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AVICENNA'S PSYCHOLOGICAL PROOF OF PROPHECY

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I

THE type of argument that Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) offers in his psychological works on prophecy is, for the most part, explanatory. The existence of prophetic revelation is implicitly accepted; what Avicenna strives to do is to interpret and explain revelation in terms of his theory of the soul and emanation. This does not mean, however, that the vital question of the existence of revelation is ignored. Thus in the *De Anima* of the *al-Shifā'* we find a standard argument, repeated elsewhere in Avicenna's writings, to show that the existence of prophecy is possible.¹ But what is significant here is that this argument is for the possibility, not for the

actual existence of prophecy. Does Avicenna go beyond this in his psychological writings to show that prophecy is not merely possible, but must exist?² The one place where he appears to be attempting to prove this is in the first part of his treatise, *Fi Ithbāt al-Nubuwwāt*.³

The circumstances of the writing of this treatise are given in its opening statements where Avicenna, addressing someone afflicted with doubts about prophecy, writes:⁴

You have asked—may God set you aright—that I sum up for you the substance of what I said to you for the purpose of eliminating your misgivings about accepting prophecy. You were confirmed in these misgivings because the claims of the advocates of prophecy are either logically possible

¹ *Avicenna's De Anima*, ed. F. Rahman (London: Oxford University Press), p. 249. Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāt* (Cairo, 1939), pp. 166–67; *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, ed. F. Ahwani (Cairo, 1952), pp. 123–24; *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-t-Tanbihāt*, ed. J. Forget (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1892), p. 127. This argument is reported by al-Ghazālī in his exposition of the philosophers' theories. Al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, 1961), pp. 382–83; *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1927), pp. 272–74. See also, F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 31. A detailed discussion of this argument and the problems it raises is outside the scope of this paper. Here we can only give a brief summary:

The power of rational intuition varies in men. Thus, for example, some men can arrive at the middle term of a syllogism intuitively. Others are totally incapable of this. The intuitive capacities of the former, moreover, varies. Thus it is only after a long process of cogitation that some men can intuit the middle term. Others intuit this in a shorter time. Some are able to arrive intuitively at several middle terms at one time; others cannot do so. This variation in intuitive capabilities can be represented as a progressive scale whose limit in the direction of weakness consists in the inability to intuit at all. If limited in the direction of weakness, it must find a limit in the

direction of strength. It finds this limit in the ability to intuit all the middle terms sought instantaneously, without any preparatory cogitative process. From this Avicenna concludes, not that men with such ultimate intuitive powers must exist, but rather, that "it is possible" (*fa yumkin idhan*) that they exist. Such individuals would be prophets.

² The proof for the existence of prophecy in Avicenna's metaphysical writings is a teleological, not a psychological proof: it is an argument from the nature of human society and divine purpose. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifā'*, edition supervised by I. Madkour (2 vols.; Cairo, 1960), II, pp. 441–42; *Kitāb al-Najāt*, pp. 303–304.

³ Ibn Sīnā, *Tis' Rasā'il* (Cairo, 1908), pp. 120–24. The full title of this treatise is *Fi Ithbāt al-Nubuwwāt wa Ta'wīl Rumūzihim wa Amthālihikim* (On the Proof of Prophecies and the Interpretation of the Prophets' Symbols and Metaphors). The full treatise is covered by pp. 120–32 of the above reference (which will be abbreviated as "TR"). This Cairene edition abounds with misprints and omissions. Photostatic copies of three manuscripts have shed light on many an obscure point in the printed text. The manuscripts are the following: Ahmad III, 1584, 3; British Museum, 1349, 10; Leiden, 1464, 7. These will be abbreviated in the notes as *Ahmad*, *Br. Museum* and *Leiden*, respectively.

⁴ *TR*, p. 120, ll. 1–5.

assertions that have been treated as the necessary without the benefit of demonstrative argument or even dialectical proof, or else, impossible assertions on the order of fairy tales, such that the very attempt on the part of their advocates to expound them deserves derision.

Avicenna, hence, is expected to give an argument for prophecy that does not commit any of the logical transgressions of such "advocates of prophecy." One suspects that nothing less than a demonstration is expected of him. Does he then attempt a demonstration, and if he does, what is it precisely that he endeavors to prove?

Now, the discussion that immediately follows this introductory passage consists, in reality, of three distinct though related arguments. The first and longest⁵ seems to be an attempt to establish that there must exist in some individuals a prophetic faculty, the angelic intellect, that receives revelation. This is followed by a section that recapitulates the first argument's premises,⁶ but which also introduces a short argument based on these premises for the finitude of the human soul.⁷ This, in turn, is followed by a third argument which is metaphysical and normative.⁸ Having established in the first argument the existence of a prophetic faculty in some men, Avicenna proceeds to argue that the man possessing such a faculty, i.e. the prophet, stands highest in the order of value in the world of generation and

corruption. The normative discussion, though in itself important for our understanding of Avicenna's theory of prophecy,⁹ is not properly speaking a proof of prophecy. It depends on the first argument and involves a process of classification that assumes a system of values.

Hence, if there is a proof for the existence of prophecy among these arguments, it would have to be the first of these three. And, indeed, it seems to have all the elements of a demonstration: it begins by discussing and defining certain concepts that serve as premises; it then subjects the faculties of the human rational soul to an analysis in terms of these premises deriving thereby its conclusion. Yet, despite this appearance of rigor, the proof abounds with difficulties, logical and linguistic. It often states its points rather than argues for them. Some of its important premises are hidden so that it is not at first sight clear how it arrives at the conclusion it gives. And, when it attempts to define the relation of the prophetic intellect to the non-prophetic, which is the heart of the problem, it is vague and ambiguous. Such difficulties in the proof raise for the student of Avicenna questions regarding the author's ultimate purpose and motive in writing it.¹⁰ Ours, however, is the preliminary and necessary task of examining the proof as it stands in the treatise, taking it at its face value. Hence, we shall treat the proof formally in an attempt to clarify some of its ambiguities, extract its hidden premises, reveal the reasoning pattern involved and point out some of the difficulties it raises.

However, we cannot proceed with our

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120, l. 6–p. 122, l. 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122, l. 16–p. 123, l. 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122, l. 16–p. 123, l. 3. This argument seems to be a re-echo of the argument for the possibility of prophecy (see n. 1 above) although, as it stands in the text, it does not say anything about the possibility of prophecy. Indeed, the purpose of its inclusion in this treatise is not very clear. It looks as if this is a brief reminder of a point Avicenna may have made to the person he is writing to orally and in greater detail. The introductory passage quoted above tells us that the treatise is a summary of a previous conversation.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123, l. 8 p. 124, l. 1.

⁹ This section in *TR* complements *Avicenna's De Anima*, pp. 50–51 and *Metaphysics*, Book X, chap. 1. Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 435.

¹⁰ No doubt some of the difficulties in this proof are due to its being a summary. See above n. 7. But some of the proof's difficulties are so basic, as we shall strive to show, that they must reflect weaknesses in the original thought.

examination without first saying something about Avicenna's theory of prophecy since the proof presupposes acquaintance with this theory. What follows is a brief statement of the essentials of Avicenna's psychological account of prophecy, based, in the main, on his discussions in the *De Anima* where it is most comprehensively treated:

Avicenna discusses two types of prophetic revelation, imaginative and intellectual. The first involves the reception by the prophet's imaginative faculty of particular images from the celestial souls (as distinct from the celestial intelligences).¹¹ The second involves the reception by the prophet's rational faculty of the abstract intelligibles from the active intelligence,¹² the last of the intellectual principles that emanate successively from God. Since the proof in the *Fi Ithbāt al-Nubuwwāt* is concerned with this second type of revelation, the intellectual, we shall confine our attention to this.

Avicenna's theory of abstract thought, which underlies his theory of intellectual

revelation, is a theory of illumination. The intelligible is not extracted from the sensory images: it is received as an emanation from the active intelligence. These intelligibles are two kinds, primary and secondary. The primary are the self evident truths and¹³ the secondary are truths deduced from the primary, knowledge of the middle term of a syllogism and the universal concepts. Most men receive the primary intelligibles and, furthermore, they receive them directly. By this is meant that no intervening activities of the soul are necessary; their reception requires neither deduction nor induction. The secondary intelligibles, on the other hand, are received only by a small class of men, those capable of abstract thought. But most of the men of this class cannot receive these secondary intelligibles directly. Their reception must be preceded by the activities of sensation, imagination, estimation and cogitation, or imaged thinking. These activities prepare the soul for the reception of the secondary intelligibles from the active intelligence. The prophet, on the other hand, differs from the rest of men capable of abstraction in that he receives the secondary intelligibles directly, without the intervening preparatory activities of the soul and the learning processes associated with them. His reception of the secondary intelligibles is direct; his knowledge is intuitive. Moreover, since other men require this preparatory process (which takes place in time) before they receive the intelligible they seek, the number of intelligibles they receive at any one time is limited. The prophet, on the

¹¹ In Avicenna's emanative scheme, each of the celestial spheres possesses a soul and an intelligence. The intelligence is a purely intellectual principle and is utterly immaterial. Hence its knowledge is universal. It cannot know the particulars in the world of generation and corruption individually: it knows them "in a universal way." The celestial soul, on the other hand, has a material aspect which enables it to know the particular things and events in the sublunary sphere. Indeed, its knowledge of the particulars is a cause of particular events. It is thus capable of knowing particular events. This knowledge of the future it transmits to the prophet through his imaginative faculty. *Avicenna's De Anima*, p. 173 ff. Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 435 ff.

¹² In *TR* this is referred to as the universal intellect, universal soul, and world soul. The intellect and the soul seem to be identified. Strictly speaking, intellectual revelation is the direct reception of knowledge from the celestial intelligences, through the last of these, the universal intellect or active intelligence. The knowledge transmitted is universal. However, the prophet can translate this universal knowledge into particular applications thereof. In this lies his political ability. (*TR*, p. 124, ll. 5-9). This translation can occur unconsciously where the prophetic knowledge in the rational soul causes in the imaginative soul particular examples, often in symbolic form. *Avicenna's De Anima*, p. 249.

¹³ In *TR*, p. 122, ll. 7-8, Avicenna regards universally accepted moral dicta on a par with self-evident logical truths inasmuch as both are received directly from the universal active intelligence. As such these moral dicta should have the same claim for certainty as logical truths. But this Avicenna elsewhere denies. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā': Demonstration (al-Burhān)* ed. A. E. Affi (Cairo, 1956), pp. 65-66; See also *Avicenna's De Anima*, p. 46.

other hand, receives all or most of the intelligibles he seeks instantaneously (*daf'atan*).¹⁴ Hence, prophetic intellectual revelation differs from ordinary abstract thought not in kind, but, as Avicenna puts it, "in quantity and manner," *bi-l-kamm wa-l-kayf*.¹⁵ The prophet is capable of this direct reception because he is endowed with a faculty not found in other men. This Avicenna terms "the holy intellect," *al-'aql al-qudsī*, "the holy faculty," *al-quwwa al-qudsiyya*, and "the angelic intellect," *al-'aql al-malakī*.¹⁶

II

The proof in the *Fī Ithbāt al-Nubuwwāt* begins with a discussion of premises.¹⁷ This is followed by an argument to show that the intelligibles are received from a source wherein they always exist, i.e. the active intelligence.¹⁸ This is then followed by the main deduction of the proof, the existence of the angelic intellect.¹⁹

The proof's premises are Aristotelian pertaining to the nature of essential and accidental inherence, actual and potential existence. These are four in number and can be summed up as follows:

(1) If *A* exists in *B* essentially, then *A* is actual as long as *B* exists.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 250, 248; *TR*, p. 122, l. 12. The rendition of *al-'aql al-malakī* as "the angelic intellect," seems the most plausible in view of the fact that in this treatise Avicenna refers to the power received by this intellect as the angel (*TR*, p. 124, l. 2). The relative adjective *malakī*, however, can be derived from either *malak*, "angel," or *malik*, "king." The possibility that *al-'aql al-malakī* may mean "the kingly intellect" is supported by the fact that in Medieval Arabic philosophical writings sometimes the prophet, sometimes the acquired intellect and sometimes the active intellect is called "king." See, for example, Ibn Sīnā, *Aḥwāl al-Nafs*, p. 126; *Risāla-yi Nafs*, ed. M. Amid (Tehran, 1371 A.H.), p. 26; Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, tr. M. Friedländer (2d edition, revised; New York, Dover Publications, 1956), p. 391.

¹⁷ *TR*, p. 120, l. 7-p. 121, l. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121, l. 9-p. 122, l. 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122, ll. 4-7.

(2) If *A* exists in *B* accidentally, then *A* exists in *B* at times potentially, at times actually.

(3) If *A* exists in *B* essentially, then *B* is always in act²⁰ and is the cause that changes other things from potentiality to actuality.

(4) If something is composed of *A* and *B*, and if either *A* or *B* can be found to exist without the other, the other can be found to exist without it.

These premises, in other words, tell us that every case of essential inherence is a case of actual existence, but not every case of the actual existence of one thing in another is a case of essential inherence.

The first three of these premises are illustrated by the examples of fire and heat, light and visibility. Fire, we are told, is the hot in essence.²¹ It is the cause that changes things that are potentially hot into the actually hot. Similarly, light is the visible in essence,²² and the cause that makes what is potentially visible, actually visible. The fourth premise is illustrated by two examples: that of the statue composed of bronze and the human form, and of oxymel composed of vinegar and honey. Bronze and the human form can exist independently of each other; the same is true of honey and vinegar.

Having set down these premises, Avicenna proceeds to discuss the human rational soul. It should be noted here that Avicenna presents us with a summary of his theory of the intellect without any attempt at proof or justification. This rational soul, he maintains, exists in all men, though its faculties vary in strength in the different individuals. It consists, to

²⁰ The original text translates: "That which has this [inherence] essentially is always in act," *wa man lahu dhālika bi-dh-dhāt fa huwa fīhi bi-l-ḥāl abadan*.

²¹ Avicenna subscribes to the Aristotelian definition of fire as being "excess of heat." Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa-t-Tanbīhāt*, p. 114; Aristotle *On Generation and Corruption* ii.3. 330^b.

²² Aristotle *De Anima* iii. 7. 413^b 4-14.

begin with, of a pure potentiality, a preparedness to become informed with the abstract intelligibles. In itself it has no form. This is the material intellect, thus termed by analogy with prime matter which in itself is likewise formless. When this material intellect is partially actualized through its reception of the primary intelligibles, we have a second potential intellect, the intellect by positive disposition (*al-ʿaql bi-l-malaka*). Though partly actualized, it is still in relation to the secondary intelligibles a potentiality since it has not as yet received them and is only in a state of readiness for such a reception. When and if it receives them, we have a third intellect, the acquired intellect (*al-ʿaql al-mustafād*):²³

There exists besides these two [i.e. the first two potential intellects], a third power that is actually informed with the forms of the universal intelligibles, of which the other two form a part when these have become actualized. This third power is called the acquired intellect.

It is the status of this intellect in relation to the material that the argument proceeds to discuss. Since the secondary intelligibles are not always present in the human rational soul, or, as the proof expresses it, since the acquired intellect "does not exist actually in the material intellect," its existence in the rational soul is not an essential existence. [This inference follows from premises (2) and (4).] The conclusion of this part of the argument is then given:²⁴

Hence the existence of the acquired intellect in the material intellect is due to something in which it exists essentially²⁵ and which

causes existence; through it what was potential becomes actual. This is called the universal intellect, the universal soul and the world soul.

This conclusion states two things: (a) that since the acquired intellect exists accidentally in the rational soul, it must exist essentially in something else; (b) that this something else is the universal intellect. The first of these conclusions betrays an important premise which is not explicitly stated, but which seems to be implied in the first three premises.²⁶ This hidden premise is as follows: if an inhering property exists in one thing accidentally, it must exist essentially in another. Since this premise is operative in the main deduction of the proof, we will refer to it as premise (5). The second conclusion above, stating that it is the universal intellect in which the acquired intellect must exist, assumes Avicenna's emanative system. It is true that this is part of an argument for the existence of the universal intellect which Avicenna expounds in greater detail elsewhere.²⁷ But this latter argument is not complete in itself and, in turn, relies on and assumes the rest of Avicenna's theory of emanation. Here again we encounter the descriptive aspect of the proof, where Avicenna states rather than argues for some of its premises.

The third and concluding part of the proof is an analysis of the receptive capabilities of the (ordinary) human soul,

²³ *TR*, p. 121, l. 13–p. 122, l. 1. Reading *al-ʿaql al-mustafād*, "the acquired intellect," as given in *Leiden. Br. Museum* omits mention of the kind of intellect involved. *Ahmad* and *TR* give *al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*, "the active intellect."

²⁴ *TR*, p. 122, ll. 23–24.

²⁵ Reading as in *Br. Museum*: *fa idhan wujuduhu fihi min mūjidin huwa fihi bi-dh-dhāt*.

²⁶ Accidental inherence is identified with temporary actual existence, while essential inherence is identified with permanent actual existence (premises [1] and [2]). Temporary actual existence is caused by permanent actual existence (premise [3]). Implicit here is the notion of essential causation. The example of the relation of heat to fire which Avicenna gives illustrates this. Fire by its very nature gives heat. Heat in water is accidental. It is caused by that which is essentially hot. From the accidental presence of heat in water we can infer the essential presence of heat in something else, in this case, fire.

²⁷ Ibn Sinā, *Ahwāl al-Nafs*, pp. 111 ff.; *al-Ishārāt wa-Tanbīhāt*, p. 129.

again, in terms of the premises initially stated. The reception of the intelligibles from the universal intellect, we are told, occurs both directly and indirectly. But direct reception is confined to the primary intelligibles, not the secondary. The secondary intelligibles are only acquired through the mediation of the primary and of "organs and materials such as the external sense, the common sense, the estimative faculty and the cogitative faculty."²⁸ The main deduction of the proof is then given:²⁹

Now the rational soul, as we have shown, receives at times directly and at times indirectly; hence [the capacity]³⁰ to receive directly does not belong to it essentially, but accidentally. This [capacity], therefore, exists in something else essentially. It is, hence, acquired [by the rational soul] from that [thing] which possesses it in essence.³¹ This [latter] is the angelic intellect that receives essentially without mediation and by its very reception becomes a cause for the other powers of the soul to receive.

To see the pattern of reasoning involved here requires some clarification:

To begin with, when Avicenna states that the (ordinary) human rational soul "receives at times directly and at times indirectly," "at times" cannot be taken in the temporal sense. Otherwise the angelic intellect that receives directly and essentially must be receiving knowledge all the time and this is not a view which Avicenna advocates. Hence, this must merely mean that, since the reception of the ordinary human soul is not entirely direct (it receives only the primary, not the secondary intelligibles directly), direct reception

is not its essential property. Furthermore, when we are told that the angelic intellect receives directly, this refers to its reception of the secondary intelligibles. Hence the prophet has essential direct reception because, unlike the ordinary man, he receives both kinds of intelligibles directly. This betrays yet another premise which is not explicitly given. This (which we shall refer to as premise [6]) is that essential direct reception means the reception of *both* the primary and the secondary intelligibles.³²

Having seen this implied premise, one may still question why there should be direct essential reception at all. This, at first sight, seems an assumption. We seem to be told that, inasmuch as in the ordinary human faculties direct reception is accidental, essential direct reception must exist in some unique faculty found in some men. All that the argument could state, it would seem, is that, *if* such essential direct reception exists, it must exist in a faculty other than the ordinary human faculties, not that essential direct reception must exist. Indeed, it seems that the very point at issue has been assumed.

This difficulty arises, however, when we are not aware that here once again the implied premise (5) is operative: if an inhering property exists in one thing accidentally, it must exist in another essentially. With this premise in mind we

³² All that Avicenna could maintain here, it seems, is that, since direct reception in the ordinary human soul is confined to the primary intelligibles, such reception is its essential characteristic. Avicenna seems to be aware of this difficulty. He adds immediately after the passage quoted above the following statement: "The property peculiar to the primary intelligibles that allows their reception without mediation is due to one of two factors: briefly, it is either because these intelligibles in themselves are easily receivable, or because the recipient can receive without mediation only that which is easily receivable." (*TR*, p. 122, ll. 13-16). In other words, Avicenna here attempts to dismiss the factors that allow the direct reception of the primary intelligibles by the ordinary human soul as accidental.

²⁸ Reading as in *Br. Museum*.

²⁹ *TR*, p. 128, ll. 23-34.

³⁰ Literally, "reception," *al-qubūl*.

³¹ Reading: *fahuwa mimman lahu bi-dh-dhāt mustafād* as given in *Leiden* and *Br. Museum*. For a different interpretation based solely on the Cairene edition see F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, p. 34 and p. 68, n. 14.

can reconstruct the main deduction of the proof. Direct reception in the ordinary human rational soul is confined to the primary intelligibles. Hence, according to premise (6), it exists in this soul accidentally. If it exists accidentally in the ordinary human soul, according to premise (5), it must exist essentially in some other faculty (found in some souls). This faculty is the angelic intellect with which prophets are endowed. Such is the pattern of reasoning, and whatever the shortcomings of the proof, it is at least not circular in the way it might appear at first sight.

III

But does the proof, as it stands, satisfy the conditions of a demonstration which Avicenna articulates in his logical writings? Furthermore, does it give an adequate, not to say, an intelligible, explanation of the relation of the prophetic intellect to ordinary souls? It seems that the answer to both these questions must be in the negative. The proof remains, in the final analysis, problematical.

A demonstration, according to Avicenna, must fulfill two conditions: its premises must be certain and its conclusion valid.³³ The first four premises of the proof presuppose an Aristotelian ontology. The rest of the proof, as we have indicated, assumes Avicenna's theory of the intellect and his emanative metaphysics. If the proof is to be a demonstration in the strict sense, then its presuppositions must be certain. Here we cannot review Avicenna's entire system to show that his arguments to demonstrate his system are wanting; nor is this necessary. The task has been accomplished by the very thorough criticism of his Medieval Islamic opponents

such as al-Ghazālī.³⁴ But even if we grant, for the sake of argument, the proof's presuppositions and consider it within the system to which it belongs, we encounter difficulties in its deductive process. Two of its premises, necessary for deriving its conclusion, are hidden premises. Premise (5), it is true, is implicit in the first three premises. The argument, however, would have been clearer if this premise had been stated more explicitly. But what about premise (6)? Not only is this a hidden premise, but it is arbitrary. We are simply told that essential direct reception means the direct reception of both the primary and secondary intelligibles. How do we derive this definition? There seems to be nothing in the proof to allow this derivation. The argument here seems *ad hoc*.

Perhaps the most serious difficulty we encounter in the proof is in the main deduction quoted in Part II. Its ambiguity leaves the relation of the angelic intellect to ordinary souls far from clear. Thus we are not told that the angelic exists in some men and not in all men. We gather that it exists only in some men from the recapitulation that follows this passage and from our acquaintance with Avicenna's theory of prophecy elsewhere. When we are told that the angelic intellect "by its very reception causes the other powers of the soul to receive," it is not clear whether "the other powers of the soul" refers to the prophet's soul or to the souls of all men. If the second is meant, then the implications of the proof become far-reaching. It

³⁴ The reference to al-Ghazālī is of particular significance here and for two reasons. In refuting the Islamic philosophers he is fully conscious of the formal basis of his attack: he strives to show that they had fulfilled neither of the conditions mentioned above for demonstrating their theories. Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, p. 16. Moreover, he rejects one aspect of Avicenna's theory of prophecy, the account of imaginative revelation, on the grounds that it is based on the emanative theory that holds that the spheres have souls, something which has not been demonstrated. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

³³ See, for example, Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt wa-t-Tanbihāt*, pp. 80–82; *Kitāb al-Najāt*, p. 66 ff.

would mean, in effect, that the existence of prophets is the precondition of all human knowing. It implies a causal relation between the prophetic faculty and the faculties of other men which becomes even more difficult to understand when we are told elsewhere in the *al-Shifā'* that prophets do not exist in every age.³⁵ If, however, it is the first which is meant—and this seems the more plausible inter-

³⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, II, 443.

pretation—where do ordinary men acquire the power to receive the primary intelligibles directly? For, if we have followed the reasoning correctly, accidental direct reception is necessarily induced by essential direct reception. In brief, the main difficulty with the proof is that it has not explained the transition it makes from the existence of accidental direct reception in all men, to the essential direct reception of the prophetic few.