] this [factor *M*] is either such that it does not itself have another [*M*-factor] or, even if it does, [we] inevitably end up at a final [*M*-factor] that itself has no [further *M*-factor]. Hence, it must be that that [*M*-factor] which doesn't have [an *M*-factor] can't possibly corrupt [...]. And by 'the soul', we mean nothing except that subsisting [*M*-factor-less] (*mujarrad*) substance.²⁷

So T5's argument seems to be: the human soul is, in itself, nothing but an immaterial, i. e., *M*-less, self-subsisting being. Now, assuming that the soul is composed of *F*-*M* factors, if we apply the considerations in [1.2] to the material *M*-factor which partly composes the soul and which, on this assumption, underlies its possible nonexistence, we, in the last analysis, arrive at the conclusion that this *M*-factor itself must be something simple i. e., not further composed from some other *M* and *F* elements. Why is this so? Though not explicit in Rāzī's exposition, there's good reason to think it's because otherwise an infinite regress would threaten.²⁸ So an ultimately simple *M* factor must be posited in order to avoid such a regress. If so, then given that anything that can cease-to-be is composed, that simple *M* factor won't have the possibility to cease-to-be. If so, then the simple *M*-factor turns out to be a something that is immaterial, i. e., matter-less, and subsisting. But this is just what it is to be a human soul on the Avicennian view; and therefore, the human soul qua being a simple matter-less substance can't possibly cease to be – which is just the conclusion sought.

Or again, as Tūsī fleshes out the thought at [1.3], if the soul isn't an §, then, taken by itself, either it's a composite of some constituent elements *F*-*M*, or it is a state (*ḥāl*) i. e., *F*, in something else i. e., *M*. If the latter, this contradicts the self-subsistence condition for being an §. If the soul is a composite though, every composite must be composed either partly or wholly of non-inhering simple

26 *Ishārāt* VII.6, 324

27 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 527–527.

28 Compare what Rāzī says at *al-Maṭalib al-'Alīyyah* VII.3.11, 236, ed. A. Alsaqā' (Beirut: 1987, vol. 7). For Avicenna, the infinite regress entailment is explicit in both *The Healing; Psychology* V.4, and *al-Najāt; Physics* VI.9 versions of the argument. For an argument against an infinity of material causes in general, see *The Healing; Metaphysics*, VII.1.9–18.

elements; otherwise, we get an infinite regress. Whatever the case, if we then consider these simple elements, it turns out that:

[T6] [...] on these presuppositions (*alā taqdīrīn*), what is a non-inhering simple [being], I mean, the [S] existent in a composite, is not itself a composite of the potentiality of corruption and the actuality (*wujūd*) of subsistence (*thubāt*).²⁹

And if there's no potentiality for corruption in that simple, self-subsistent being, then it can never fail to exist.

Rāzī's first objection

Contra [1.3], Rāzī argues as follows: If, as [1.3] explicitly allows, the soul were a composite of some simple material factor, *M*, and formal factor, *F*, then, even if its simple *M*-factor, as the Avicennian insists, persists despite *F* perishing, that remaining *M* factor wouldn't be robust enough of an entity to be characterized as a human soul in the way the shaykh himself understands the soul. That is, Rāzī is urging that the soul can be composed in such a way that if only its simple *M* part were to survive, it would not be the case that the soul as such survives. The objection begins as follows:

[T7] [F]rom the subsistence of the [*M* part] of the [soul] it doesn't follow that the soul subsists, just as from the subsistence of the prime matter of elemental bodies it doesn't follow that they [i. e., the elements] subsist.³⁰

That is, assuming that only the soul's simple *M* factor persists – the *F* factor passing away – entails that the soul qua whole ceases to be, i. e., insofar the *F*-factor is a part of it that contributes to its complete being. And in that sense, the soul would in fact have the potentiality for corruption in the way any hylomorphic composite in general does, i. e., insofar as once that composite's formal part ceases to exist, what survives isn't identical to what we started out with. This is all the more true in the case at hand, Rāzī explains, because on the shaykh's view, the separated human soul is an entity that has various intellectual and ethical features as properties; but the surviving simple *M* element of the (on the present assumption) composite that is the soul would just not be that sort of thing. And so it just wouldn't be a soul without equivocation. Rāzī presses on:

[T8] What confirms [the truth of the objection raised] is that [...] you say: 'the soul subsists after the body's death, cognizing its intelligibles, perceiving its perceptibles, and characterized by the ethical traits which it acquired in its state of embodiment'. In that case, [from] your allowing that the surviving thing, after bodily death, is its [*M* part] only, it's not possible for you to prove any of that. For someone can object: 'why can't

29 Ṭūsī, *Hall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 883.

30 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 528.

one say that [the soul's *M* part] being characterized by these cognitions, perceptions, sciences and ethical traits is conditioned on the realization of [the *F* part] in it, and that when in bodily death this [*F* part] corrupts, then assuredly nothing of these sciences and ethical traits remain'. And so it's evident that the amount they mentioned for the subsistence of the soul is insufficient.³¹

How good is this objection? Well, to the extent that on Avicennian principles intellectual and ethical features follow upon a thing's form – they are formal features of a composite – the objection has bite. For if that's so, it's no doubt true that should the formal part of a composite go, all the features that it grounds would likewise have to go. The criticism is especially weighty, as T8 makes clear, because what motivates the thesis about soul's post-mortem subsistence, on the (A-A) view, is a further thesis about the eschatological states of happiness and misery the human soul will experience in that post-mortem state. For this to be possible, however, the soul has to somehow retain said formal features, for they determine such states – and this is precisely what can't be sustained, Rāzī claims, on the assumption that the soul as such remains intact when only one of its parts i. e., the *M*-part, does so. And hence, on this assumption the soul ceases to be just like a composite as such ceases to be when its form perishes.³² Hence, contra [1.3]'s argument, the *M* part's survival doesn't suffice for the human soul's survival as such.

Ṭūsī's response

How can the Avicennian resist this conclusion? Naṣīr al-Dīn needs to show that the soul's simple *M* part surviving guarantees the survival of those formal features noted above. He has an argument for that which, I think, goes some distance in meeting the Rāzian objection. The argument takes the form of an elaborate disjunction, and it draws on three crucial premises all of which are taken as established by the shaykh in the earlier parts of the *Ishārāt*. Ṭūsī's response has two virtues: first, in its own right, it suffices to show, contra Rāzī, that the surviving simple *M*-part is robust enough of an entity to be characterized as a soul; and second, it's a neat illustration of Avicenna's consistency on the issue in terms of how certain chapters of the *Ishārāt* hang together.

The argument, as I understand it, goes like this:

1. Suppose that only the simple *M*-part of the soul survives
2. That *M*-part then either (1) has position (*waḍ*) or (2) does not have position.
3. If (1), having position would be a part of what the simple *M*-part is in itself
4. But the simple *M*-part has no position in itself [cf., *Ishārāt* I.14, 197–198]

31 Ibid., 528.

32 Ibid., 528.

5. 3 contradicts 4
6. Therefore, $\sim(1)$ [by reductio]
7. Therefore, (2) [from 2, 6]
8. If (2), either (2.1) this position-less simple *M*-part subsists on its own (*infirād*) or (2.2) it does not subsist on its own
9. All that is immaterial and subsists on its own cognizes of itself [cf., *Ishārāt* III.19, 250]
10. If (2.1), the simple *M*-part cognizes of itself [from 8, 9]
11. If the simple *M*-part cognizes of itself then it is the whole soul as such
12. Therefore, the simple *M*-part is the whole soul as such [from 10, 11, modus ponens]
13. 12 contradicts 1
14. Therefore, $\sim(2.1)$ [by reductio]
15. Therefore, (2.2) [from 8, 14]
16. If (2.2), either the simple *M*-part (2.2.1) subsists through the body's causal influence or (2.2.2) it does not subsist through the body's causal influence
17. If (2.2.1), the soul doesn't have an independent being from the body
18. If the soul depends on the body for its being, it has no activity per se (*bi-dhātih*)
19. But it does have an activity per se [cf., *Ishārāt* VII.2–5, 321–324]
20. Therefore, the soul doesn't depend on the body in its being [18, 19, modus tollens]
21. Therefore, (2.2.2) the simple *M*-part does not subsist by the body's causal influence [16, 20]³³

The upshot of the argument in 1–21, then, is:

[T9] If [the soul] does not exist on account of the body's causal influence, then it subsists by that which renders it subsistent, even if the body is not existent. This is just the conclusion sought (*maṭlūb*). Moreover, it's not possible that the forms residing in [the soul], and the perfections that follow upon those forms, corrupt and change after its connection from the body is severed; for change does not exist except as depending on a moveable body, as determined according to philosophical principles.³⁴

Does Ṭūsī's analysis succeed in resolving Rāzī's objection? Recall that Rāzī censured the Avicennian by objecting that if the soul can be a composite entity only the simple *M*-part of which survives (as in 2.2) – its *F* perishing – then that simple part would on this supposition turn out to be nothing more than a bare, i. e., featureless, entity, hardly worthy of being considered a soul as such i. e., in the way that sort of entity is normally understood by the Avicennian, with all its cognitive and moral perfections available to it. This would amount to a corruption of the soul as a whole. In his response Ṭūsī shows, in three steps, that the soul's remaining or surviving simple *M*-part, on analysis, turns out to be not a part of the soul but rather a fully-fledged soul as such – with its psychological properties intact. Consequently, there's no real sense then in which it corrupts.

33 Ṭūsī, *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 884–885.

34 *Ibid.*, 885.

The gist of each step is as follows. In the first, premises 1 to 7, we learn – on the basis of *namaṭ* I.14, where the shaykh establishes that prime matter, the sort of matter that has no further matter of its own, has position only on account of the form that comes to inhere in it – that the surviving simple (i. e., matter-less) *M*-part can't also be something intrinsically located. If by 4 we know that prime matter has position only due to form, then if the simple *M*-part lacks form but intrinsically still has position, we have a contradiction – it *both* doesn't have position of itself and does have position of itself.³⁵ In the second step, premises 8 to 16, Ṭūsī shows – on the basis of *namaṭ* III.19, where Avicenna establishes that anything that is immaterial (i. e., matter-less) and self-subsistent is an agent of intellection – that if the simple *M*-part, as unlocated, is self-subsistent, then it follows that that *M*-part is an agent of intellection.³⁶ As such, as 11 states, it would be the human soul as a whole; for the subsistence of a cognitive self-subsisting substance is all that the Avicennian seeks in showing the human soul survives. But if, as in premise 12, the simple *M*-part's persisting amounts, given 9, to the soul as such surviving, then we have a contradiction; 12 runs up against the initial (Rāzian) assumption, i. e., premise 1 – namely, that the *M*-factor is only a *part* and not the whole soul. And from the denial, by a *reductio*, of the first disjunct (2.1) of 8 we derive its second disjunct (2.2): the intrinsically unlocated simple *M*-part doesn't subsist by itself. In that case, it, per 16, subsists by the body or not, but rather by something else, whatever that thing may be. Finally, in the third step, premises 17 to 20, Ṭūsī shows, on the basis of *Ishārāt* VII.2–5, where Avicenna argues for the independence of intellectual cognition, that the simple *M*-part must then subsist independently of the body since it has an activity (i. e., cognition) of its own i. e., independent of the body.³⁷ With 21, we have our conclusion: the positionless simple *M*-part subsists independently of the body in virtue of something which will count as a formal feature of it. But why should it be a formal feature that makes it subsist? Precisely because we had assumed – at

35 Perhaps Ṭūsī also has another point in mind in the reasoning from 1–7, namely, that if the simple *M*-part is intrinsically located, then given premise 4, which goes back to *Ishārāt* I.14, it would follow that it is in fact informed, which on the present assumption it is not. And so another contradiction follows – the simple *M*-part is *both* informed i. e., qua possessing position, and not informed, given the present assumption that it's the *only* surviving part of the whole composite that is the human soul.

36 For Rāzī's and Ṭūsī's debate over *Ishārāt* III.19, see Peter Adamson 'Avicenna and his Commentators on Human and Divine Self-Intellection', in *The Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 97–123.

37 And this, again, means that the soul wholly, not partly, subsists despite the nonexistence of the body. Premise 18 is self-evident; the conditional in 19 we've already seen the reason for, namely, that activity follows being, so that if *x* depends on *y* for its existence, *x* depends on *y* for its activity. Premise 20 is a denial of the consequent of 19 on the basis of *Ishārāt* VII.2–5, with 21 following by *modus tollens*.

premise 8, option (2.2) – that the *M*-part doesn't subsist on its own, and – at premise 16, option (2.2.1) – that it also doesn't subsist in virtue of the body's causal influence. Hence, insofar as the *M*-part is like prime matter, which doesn't subsist unless through form, the *M*-part then subsists in virtue of some formal feature, *F*, whatever it may be. And so long as this formal feature, *F*, survives the soul's separation from the body – and it inevitably must since the *M*-factor survives and survives due only to some formal factor – then the perfective properties that *F* is the source of will also remain with it such that the soul will be incapable of losing them post-mortem. For their loss would be a change, and change requires a body at its subject. But, the human soul in our supposed state of separation has no body. Hence, it won't be able to lose them. Hence, contra the Rāzian objection, the soul as a whole (i. e., with its formal perfective features), not just a part of it, survives.³⁸

Rāzī's second objection

Supposing the first objection is adequately dealt with, Rāzī then turns to pointing out a more serious difficulty in the shaykh's more general account of the soul. The strategy here will be to exploit an asymmetry between the origination of the

38 One might object here, with Rāzī, that if the Ṭūsian response is correct, then it follows that “the [*M*-part] of a thing would be equivalent to that entire [i. e., composite] thing in every attribute” (*Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 528). This is because, Rāzī explains, insofar as the soul, on the A-A view, falls under the genus of substance, it will consist of a genus and a differentia. And the genus and differentia, in a certain respect, are just matter and form, which are the two essential parts of any composite. Hence, if the soul's genus qua matter, as a matter-less (*mujarrad*) self-subsistent entity is, by *Ishārāt* III.19, an intellect, an agent of intellection, and intelligible – which just is the soul as a whole – then something impossible follows: a part of a thing becomes to be equivalent to the whole of that thing. That is, if it's true that the persistence of the soul's simple *M*-part, given III.19, is a sufficient condition for the persistence of the soul as such, then it would be true that a part of a composite, i. e., its genus qua matter, would suffice for all the properties of the whole of that composite, properties that it has in virtue of having a differentia qua form which, on the present assumption, has ceased to exist. But on A-A, that's manifestly false; genus qua matter is a constitutive part of a composite and as such cannot exhaust or account for the being of the composite as a whole. Ṭūsī responds by noting, rightly, that this objection commits a fallacy of equivocation; that is, it equivocates on the terms matter and form. For the two are said of the parts of a composite body and the genus and differentia only by *tashshabuh* – analogy or similarity (*Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 885–886). There's a correspondence between the two pairs, to be sure, but they aren't equivalent. Otherwise, as Ṭūsī contends, “all species of accidents would likewise be hylomorphically composed” (*ibid.*, 886), insofar as accidents have a genus/differentia composition, but no corresponding form/matter composition. Basically, then, the absurdity of the part becoming equivalent to the whole, Ṭūsī argues, only results from Rāzī's treating the genus/differentia distinction as equivalent to the form/matter distinction, and not from the conjunction of the thesis established at *Ishārāt* III.19 and the simple *M*-part of the soul being something itself matter-less (*mujarrad*) and self-subsistent.

human soul on the (A-A) view and its possible cessation. This is the objection we've termed BC. It states:

(BC): if the body can serve as a condition for the soul's possible generation, then it can serve as a condition for its possible corruption

The main thrust of BC is that it seems Avicenna has no principled reason why these two possibilities:

- 1) The possibility of coming-to-be, and
- 2) The possibility of ceasing-to-be

cannot function in the same way vis-à-vis their relation to a putative bearer or substrate. Rāzī explains:

[T10] Just as corruption is preceded by the possibility of corruption, in the same way coming-to-be is preceded by the possibility of coming-to-be. And so if the possibility of [the human soul's] coming-to-be is independent of a substratum or, if it is dependent on a substratum but the substratum of that possibility is the body, then one must allow for the possibility of corruption that it [too] does not depend on a substratum or, if it is dependent on it, its substratum is the body. And if this is false here, then that's false there; otherwise, what's the difference?³⁹

The objection is particularly apropos, Rāzī thinks, since the shaykh grants 1) insofar as he holds that the soul *does* in fact come-to-be at some *t* and so the possibility of its coming-to-be *does* have matter as its bearer at *t*. On the basis of this admission, why then can't someone, Rāzī asks, maintain:

[T11] If the emanation of the soul from the Active Intellect is conditioned (*mashrūṭan*) upon the realization of a mixture (*mizāj*) receptive for [the soul's] management and action, then, when this body is corrupted, the condition of its emanation from [the Active Intellect] has corrupted. And with that, its annihilation becomes necessary on account of the annihilation of its condition.⁴⁰

Simply put: if the body, or more precisely the complex bodily 'mixture', can serve as a condition for the soul's possible coming-to-be, then it can equally serve as a condition for its possible ceasing-to-be. At the very least, an argument hasn't been provided against thinking that if, as the Avicennian concedes, the possibility of the soul's temporal origination is anchored in a substrate, i. e., a suitable bodily mixture, the possibility of its nonexistence is equally anchored in that same bodily mixture. In sum, the dilemma Rāzī saddles the Avicennian with is that the there's no relevant difference between the two possibilities 1) and 2); they run parallel in that either both inhere in some substrate, in which case the soul, contra

39 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.6, 528.

40 *Ibid.*, 528.

VII.6, *would* be susceptible to corruption, or neither does, in which case the temporal coming-to-be of the soul, just like its corruption, would be impossible. And the latter consequence contradicts the shaykh's explicit teaching that no soul pre-exists the body of which it is the soul. This objection, I think, is substantive.

Ṭūsī's response

Rāzī's second objection exercises Ṭūsī, forcing him to offer a searching analysis of the Avicennian position on the soul-body relation as it concerns coming-to-be and passing-away. In responding to BC, Ṭūsī first clarifies the precise sense in which something is said, in general, to serve as a substrate for another thing's possible generation and/or corruption. For he thinks Rāzī misunderstands that and thereby misunderstands two further things: first, what it is for the body to be a substrate for specifically the soul's possible coming-to-be; and second, what it is for the body to be a substrate for the soul's possible ceasing-to-be.

As regards the general account, it is that:

[T12] The meaning (*ma'nā*) of the body being a substrate for the possibility of the existence of blackness is its disposition (*tahayyu'uhu*) for the existence of blackness in it, so that the state of the existence of blackness is bounded (*muqtaranan*) to it. And the same is the case for the possibility of corruption. For this reason, it's impossible for something to be a substrate for the possibility of corruption itself.⁴¹

As I understand it, Ṭūsī is claiming that for something, e.g., *F*, to have its possibility of existence grounded in something else, e.g., *x*, is, fundamentally, for that something else, *x*, to have some dispositional property to exist a certain way i.e., in the *F*-way or as *F*. As such, being a substrate for *F* is about a type of existential dependence – in this case of *F* on *x*, where the existence of the one is conjoined or bound to that of the other. Take the example offered in T12: the color black can possibly come to be, and its possible coming to be has some body as its substrate. This means that that body possess as a real property a disposition to be black. Once that disposition is manifested due to the relevant causal factor(s), the body is actually black. For black to possibly come to be, then, is just for the body to have a property in virtue of which it is possibly black; and for black to actually exist is just for the body to actually be black. This, as you'll recall from section I, then amounts to the claim:

For something, *F*, to come to be, is for something else, *x*, to come to be *F*

Black's actual existence, on this account, is the same as the body's actually being black. In sum, on Ṭūsī's analysis, to say that

41 Ṭūsī, *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 886.

‘ x is a substrate for the possibility of F 's existence’

is to say that

‘ x has a disposition to be F ’

where ‘disposition’ is understood as positive property had by x to exist in a certain i. e., F , way. It marks out a kind of potentiality possessed by x which, when acted on by the relevant causal factor(s), becomes actualized.

If the above is correct, then once we recall the self-subsistence condition for being an Ş which the human soul satisfies, the point Naşir al-Dīn makes next – against Rāzī's BC objection – is significant. He writes (emphasis mine):

[T13] The response [to Rāzī] is that for something [e. g., x] to be a substrate for the possible existence, or possible corruption, of something else [e. g., F] – *the subsistence (qiwām) of which is clearly distinct (mubāyin) from [x] – is unintelligible (ghayr ma'qūl).*⁴²

That is, for anything, F , the persistence conditions of which are distinct from those of something else, x , x can't serve as the substrate, in the sense specified above, for the possible existence (or corruption) of F . The reason, again, is because x 's being a substrate for F is just for x to have a disposition to exist as F . That is to say, for F to be is just for x to exist in an F -way. On that account, F would not have a distinct being from x . But that can't hold if F is something with a distinct or independent subsistence of its own. Thus, if it has been established, on independent grounds, that F (= the soul) is distinct in being from x (= the body), then it follows that x can't serve as its substrate in the sense that x is something with a disposition to exist in an F -state. Or rather, where F has an independent being from x , it is, as Ṭūsī puts it, incoherent (*ghayr ma'qūl*) to claim that x serves as the substrate of F 's possible existence; for being a substrate denotes existential dependence, and F 's being something with existential autonomy (from x) is incompatible with that. In sum, the Rāzian claim would amount to a contradiction: F both depends on x – qua having x as its substrate – and does not depend on x – qua being something self-subsistent (insofar as it is an Ş).⁴³

In light of the above analysis, it's clear that Rāzī's BC objection misunderstands the Avicennian view, according to Ṭūsī, insofar it conceives the soul's

42 Ibid., 886.

43 Ṭūsī's parsing of the Avicennian account in this way has the consequence that a thing's bearing the possibility of another thing's corruption has to be fleshed out in positive terms. In other words, that, say, F 's possibility for corruption inheres in x would mean that x has the disposition for the existence of some F^* , i. e., for being F^* . This is, I think, why Ṭūsī concludes T12 with: For that reason, it's impossible for something to be a substrate for the possibility of corruption itself. Possibility qua disposition is a positive feature of thing; as such, it's always for some other positive state of affairs i. e., for some actuality.

coming to be as the body's coming to be in a certain state *F*, e. g., animate or the like, and likewise the soul's ceasing to be as the body's ceasing to be in an *F* state – just as in the blackness and body example. This of course assumes that the soul's persistence conditions are dependent on those of the body and so overlooks a crucial premise established in earlier *anmāṭ*, namely, that

Every human soul is §

Ṭūsī is denying precisely that assumption in T13 by appealing to the idea that the soul already been shown to have a mode of being independent from that of the body.

Certainly, Ṭūsī is right that BC, first, misunderstands in what sense the body is a substrate for the soul's possible coming to be and, second, fails to see the relevance of § to the issue. However, the response, so far at least, is largely negative in character; that is, all it tells us is in what sense the body isn't a substrate for the coming-to-be of the soul (and why isn't it in that sense). But what's Ṭūsī's positive account of how the body serves as a bearer of the soul's possible coming-to-be? For the Rāzian might insist: 'granted that the body doesn't serve as a substrate for the soul's possible existence in the sense specified above in T12; but, since the shaykh clearly endorses the claim that the body *is* a condition for the soul's existence, there's a sense in which it *does* serve as a substrate, and you haven't shown that that sense is one on which the soul's ceasing to exist, per BC, doesn't follow. So the BC objection still stands'. That's a fair point; so more needs to be said in order to show that the Avicennian view precludes the consequence the Rāzian is pushing.

Ṭūsī does say more. The positive account consists of clarifying the precise dispositional role of the body qua being related to the soul's origination (*ḥu-dūth*). Strictly speaking, Ṭūsī states, it's not the body qua a distinct entity (i. e., from the soul) that it serves as the substrate for the origination of the soul:

[T14] Rather, only as existing with a specific disposition (*hay'a makhṣūṣa*) before the coming-to-be of the soul is it a substrate and disposed for the coming to be of a humanity-form (*ṣūra insāniyyah*) that conjoins to it and constitutes it as a determinate species. And the existence of that form is not possible unless with its proximate essential principle, i. e., the soul.⁴⁴

Two points are noteworthy in T14: first, in relation to the soul's coming into existence, the body functions as a substrate qua having a specific or 'special disposition' (call this DP). This is a standard Avicennian point; DP refers to the body under the ratio (*ma'nā*) of possessing a certain level of material complexity, since on the Avicennian view not just any old body can come to be ensouled, but a

⁴⁴ Ibid., VII.6, 887.

body of a special sort. And second, the body qua possessing DP is a substrate for the coming-to-be, not of the human soul proper but, as Ṭūsī says, of the ‘form of humanity’ (call this FH). Once FH is related or joined to that special sort of body, a specific type of living entity comes to exist, e.g., a human being.

Now this second point is highly interesting in its own right, but is it a legitimate interpretation of Avicenna’s view? For it seems to entail that there’s a distinction between FH and the soul insofar as the latter, as the end of T14 states, is a causal principle (*mabda*) of the former. So according to T14, then, it seems that when a human being comes to be, two entities come to be: FH and the human soul. And the former can’t come to be unless the latter does. That is, the body qua DP serves as substrate for the coming into being of FH and FH only comes to be, not because of the body qua DP, but because the soul itself, as its essential proximate principle, comes to be first.

If we interpret Ṭūsī as distinguishing two entities here – FH and its principle i.e., the human soul – then this is a departure from the shaykh’s account of the soul’s temporal origination. And so Ṭūsī here, under pressure from Rāzī, would be innovating. But is this what Ṭūsī is really saying?

I don’t think so. Ṭūsī goes on to explain the talk of form of humanity, soul, and their relation to DP, as follows (emphasis mine):

[T15] The coming to be, by way of [the body’s] preparedness and disposition, of that principle [i.e., the soul] of the form conjoined to [the body], and constituting it, *is in the sense that* (*‘alā wajh*) *that principle becomes linked to [the body] by this type of linkage* (*irtibāt*).⁴⁵

That is to say, when there’s a sufficiently complex body disposed for the reception of a human soul, it’s not the case that two things come to be – an FH and its principle, the human soul. Rather, only a single thing comes to be, but that thing’s coming to be can be considered in two ways. In one way, it can be considered in itself; as such, it is the coming to be of the human soul proper. In another way, it can be considered in relation to the body; as such, it is the coming to be of the soul, not in itself, but qua being related to the body. And I take it its aspect of ‘coming to be related to the body’ is what FH designates. In other words, the coming to be of ‘the human form’ is not the coming into being of some entity distinct from the soul but rather just the soul’s coming to be i.e., related to the body, where this relation, according to the shaykh, is that of management or governance (*tadbīr*).⁴⁶

Taken in this way, it’s a perfectly Avicennian move on Ṭūsī’s part. For if the human soul is a distinct (*mubāyin*) entity i.e., an Ṣ, then there’s the fact of its

45 Ibid., 887.

46 Avicenna, *Ishārāt* III.5, 235–236.

being in itself and then there's the fact of its being related i. e., to some x , which is just the soul considered qua FH. The former fact is more fundamental than the latter one, such that if the soul comes-to-be qua coming-to-be related, then it follows that it must have come-to-be qua in itself. But, crucially, this inference doesn't straight-forwardly go through; it only follows provided that the soul doesn't already pre-exist the body and is self-subsistent. And, interestingly, the former is a claim which the shaykh, as far as I can tell, nowhere argues for in the *Ishārāt*.⁴⁷ So Ṭūsī's response to BC, if I've got it right, assumes its truth. The core of the response to BC, abstractly stated, then seems to be:

For some x and y , if 1) y doesn't pre-exist x and 2) y is an $\$$, then y 's coming to be related to x at t is other than y 's coming to be in itself at t

And if these two facts about y , i. e., its coming-to-be in itself and its coming-to-be related, are distinct facts, then if x serves as an explanation for y 's being related to it at t , that doesn't entail that x is also the explanation for y 's being in itself at t . When this premise is applied to the soul, it follows that despite the body qua DP serving as a substrate for the coming-to-be of the soul's relation to it qua FH, it doesn't follow that it therefore serves as a substrate for the soul qua the soul's coming-to-be in itself; for, again, we know on independent grounds that in itself the soul has an existence distinct from the body (i. e., it is an $\$$). In sum, according to Ṭūsī, only the soul's *coming-to-be related* requires a substrate, which here is the body qua DP, but its *coming to be as such*, i. e., in itself, does not, due to considerations about its independent or distinct (*mubāyin*) subsistence conditions.

Ṭūsī then, *mutatis mutandis*, applies the above account to what it means for the body to ground, if it grounds at all, the soul's possible non-existence. He states:

[T16] And so the body remains a substrate for the possibility of the corruption of the form conjoined to it, and only that linkage ceases from it, it being impossible for it to be a substrate for the possibility of the corruption of that principle insofar as it is an entity (*dhāt*) clearly distinct (*mubāyin*) from [the body].⁴⁸

Based on the considerations above, in parsing T16, we can say that the consequent of BC, namely, that:

I. the body can be a substrate for the possible non-existence of the soul

can mean either:

I.a: the body can be substrate for the possible non-existence of the soul *simpliciter*, or

⁴⁷ The absence of a justification of the soul's temporal origination in the *Ishārāt* is surprising, given that Avicenna usually treats the issue at length in his standard works. See e. g., his most detailed discussion of the issue in *The Healing; Psychology* V.3, 286–288.

⁴⁸ *Ḥall Mushkilāt* VII.6, 887.

I.b: the body can be substrate for the possible non-existence of the soul's relation to the body

If I.a is meant, then, as we've already seen, the objection fails to take § into account, and so the Rāzian objection fails to actually engage the Avicennian argument at VII.6. If, though, I.b is meant, then BC doesn't draw any blood against the Avicennian view, since it does not follow from I.b that the human soul ceases to exist in itself. Thus, given §, the body qua DP can be substrate only for the ceasing to be of the FH conjoined to it, which is just to say for the ceasing to be of the relation of governance (*tadbīr*) that the soul on the (A-A) view bears to it. And likewise is the case, Ṭūsī infers, with the antecedent of BC:

[T17] Therefore, the body, together with the specific disposition, is a condition for the coming to be (*ḥudūth*) of the soul insofar as the soul is a form or a principle of a form, not insofar as it is an independent (*mujarrad*) existent. And [the body] is not a condition for its existence (*wujūd*).⁴⁹

The soul's 'being a form' (or its 'formality'), one can say, consists in its relation of management to the body. It's this relation that the DP of the body is the substrate for, both with respect to the soul's origination and cessation. With regards to the latter, DP is a substrate for it insofar as when that DP corrupts, the soul's governing role vis-à-vis the body is thereby severed. And with regards to the former, DP is a substrate for it in the sense that when the soul comes to be related to the body as its governor it obviously also comes to be simpliciter; for relations presuppose their relata.

Importantly, on this analysis, the soul's self-subsistent status, known on independent grounds, is preserved. And thus, though it's true that there's a sense in which the body is a condition, as the Rāzian objection urged, for the coming to be of the soul, that sense is compatible with the soul being an §. If that's so, then it doesn't necessarily follow that should that condition cease to be, the thing for whose origination it was a condition for should also cease to be. For, in general, there are counter-examples to that claim, as Ṭūsī concludes:

[T18] A thing, when it comes to be, need not corrupt by the corruption of what is the condition of its coming to be, like e.g., a building; for it persists after the death of the builder who was a condition for its coming to be.⁵⁰

Hence, DP's corruption doesn't entail the human soul's corruption in itself. And BC is resolved.

But you might then wonder: if the coming to be of the body qua DP necessitates the coming to be of FH (= the soul's relation of governance to the body),

49 Ibid., 887.

50 Ibid., 887.

which in turn necessitates the coming to be of the soul simpliciter – why, then, does making the body necessary for the corruption of FH not likewise necessitate the corruption of the soul simpliciter?⁵¹

Ṭūsī's answer to this is on point:

[T19] Because what requires the coming to be of some effect (*ma lūl*) precisely requires the existence of all of the causes of that effect as its conditions. But what requires the corruption of an effect does not require the corruption of [such] causes. Rather, it's sufficient for it that some condition corrupts, even if it be a privation.⁵²

Compare: for, say, burning to occur, all the necessary conditions (e.g., fire, something burnable, oxygen, etc.) for its existence must be present; but, for it to cease to be, it's not necessary that all the conditions for its occurrence cease to be; it suffices that at least one them does so (e.g., oxygen). The same applies to FH; it's origination requires all its causes, but its corruption does not. In general, the non-existence of the effect does not entail the non-existence of the cause in itself simpliciter (*muṭlaqan*).

The above constitutes Ṭūsī's handling of the two Rāzian objections. There's an exegetical and a philosophical lesson to be taken away from how the two commentators engage the shaykh at *Ishārāt* VII.6. Exegetically, the lesson is that, of the two commentators, Ṭūsī seems to display much more familiarity than does Rāzī with the Avicennian material. He seems to know much better how Avicenna's claims at VII.6 hang together with ones made in other places in the text. This is especially evident in his response to Rāzī's first objection. And I'd say this is true even with regards to the second objection Rāzī raises, despite the fact that, as we've seen, at a crucial stage in his response Ṭūsī appeals to a premise (i.e., the soul's temporal origination) which Avicenna did not previously discuss anywhere in the *Ishārāt*, let alone establish.

Philosophically, I think, Naṣīr al-Dīn gets the better of the argument, insofar he sufficiently answers both objections in a way that is consistent with established Avicennian principles, whereas Rāzī fails to take such established principles into account when offering his critique. Again, this is especially evident in the case of the first Rāzian objection. Admittedly, though, the Ṭūsian response to the second i.e., BC, objection falters in this regard to some extent, insofar it assumes a premise not treated anywhere in the *Ishārāt*. But still, even if we don't grant Ṭūsī that premise, his response would still suffice, on systematic grounds, in resolving the Rāzian doubt – though it wouldn't be adequate as an interpretation of Avicenna's own view. The reason it would suffice philosophically is simply because there's no doubt that the existence of the relation of the soul to the body pre-

51 Ibid., 887.

52 Ibid., VII.6, 888.

supposes the existence of its terms – soul and body. And the reason it wouldn't be adequate as an Avicennian answer is because it would presuppose that the soul pre-exists the body. Moreover, with respect to this last point, important considerations come up given the answers Ṭūsī in fact provides on behalf of the Avicennian view. In particular, in confronting BC, his analysis raises the more general question of the relation between individuation (*tashakhkhus*), origination (*hudūth*), and existence over time (*baqā*) i. e., subsisting in existence. The shaykh's account, as well as Ṭūsī's response to BC, would certainly benefit from a clarification of that relation; however, this sort of issue, being more general, also involves a more properly metaphysical investigation. As such, it falls outside *Ishārāt* VII.6's much more specific aim.

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