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Ethics of Selfhood and Human Flourishing in Islamic Thought." In *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Ethics*, edited by Mustafa Shah. New York: Oxford University Press, completed and forthcoming.

Ethics of Selfhood and Human Flourishing in Islamic Thought

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Abstract

The present study investigates the ethics of selfhood and human flourishing in Islamic thought, which is intertwined with a distinct moral and spiritual view of human nature. Drawing on the repository of various texts and authors in Sufism, Islamic philosophy and theology, and Islamic ethical literature, this article argues that it is in terms of the realization of one's true nature that the goal of flourishing or the process of moral and spiritual perfection is best understood. Moreover, in Islamic ethics of human flourishing, the realization of one's true self depends on living an ethical life that combines both theoretical reason/intellect and spiritual practices.

An Islamic Ethics of Human Flourishing

Ethics of human flourishing in Islam are often described as a form of "virtue ethics," which emphasizes a narrative character of ethical behavior that directs one's attention to the ethical subject's intention, circumstances, intersubjectivity, experiences and *telos*—all of which influence moral decision-making (Faruque 2020). Moreover, such a conception of ethics differs from modern theories which focus on some kind of "rule" or maxim as in both utilitarianism (the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people) and Kantian deontic ethics

(categorical imperative: act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law), which Kant sets forth in his *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1967). As philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre have rightly pointed out (MacIntyre 2007, 246ff.), one can see the persistence of such "rule-based" ethics even in the contemporary liberal ethics of John Rawls's "distributive justice" (Rawls 1999) or in the libertarian ethics of Robert Nozick's "personal entitlement" (Nozick 1974), both of which marginalize the narrative character of the self and human life, push individual circumstances or subjectivities to the sidelines, and downplay *telos* and the intention of the agent. In contrast to Rawls, Nozick, and others for whom society is composed of individual subjects, each seeking to maximize self-interest, who then have to come together to formulate common rules of life, Islamic virtue ethics envisions a common origin and a universal *telos* for human beings, namely ultimate happiness or flourishing.

While there is truth to the idea that some of the core elements of the ethics of human flourishing in Islam can be explained in terms of "virtue ethics," I will argue in this chapter that such an ethics is also founded upon a distinct moral and spiritual view of human nature, alongside an emphasis on "self-knowledge." I will present my case by drawing on the repository of various texts and authors in Sufism, Islamic philosophy and theology, and Islamic ethical literature from classical and post-classical periods.

In Islamic thought, there is a distinction between the ordinary and the real self, which is crucial to any ethics of human flourishing (Faruque 2021). The ordinary self (*nafs*) is comprised of human intelligence, behavioral inclinations, tendencies, drives, instincts, and impulses. It also represents human vulnerability to temptations and irrational thinking. In contrast, the real self is often understood in terms of the Qur'anic term "*fiṭra*," which means one's pristine,

unadulterated nature (Q 30:30).[1] According to the Qur'an, human nature is made in the *fiṭra* of God, which is further corroborated by a Hadith that says that God created human beings in His image (*ṣūra*) [*Bukhārī*, *k. istiʾdhān*, 8:74, #246, available at https://sunnah.com/bukhari:6227]. The ethical and ontological implications of such a view of human nature cannot be more significant, as Islamic metaphysics describes God as the absolutely unconditioned being (*al-wujūd al-lā-bisharṭ al-maqsamī*), beyond any thought, imagination, and conceptual categories (al-Qayṣarī, *Muqaddima, Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, vol. 1). Being created in God's image, human nature too, in the final analysis, defies having any fixed essence, since God cannot be defined through a specific image or form. Put another way, human nature in its primordial purity and original constitution (i.e., *fiṭra*) is in a state of non-determination as it is made in the form of the formless—formless because the absolute and infinite nature of God ultimately transcends any form. Now, human flourishing involves a process of transformation from human nature-as-it-is (i.e., the ordinary, given self) to human nature-as-it-ought-to-be (i.e., the real self) if one pursues an ethical living. More particularly, human flourishing implies the effort on the part of the human subject to recover their *fiṭra* or actualize the potential to attain likeness to the divine form. But since the "form" of the divine self ultimately implies the formlessness of the infinite reality of God, the possibilities of being a self are also limitless. This is why we see so much variation when it comes to being a particular self/individual in the world. People carve their selfhood into a particular shape based on their preferences, intentionality, education, social environment, gender, race, and other factors. It is thus no surprise that Islamic ethicists such as

[1] The Arabic word *fiṭra*, often translated "original disposition," "natural constitution," or "innate nature," appears in the Qur'an and Hadith literature and finds its way into Islamic legal and philosophical discussions about human nature and knowledge. On the complex understanding of this term, see Hoover (2016). See also, Geneviève Gobillot "*Fatara* et *Fitra*, quelques acceptions oubliées," *En hommage au père Jacques Jomier, o.p,* ouvrage collectif (Paris: Le Cerf, Patrimoines, 2002), 101–120.

Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502), and Ṭaşköpüzāda (d. 968/1561) consider human character to be malleable. For instance, Miskawayh sees human beings as having different innate potentials and inclinations that are not static, and hence can be reformed through appropriate moral actions. For these thinkers, the malleable character of the self implies that it is not solidified into some unchangeable nature (Zargar 2017: 86–91; Khalil 2018: 158–160).

Indeed, the self—as the subject of experience—has the potential to conceive of anything as its object. That is, it has the ability to be aware of every possible object of knowledge. Moreover, it has the capacity to objectify and eventually reconstitute and recreate itself into a desired self/person. But ultimately, being made in God's image, and coupled with the fact that God taught Adam (i.e., the primordial human being) all the names or the essences of all things (Q 2:31), human beings can achieve self-actualization in God. Islamic metaphysics articulates such self-actualization through the concept of the perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*), which represents the pinnacle of human selfhood. The great Sufi metaphysician Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) identifies the station of the perfect human as "the station of no station" (*maqām lā maqām*), which means perfection is achieved only by those who avoid defining the self in essentialist terms (Chittick 2002: 52). In other words, the perfect human, as the mirror image of the divine, can manifest her reality through the countless divine names and attributes. Which is to say that in Islamic ethics, the meaning of being human hinges on attaining the perfection of all the divine names and qualities. As Ibn ʿArabī's says:

> In this voyage I attained the meanings of all the divine names. I found that they all go back to One that is Named and One Essence (*musammā wāḥid wa-ʿayn wāḥida*). The Named was what I was witnessing, and that Essence was my own *wujūd*. Thus, my voyage was

only in mysel, and pointed to none but me (*illā fīyya wa-dalālatī illā ʿalayya*) [Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, 6: 65].

But some Islamic thinkers, also in the School of Ibn ʿArabī, talk about how each human identity exists as a particular object of God's knowledge, which suggests that although human beings are created in the image of the imageless, each of them possesses a particular *ʿayn* or essence under the wings of a given cluster of divine attributes (al-Qayṣarī, *Muqaddima, Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*). This explains why human beings actualize various ontological and psychological potentialities in never-repeating combinations. On the one hand, being made in God's image, human beings have sufficient freedom to discover, realize, harmonize, and unify every possibility of being, while on the other, their particular *ʿayn* allows them to develop a unique subjectivity by following a particular life-trajectory. Hence, some people lean toward the universality and goodness of the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), while others perceive reality as dissonance, disequilibrium, and devoid of meaning. Regardless, the self at the level of the perfect human, where the human consciousness is reintegrated into the divine, transcends any particular definition, while it functions as a given person in the lived world.

However, it would be a mistake to think that the pursuit of human flourishing is an individualistic concern. Beginning with al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and continuing with numerous ethicists throughout classical and post-classical periods, Islamic philosophers have approached the question of human flourishing as both an individual and a communal pursuit (there is nothing like a "separate domain" argument as in modern economic theory). This is because, following Aristotle, they define the human being as a political animal. Al-Fārābī thus links the concept of human perfection with the way people live in societies and how these societies serve a specific purpose, beyond the mere allocation of daily needs, such as food, shelter, and

protection (al-Fārābī, *Attainment of Happiness*). In al-Fārābī's view, societies have the natural goal of guiding their members towards their end, which is true felicity and flourishing. This is explained through the famous distinction between the virtuous city (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*) and the ignorant city (*al-madīna al-jāhiliyya*). Al-Fārābī's virtuous city is one in which there is genuine cooperation between people to attain human flourishing (al-Fārābī, *Perfect State* V, 15, 3: 231; Germann 2021). Later thinkers such as al-Ījī write that city life is facilitated from the need for individuals to cooperate with one another in order to survive, while his commentator Ṭaşköprüzāda expands upon this saying by explaining that since human beings have different skills and different levels of wealth, each person within a community can benefit from a process of mutual interdependence (Salem 2022). Similarly, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) talks about a just society (*al-jāmiʿa al-ʿādila*) in which each member of the community is subject to the interests of the whole, thereby collectively promoting human flourishing (Toussi 2020). These ethical concepts are in line with the famous Qur'anic maxim of "commanding the right and forbidding the wrong" (*al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar*), according to which the individual pursuit of felicity, happiness, and flourishing is inseparable from its communal aspects (for a comprehensive treatment of this maxim in various trends of Islamic thought, see Cook 2010). The connection between individual and communal aspects of flourishing is not difficult to gauge when considering virtues such as friendship, chivalry (*futuwwa*), and justice. But one should note how the traces of some of these concepts can also be seen in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, which has had an enormous influence on Islamic ethical thought. For instance, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that human flourishing refers to the *telos* to which all human conduct and goods are directed. It is a technical concept which is intertwined with

notions of happiness, virtue, fulfillment, and the human good (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a24–1097b6).

Yet, unlike Aristotle, Islamic ideas of human flourishing rely on a distinct view of human nature. It is in terms of the realization of one's *fiṭra* (i.e., the real self) that the activity of flourishing or the process of ethical and spiritual perfection is best understood. Relatedly, Islamic theories of human flourishing also underscore the necessity of acquiring self-knowledge. As shall be seen in the following sections, when talking about recovering the *fiṭra* or attaining self-perfection, Islamic ethicists never tire of reminding their readers of the importance of self-knowledge. They argue that in order to know what promotes our wellbeing and flourishing, we need to have knowledge of who we are. More specifically, we need to know where we came from and where we are going. They also think of self-knowledge as a means of self-cultivation, since they recognize the crucial function that human nature plays in the constitution of our moral and epistemic outlook. Moreover, self-knowledge informs us about the fragility of the lower self, which is vulnerable to negative thoughts, desires, and emotions. Furthermore, it is through self-knowledge that we come to a better understanding of our character traits, behavior, capacities, and limitations, including certain features stemming from socio-cultural influences. Finally, self-knowledge paves the way to a knowledge of the divine, as we are made in the *fiṭra* of God.

A Multidimensional View of Human Nature

The previous section made clear how an ethics of human flourishing is contingent upon a distinct view of selfhood or human nature. Before proceeding further, one must clarify how the term "self" is used in Islamic ethical writings, not least because in contemporary scholarly discourse the word evokes all sorts of connotations [for an in-depth analysis of all the theoretical issues concerning the self, see Faruque (2021)]. In the Islamic context, there is no single term

that renders the self, but a few have overlap such as *nafs*, *dhāt*, *anāʾiyya*, and *anāniyya*. Broadly speaking, these terms refer to the relationship between human consciousness (or, the human self), God and the cosmos. The lexical meanings of *nafs* in Arabic include, soul, self, spirit, mind, desire, and appetite, among others. However, it also denotes reflexivity, as in *nafsī* (myself) and *bi-nafsihi* (by himself). What is important to note however is that in mystical and philosophical texts (unless it is used as a compound word), the word normally connotes either self or soul. My recent book [Faruque (2021)] proposes a multidimensional, "spectrum theory" to study selfhood in various contexts and cultures (Islamic or otherwise). In my view, the self is a multidimensional entity, which is best captured through the notion of a "spectrum." By drawing a distinction between descriptive and normative dimensions within this spectrum, I provide a global framework for analyzing the self in terms of its bio-physiological, socio-cultural, cognito-experiential, ethical, and spiritual aspects. But the idea of "multidimensionality" can also be seen in the writings of Islamic philosophers such as Mullā Ṣadrā, who repeatedly affirm that the self is a multidimensional and hierarchical reality containing the divine at the center of its being. For instance, Ṣadrā writes:

> The human self (*al-nafs al-insāniyya*) has many stations and degrees (*maqāmāt wa-darajāt kathīra*), from the beginning of its generation to the end of its ultimate goal. It also has numerous essential states and existential modes (*aṭwār wujūdiyya*). At first, it appears as a corporeal substance (*jawhar jismānī*) in its state of attachment to the body. Then it gradually attains intensity in being and develops [existentially] through the different stages of its given constitution until it subsists by itself and voyages from this world to the other world, and so *returns to her Lord* (Q 89:27) [Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-ʿArshiyya*, 32].

The spectrum theory of selfhood can be useful when analyzing various treatments of human nature in Islamic ethical writings. For example, one is rather surprised to discover that despite an emphasis on the self's spiritual development, early Sufi literature often presents a quasi-physicalist or a combination of physicalist cum immaterialist view of the self (for more information, see Faruque 2018). This might be due to the influence of *kalām* on Sufism or it may be due to figures who were both theologians and Sufis, such as al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072).[2]

Be that as it may, early Sufis use a constellation of terms such as *rūḥ*, *nafs*, *sirr*, etc. to talk about the self and its different dimensions. Their deployment of these terms is often inconsistent. It is only with later Sufis such as al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) or Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) that we get a refined sense of what the self might look like in Sufism. Among the early Sufis, Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) provides one of the most organized, multidimensional models of the self his *Tafsīr al-Tustarī* [al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 81–83]. Al-Tustarī discerns two fundamental and opposing forces within the human constitution. The positive force (i.e., the real self] for him, is represented by the heart or the spiritual center (*qalb*), while the negative force is called the lower self (*nafs*) that drags the human being toward immoral acts [Böwering 1980: 241ff.]. When asked about the reality of human nature and how one might attain the highest level of selfhood associated with divine beatitude, al-Tustarī says:

> Truly, the self that incites to evil (*nafs ammāra*) is appetite (*shahwa*), which is the role played by human nature (*ṭabʿ*); *"... unless my Lord has mercy,"* is the role played by God's protection (*ʿiṣma*). The tranquil self (*nafs muṭmaʾinna*) is the essence of mystical

[2] However, even as late as the 13th century, the Sufi Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 645/1247) puts forward a combination of physicalist cum immaterialist view of the self. He says e.g., '"Know that the self, in the usage of the people of the path, consists of a subtle vapor arising from the fleshy form of the heart. It is what the physicians call the animal spirit. From it arises all reprehensible attributes, as God Almighty says: "Truly the self commands unto evil"' (Q. 12:53) [Rāzī, *Mirṣād al-ʿibād*, 174].

knowledge. God, Exalted is He, created the self and made ignorance its nature (*ṭabʿ*) and made caprice (*hawā*) the closest thing to it (al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī,* 82, trans. Annabel and Ali Keeler, modified, in *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*: Qurʾān, 96).

Human nature (*ṭabʿ*) consists of four natural dispositions (*ṭabāʾiʿ*): the first is the animal disposition (*ṭabʿ al-bahāʾim*), that of the stomach and genitals; the second is the satanic disposition (*ṭabʿ al-shayāṭīn*), that of play (*laʿb*) and amusement (*lahw*); the third is the sorcerous disposition (*ṭabʿ al-saḥara*), that of delusion (*makr*) and deception (*khidāʿ*); and the fourth is the devilish nature (*ṭabʿ al-abālisa*), that of refusal (*ibāʾ*) and arrogance (*istikbār*). God's protection (*ʿiṣma*) against the animal disposition is through faith (*īmān*). Safety (*salāma*) from the satanic disposition is through glorification (*tasbīḥ*) and sanctification [of God] (*taqdīs*), which is the natural disposition of angels. Safety from the sorcerous disposition is through truthfulness (*ṣidq*), good counsel (*naṣīḥa*), impartiality (*inṣāf*) and graciousness (*tafaḍḍul*). Safety from the devilish nature is through taking refuge (*iltijāʾ*) in God, Exalted is He, by humbly imploring him (*taḍarruʿ*) and crying out to Him (*ṣarākh*). The nature of the intellect (*ʿaql*) is the mark of knowledge, but the nature of the lower self (*nafs*) is ignorance (al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī,* 82, trans. Annabel and Ali Keeler, modified, in *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*: 96).

In addition, a systematic treatment of selfhood in early Sufism is also found in Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī's famous *al-Risāla*, in which he explains that for the Sufis the word *nafs* or self does not mean either existent (*mawjūd*) or a physical body (*jism*). Rather Sufis have in mind spiritual qualities or the lack thereof when they discuss the self. Al-Qushayrī writes:

> In common parlance, a thing's self (*nafs*) is its existence (*wujūd*). However, when the Sufis use the word 'self' they imply neither existence nor a physical frame (*qālab*). Rather, they imply the deficiencies of one's character traits as well as one's reprehensible morals and deeds. The deficiencies of one's character traits fall into two categories: first, those which one acquires by oneself, namely one's acts of disobedience and one's sins; second, one's [inherent] base morals. They are blameworthy in and of themselves. However, when a human seeks to treat them and fight them, these base morals are extinguished in him through a strenuous and uninterrupted effort (al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya*, 174, trans. Knysh, modified, in *al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*, 109).

However, a few lines later he suggests that the self may also refer to a subtle substance placed in the human body:

> [T]he self (*nafs*) may also mean a subtle entity (*laṭīfa*) placed in the physical frame (*qālab*), which is the repository of blameworthy character traits in the same way as the spirit (*rūḥ*) is a subtle entity placed in the physical frame, which is the repository of praiseworthy character traits. All these elements are subjugated to one another, and their sum total constitutes a human being (*insān*). The spirit (*rūḥ*) and the *nafs* are subtle bodies (*al-ajsām al-laṭīfa*) residing in a certain form in the same way as the angels and demons are characterized by subtlety. This is also the case with vision being the locus of seeing, the ear being the locus of hearing, the nose being the locus of smelling, and the mouth being the locus of tasting (al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya*, 174–175, trans. Knysh, modified, in *al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*, 109).

Apart from the *nafs*, and *rūḥ*, the Sufis also use a cluster of terms such as *sirr*, *khafī* and *akhfā* that denote various aspects/degrees of the self. Al-Qushayrī, for instance, notes:

> [T]he secret core (*sirr*) is a subtle entity (*laṭīfa*) placed in the physical frame. According to their principles, [the secret core or the innermost self] serves as a locus of direct vision [of God] in the same way as the spirits are the locus of love and the heart (*qulūb*) are the locus of knowledge... According to the terminology and principles of the Sufis, the innermost self is more subtle than the spirit (*rūḥ*), while the spirit (*rūḥ*) is more noble than the heart (*qalb*). They say that the innermost selves are free from the bondage and traces of all things [other than God]. The words "innermost self" denote the states that are kept secret between God—glory to Him—and His servant (al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya*, 176, trans. Knysh, modified, in *al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*, 110).

As alluded to earlier, Sufi conceptions of human nature make use of a variety of terms, such as *nafs*, *rūḥ*, *qalb*, etc., which gives rise to a lot of ambiguities. Writing as late as in the 18th century, Shāh Walī Allāh acknowledges the cloudiness surrounding all these terms. He begins by stating that there is a lot of loose talk in Sufi discourse concerning this issue (Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds*, 74). But it is instructive to note that the inconsistent use of these terms, viz., *nafs*, *qalb*, and *rūḥ* in Sufi ethical writings was observed by al-Ghazālī nearly seven hundred years before Walī Allāh when the former was writing his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, with which Walī Allāh was intimately familiar. Before elaborating on Walī Allāh's demystification of these terms, I would like to quote al-Ghazālī on this. Al-Ghazālī remarks that few of the leading scholars have a comprehensive knowledge of terms such as *nafs, rūḥ, qalb*, and *ʿaql* and their different meanings. He then explains that the term *nafs* has several meanings. One of its meanings relate to the faculties of anger (*ghaḍab*) and appetite (*shahwa*) in human beings. This meaning is prevalent among the Sufis, for they mean by *nafs* the "ordinary self" which includes blameworthy character traits (*ṣifāṭ madhmūma*). The other meaning of *nafs*, according to al-Ghazālī, denotes

the reality of the human being (*ḥaqīqat al-insān*), which is praiseworthy, for it is the human being's very self and real nature (al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, 8: 1343–46; modified trans. taken from Skellie, *The Marvels of the Heart*, 5-10).

Taking into account various inconsistencies regarding terms such as *nafs*, *rūḥ*, and *qalb*, Walī Allāh goes on to explain that sometimes the word *nafs* is used to mean the origin of life (*mabdaʾ-i ḥayāt*), in which case it is synonymous with *rūḥ*. But Walī Allāh also maintains that sometimes people use the word *nafs* to refer to the ordinary self, with its need for food and drink, while on other occasions, it refers to the appetitive self (*nafs-i shahwānī*) [Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds*, 73-4). Moreover, he goes on to suggest that the *nafs* is the sum total of all the vices (*radhāʿil*) that result from one's carnal desires when they rule the heart (*qalb*) and the intellect and enslave both of them. So, one can see that Walī Allāḥ agrees with al-Ghazālī regarding the first meaning of the *nafs*, which is the ordinary, lower self with its negative desires, thoughts, and emotions. However, *nafs* also has a positive meaning when it refers to the reality of human nature.

Later Sufism, heavily influenced by the School of Ibn ʿArabī, begins to explain different modalities of the *nafs* in terms of the on-going and ever-changing manifestation of the divine names (*al-asmāʿ al-ilāhī*), and the full actualization of the self is seen as demanding a disciplined body, mind, and heart (Chittick 2011: 11). The primary impetus behind such a conception, as Sara Sviri points out, seems to have come from the Qur'anic notion of the self (*nafs*) that describes its progressive states through such terms as *al-nafs al-ammāra, al-nafs al-lawwāma, al-nafs al-mulhama,* and *al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna,* which eventually prompted the Sufis to develop a paradigm for the transformation of the lower self by means of various spiritual exercises such as self-discipline, self-examination, and the invocation (*dhikr*) [Sviri 2012: 197ff.; Corbin 1994: 66ff; Kukkonen 2016: 37–60].

The Primacy of Self-knowledge

As mentioned earlier, alongside a distinct view of human nature, Islamic ethical writings also emphasize the importance of self-knowledge. For instance, early philosophical views broach self-knowledge when talking about the self and call attention to the human being's place in nature, as in al-Kindī (d. ca. 256/870):

> Philosophy consists in the human being's knowledge of himself. This statement is both noble and profound. For instance, I agree that entities are either corporeal or incorporeal, while what is incorporeal is either substance or accident. Human beings are a combination of body, soul, and accidents, while the self (*nafs*) is an incorporeal substance. If human beings know themselves, they come to know the body and its accidents... and the substance which is incorporeal. Hence if human beings know all of this, they know everything. For this reason, the wise called humans the microcosm (al-Kindī, *Rasāʿil*, 173).

In the above, al-Kindī first asserts that the self/soul is an incorporeal substance. Al-Kindī also accepts the Aristotelian definition of the soul as the perfection (*tamāmiyya*) of the natural, organic body that receives life. Following Aristotle, he further explains that it is the first perfection (*istikmāl*) of the natural body having life potentially (al-Kindī, *Rasāʿil*, 165). However, his remarks on the self also show Platonic-Pythagorean influences, when e.g., he says that the self "is an intellectual substance, self-moving by means of a harmonious number" (al-Kindī, *Rasāʿil*, 165-66, cf. Adamson and Pormann, *Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī*, 300). After explaining the nature of the self, al-Kindī draws attention to self-knowledge, and contends that by knowing the self one comes to know the universe, since the human self, as a microcosm, reflects the

macrocosm or the greater world. Al-Kindī further explains the nature of the *nafs* in the following:

> [The] self (*nafs*) is separate and distinct from this body, and that its substance is divine and spiritual, as we can see from its noble nature and its opposition to the desires and anger that affect the body. This is because the irascible faculty incites human at times, and urges him to commit a serious transgression. But this self opposes it, and prevents the anger from carrying out its action, or from committing an act of rage and wrongdoing; the self restrains it... This is a clear proof that the faculty by which the human becomes angry is not this self which prevents the anger from attaining what it desires; for the thing which prevents something is doubtlessly not that which is prohibited, since one and the same thing is not opposed to itself (al-Kindī, *Rasā'il*, 273; trans. Adamson and Pormann, modified, in *Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī*, 113); cf. Plato, *Republic*, 436b-441c).

As noted above, al-Kindī emphasizes the ethical implications, which results from the self's fragile nature. Since for al-Kindī the self is incorporeal and something whose substance is divine and spiritual, one should do one's best to attain one's divine nature. He thus devotes pages to elucidate "what kind of life one should live" in order to achieve that desired goal. Less surprisingly perhaps, such reflections resemble what many Sufis also say regarding the same topic. Here is a classic example:

> O ignorant human being, know you not that your stay in this world is but a brief instant, and that you shall then come to the true world, where you will stay forever? You are but a transient wayfarer here, according to your Creator's will, transcendent is He... Plato was indeed right to use this analogy of the Sun, and with it has hit upon a valid proof...

> Those who, in this world, aim only at enjoying food and drink, and who moreover aim at the joys of sex, cannot through their intellectual self reach knowledge of these noble things. [Because of the appetitive self's immersion in the world of senses], the intellectual self is unable to attain a state where it becomes similar to the Creator, praise be to Him (al-Kindī, *Rasāʿil*, 280, trans. Adamson and Pormann, in *Philosophical Works of Al-Kindī*, 118).

Like al-Kindī, al-Fārābī also pays much attention to the human self in his various treatises, namely *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, and *Risāla fi-l-ʿaql*. But whereas al-Kindī's ruminations on the self often involve analyses from the first-personal stance (especially when he mentions self-knowledge), al-Fārābī's perspective seems mostly limited to the third-personal consideration of the self's psycho-somatic functions. For instance, in his *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna*, al-Fārābī presents a compact view of his faculty-based concept of the self, in which cognitive capacities of the self from the faculty of nutrition to the faculty of the intellect are explained:

> When humans come into being, the first thing to arise in them is the faculty by which they consume food. This is called the nutritive faculty (*al-quwwa al-ghādhiya*) ... Together with the senses another faculty comes into being, which is inclined toward the objects of perception in order to either desire or dislike them. After that there arises another faculty in them by which they retain (*yaḥfaẓū*) impressions from the objects of perception (*al-maḥsūsāt*) when they are no longer perceived, and this is called the imaginative faculty (*al-mutakhayyila*)... After that the rational faculty (*al-quwwa al-nāṭiqa*) originates in human by which he is able to perceive the intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt*) and by which he

discriminates the beautiful(*jamīl*) from the ugly (*qabīḥ*) and by which he grasps the arts (*al-ṣināʿāt*) and sciences (*al-ʿulūm*) [al-Fārābī, *Mabādiʾ*,164; with modifications).

The Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān Ṣafāʾ*, fl. 10th century), a society of philosophical brotherhood, narrate the virtues of self-knowledge, while not undermining the Neoplatonic idea of the self as found in al-Kindī and al-Fārābī. For instance, the Ikhwān do talk about the vegetative soul (*al-nafs al-nabātiyya* whose features includes inclinations (*nazʿāt*) and appetites (*shahawāt*), the animal soul (*al-nafs al- ḥayawāniyya*) containing movement, ethical tendencies and senses, and the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) which possesses discernment (*tamyīz*) and knowledge (*maʿrifa*) [see Ikhwān Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʿil,* II: 387].

The Ikhwān divide self-knowledge into three distinct domains, stating that all knowledge starts from one's knowledge of oneself. In the beginning, the self knows itself as a corporeal being, while in the next stage of its development it comes to know that the soul rules the parts of the body. Finally, at the third and highest level, the self's knowledge results in a holistic understanding of things. Self-knowledge at this level also includes knowledge of "morality, actions, movements, skills, works, sounds, and so on" (Ikhwān Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʿil* II: 379).

Finally, with al-Ghazālī we find a comprehensive expression of the classical view of self-knowledge. In his *Kīmiya-yi saʿādat*, Ghazālī observes that nothing is closer to us than our own self, and that without self-knowledge it is not possible to know the world or other people. Unlike his theologian colleagues, al-Ghazālī espouses an immaterial self and places a great deal of emphasis on its spiritual development. His psychology shows clear influences from Avicenna (d. 428/1037) [for Avicenna's influence on Ghazālī, see Treiger 2012]. Al-Ghazālī writes:

> If you want to know self, know that you have been created from two things: One the manifest mold, which is called the "body" and which can be seen with the manifest eye;

> the other the nonmanifest meaning, which is variously called the soul (*nafs*), the heart, and the spirit. This can be known with the nonmanifest insight, but it cannot be seen with the manifest eye. Your reality is this nonmanifest meaning, and all the rest are your subordinates, army, and soldiers. We call it by the name heart. When there is talk of the heart, we mean the reality that is called now spirit, now soul—not the piece of flesh that has been put in the breast (al-Ghazālī, *Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat*, 15, trans. Chittick, modified, in *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy*, 113).

Concerning the self's spiritual development, he asks the reader to begin a self-inquiry with questions such as "What thing are we?" "Where have we come from?" "Where are we going?" "Why have we been created?," and "What is happiness, and in what does it lie?," after which he advises the following to the reader (al-Ghazālī, *Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat*, 13-14):

> The nourishment and felicity of cattle is eating, sleeping, and having sexual intercourse. If you are a cow, exert efforts to keep aright the work of the stomach and pudendum. The nourishment and felicity of rapacious animals is tearing, killing, and expressing anger; the nourishment and felicity of devils is inciting evil, deceiving, and acting deviously. If you are one of them, keep yourself occupied with their work, so that you may reach your comfort and good fortune. The nourishment and felicity of angels is witnessing the divine beauty. If you are an angel in substance (*jawhar*), exert efforts in your own root so that you may know the Divine Presence. Make yourself familiar with witnessing that beauty and free yourself from appetite and wrath (al-Ghazālī, *Kīmiyā-yi saʿādat*, 14, trans. Chittick, modified, in *Heart of Islamic Philosophy,* 112).

After al-Ghazālī, one can mention Bābā Afḍal al-Dīn Kashānī (d. 610/1213-14) who was known for his emphasis on the self and self-knowledge in his philosophical writings in Persian.

In his writings, Bābā Afḍal explains how one can attain self-knowledge through rational investigation. The goal of self-knowledge is the everlasting reality of the intellect, which is the essence of the self. For Bābā Afḍal, human beings realize the meaning of their life by penetrating the deepest core of their self (Chittick 2001: 6–7).

Like the aforementioned authors, Mullā Ṣadrā lists numerous benefits of self-knowledge in the more spiritually flavored exegetical work *Asrār al-āyāt*. The main argument of these pithy statements is that self-knowledge is the gateway to knowledge of everything else, i.e., the world, which in turn causes one to know God. Conversely, if one knows God, one already knows one's self. Ṣadrā also underscores how self-knowledge aids in ethical self-fashioning. For instance, he maintains that "whosoever knows the self, never finds any faults in others and never tries to backbite or speak ill of others. Whenever he notices any blemishes in others, he ascribes them to himself and strives to correct himself accordingly" (Mullā Ṣadrā, Asrār al-*āyāt*, 133). This is because Ṣadrā seems to believe that if one has knowledge of God, then one is fully virtuous, which implies that one is kind, compassionate, forgiving, just, generous, humble, and so on. The following is a translation of selected quotes on self-knowledge from his *Asrār al-āyāt* (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asrār al-āyāt*, 131-134):

> The human self is the aggregate of all existent things as will become clear. Hence whoever knows it, knows the totality of all beings.
>
> Whoever knows the self knows the world and whoever knows the world witnesses the divine in it... (cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 134).
>
> Whoever knows the self, knows its enemy too—enemy which remains hidden through it. The Prophet said the most dangerous enemy is one's own self (i.e., the ego), and he always sought protection from it.

In knowing the self, one is able to control and manage it, and this can bring much good to the world. Such a person deserves to be called God's vicegerent in the world.

From the foregoing, we learned that it is based on the knowledge of the true nature of the self that one can hope to attain eternal happiness, fulfilment in life, and better relations with others.

Self and Self-transformation

Once it is understood that human flourishing is intertwined with a given view of selfhood and knowing who we are in the larger scheme of things, the question of morality becomes inseparable from the idea of human nature. As Charles Taylor explains, when we try to ask, "who we are," we are already oriented in a moral space, "a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary" (Taylor 1989: 28). For this reason, Muslim ethicists often espouse an ethics of human flourishing that explains what a given self must undergo in order to actualize its full potential. One thus observes a shared platform binding Sufis, theologians, and philosophers when it comes to normative ethics, despite their respective visions of "self-transformation." This can be seen in a treatise such as *al-akhlāq al-ʿAḍudiyya*, which is authored by a theologian, namely al-Ījī. It is a short treatise written in the vein of *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, which deals with various topics including theoretical and practical ethics, economics, and political philosophy. Numerous commentaries have been composed on this treatise, which shows its popularity. As Feryal Salem demonstrates, Ṭaşköpüzāda's commentary on the *al-Akhlāq al-ʿAḍudiyya* is one such work which is rich in its depiction of how sixteenth century Muslims in predominantly Ottoman lands conceived of virtue, chivalry (*futuwwa*), societal structure, and politics (Salem 2021). Showing Neoplatonic influences, al-Ījī writes that there are three parts to

the soul corresponding respectively to reason, anger, and desire, which provides a foundation for discussing virtues and vices. Ṭaşköprüzāda elaborates on al-Ījī's description of the soul by explaining that the part of the soul which reasons and conceptualizes reality is said to originate in the brain and it is labeled as the "sovereign soul" or *al-nafs al-malakī* (Salem 2021). The balanced state of the capacity to reason is described as wisdom (*ḥikma)*. Its excess leads to deceitfulness *(jarbaza)* while its deficiency leads to dullness (*ghabāwa*). But wisdom is a master virtue that require acquiring purity of mind (*ṣafāʾ al-dhihn*), excellence in understanding (*jawdat al-fahm)*, sharp-wittedness (*dhakāʾ*), sound conception (*ḥusn al-taṣawwur*), ease in learning (*suhūlat al-taʿallum*), capacity to memorize (*ḥifẓ*), and strong memory (*dhukr*). Al-Ījī's treatise contains a discussion of numerous other virtues, which are needed for self-transformation and flourishing (Salem 2022).

But such a quest for human flourishing should not be seen as an individual pursuit. As mentioned earlier, philosophers such as al-Fārābī argues that human beings, like any natural species, have a perfect state towards which they journey. He also notes that a self-enclosed individual cannot attain the state of perfection without the help of others. And the best form of happiness and perfection belongs to the virtuous city and its people, because in such a society people encourage each other to attain moral virtue and goodness (al-Fārābī, *Perfect State*). Mullā Ṣadrā elaborates on al-Fārābī's virtuous city and adds that people in such a society work and act in various ways not only because they are obligated to do so but also because their innate human intelligence tells them that they must strive to realize their potentialities by the best means available (Toussi 2020). Drawing on his gradational ontology, Ṣadrā likens the unity of the self to that of the universe. The unity of the universe is not a body formed of unrelated things, but is rather a system of interconnected phenomena through casual relationships, either mediated

or unmediated. While unity of the cosmos is pre-determined through the divine providence, unity within society is realized through mutual cooperation and giving precedence to the interests of the community over those of the individual (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, VII: 113).

So, once it is understood that human flourishing is not an individualistic pursuit, one can draw attention to factors such as "habits" that affect the modalities of one's self-transformation. Not surprisingly, philosophers such as al-Kindī argue that choosing the right combination of habits will ensure a sense of self-transformation toward flourishing. Al-Kindī says:

> We see that this clearly exists in [people's] habits (*ʿādāt*), and that the [different] states in which people are and the difference in their wants and desire clearly indicates this. For instance, we see that someone who enjoys food, drink, sex, clothes and similar things which give pleasure on the level of sense-perception (*ḥissiyya*) is made happy and made joyous by these things, and regards anything contrary to these as a loss and a misfortune. We notice that someone addicted to gambling, despite his being deprived of his money, his wasting his days idly, and the constant sequence of sorrows brought about by his losses, is nonetheless made joyous and happy by his situation; for him anything contrary to this, or being deprived of it, is a misfortune and a loss (al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil falsafiyya*, 9–10; modified trans. taken from Adamson and Pormann, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, 251).

In al-Kindī's view, the above examples clearly show that the worldly things which one loves or hates are not something determined by nature, but rather by habit and frequent use. Since happiness is attained through experiencing things, and since finding solace from what we have lost is achieved by way of habit, we should motivate ourselves to bringing to this state and to educating ourselves so that this becomes our necessary habit and acquired character. That is to

say, we mold ourselves a character if we do not naturally possess this character in actuality, i.e., prior to acquiring our habits, so that we live a good life in the end (al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil falsafiyya*, 10). Al-Kindī further stresses this point by saying how we should try to improve our souls by firmly resolving to adhere to habits that are beneficial to ourselves. This means we should not try to improve our souls through potable drugs, or through the pain of cautery and fire, or by paying money, but by habituating the soul to the right kind of behavior, first in a small matter where this can be easily done, and later moving from this up to something greater. Once the soul is habituated to this, one ascends on a continuous scale to something greater still, until habit has accustomed the soul to the greatest thing in the same way as to smallest of things (al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil falsafiyya*, 10–11).

For their part, Sufis argue that self-transformation is contingent on overcoming the lower self and all its negative tendencies. Sufis such as Walī Allāh argue that without a method of purification (*tazkiya*), one would not be able to know the real nature of the self and how this differs from what we ordinarily perceive, think, and treat the self to be. For instance, since the lower self seeks to fulfil its carnal desires, it is prevented from seeing its true nature:

> Since the essential nature of the lower self (*nafs*) is to realize the satisfaction of its appetites (*shahawāt*), it is necessary that it should be purified through repentance (*tawba*) and renunciation (*zuhd*). And since the essential nature of the lower self is guided by its fickle-mindedness (*ṭaysh*) and impetuousness in pursuit of its desires, its remedy then inevitably lies in its taking stock of the beastly self (*nafs-i sabʿiyya*). This means the individual should be arduous in fighting against his lower self (*tā ādamī khūd bar khūd jūsh zanad*), and should dislike himself and be the judge of his own self (*khūd bar khūd ḥakam bāshad*). And as has been observed on numerous occasions, a man begins to rebuke

himself, takes himself to task and expresses his regret and shame. All of this manifests domination of the beastly self (*nafs-i sabʿī*) over the appetitive self (*nafs-i shahwī*) [Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds*, 79].

That is, the *nafs* (i.e., lower self) is that undesirable part of the self that needs to be overcome. This is because the lower self is always craving the satisfaction of its base desires for such things as sensuality (*shahawāt*) or superiority (*ghalaba*) and dominance over one's peers (*istīlāʾ bar abnāʾ-i jins*). Walī Allāh also maintains that at times the individual tries to restrain his lower self (*shakhṣ nafs rā bāz mī-dārad*) and opposes it, with the result that a fierce conflict arises within him. At that time, a great deal of bitterness is experienced, but when the dust settles and agitation (*shūr*) ceases, a wonderful light (*nūr-i ʿajīb*) descends from the Spirit (*rūḥ*) and envelops the wayfarer both inwardly and outwardly (Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds*, 108-09). Since the subtle fields of consciousness called the *laṭāʾif* also manifest various emotions, Walī Allāh broaches the heart (*qalb*) which plays a crucial role in the purification of the self:

> The heart rules over the bodily organs, and by virtue of its love modify their patterns of behavior (*bi-ḥasab-i muḥabbat-i khūd ādāb-i jawāriḥ wa-kayfiyat-i aʿḍāʾ ro mī-gardānad*). When this quality becomes innate in the heart and is maintained for a long time in close association with continuous worshipping, then a stage is created between these two attributes... As a result, [the disciple's] bodily organs become submissive (*khāshiʿ*), and he begins to show courtesy and deference in speech and treat all those who are related to the Beloved (*maḥbūb*) as his own respected friends (Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds*, 90).

Walī Allāh asserts that it is the characteristic of the heart (i.e., the faculty in charge of emotions) to subjugate the appetitive self (*nafs-i shahwānī*) and ignore its frivolity and greed and keep it under firm control. The effect of this aspect of purification is called patience (*ṣabr*). A further

characteristic of the heart is to conform to the intellect and to heed and accept its command. The effect of this aspect of purification is termed surrender to providence (*tawakkul*). Yet another of its characteristic is loyalty to friends (*wafā bih dūstān*) and close adherence to their beliefs and opinions. The effect of this aspect of purification is called piety (*taqwā*), love, and holy ritual. One final characteristic of the heart is that, in comparison with the ultimate objective, everything else appears rather secondary. And because of its inclination towards the real, the heart suppresses any impulse of anger, avarice (*shuḥḥ*), love of dignity, or extravagant hopes. The effect of this aspect of purification of the self is called generosity (*samāḥat*) [Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds*, 83]. After describing how the heart can suppress, subdue, and transform the lower self, Walī Allāh goes on to suggest that if the *laṭīfa* of the intellect dominates over both the lower self and the heart, then even more praiseworthy qualities (*ṣifāt-i maḥmūda*) will result. Drawing on the Qur'anic terminology, Walī Allāh affirms that the self in this condition is called the tranquil self (*nafs-i muṭmaʾinna*). For instance, when a man comes to realize through his intellect that his happiness (*saʿādat*) lies in performing good actions (*aʿmāl-i birr*), while bad actions (*aʿmāl-i athamm*) will only bring him misery (*shiqāwat*), then his lower self no longer goes against or objects to the command of the intellect; and his heart, too, begins to show love (*maḥabbat*) and spiritual longing (*shawq*) for what reason requires. It often happens that a man of abundant intellect thinks of some desirable worldly or religious objective (*maṣlaḥat-i dīniyya wa-dunyawiyya*). Then, however much his heart may dislike certain aspects of it, and even though sweet pleasures (*ladhdhat-i ʿajīb*) may meanwhile be slipping through his hands, still his heart and the lower self do not disobey his intellect (Walī Allāh, *Alṭāf al-quds*, 43-4. Cf. Walī Allāḥ, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, 1: 44, where he says the *ʿaql* must dominate the *qalb* and the *qalb* must dominate the *nafs*).

Human Flourishing and the Overcoming of the Ordinary Self

In his magnum opus *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, Shāh Walī Allāh describes how one attains ultimate flourishing, which takes place when one is able to overcome one's the ordinary, lower self. In his view, this can be attained by turning complete attention to what lies beyond the physical world, to the spiritual realm. This state brings about a pleasure that is different from the familiar pleasures of ordinary life. When this happens, the person no longer socializes unnecessarily, desires what others desire, or fears what others fear, since this person is far removed from the activities of everyday life. Walī Allāh states that this is the happiness realized by the transcendent philosophers (*mutaʾallihūn min al-ḥukamāʾ*) and the ecstatic Sufis (*majdhūbūn*) [Walī Allāḥ, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, 1:100].

Yet, this idea of overcoming and transforming the ordinary self is found across genres of Islamic thought. Among the classical philosophers, Avicenna's method of "human flourishing" through the therapeutic use of reason and intellect, acquiring virtues, and following God's commands stands out:

> The bliss of the self comes about when its substance is rendered perfect, and this is accomplished when it is purified through knowledge of God (*bi-tazkiyat-i bi-l-ʿilm Allāh*) and works for God. Its purification through works for God consists of (a) its being purged of vile and wicked qualities of character, (b) its being far removed from blameworthy attributes and evil and offensive habits by following intellect and religious law (*ʿaql wa-sharʿ*), and (c) its being adorned with good habits, praiseworthy qualities of character, and excellent and pleasing traits by following intellect and religious law (Avicenna, *Risāla al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*, 196, trans. modified, in Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 71).

In addition, Avicenna also maintains that human beings alone possess the capacity to grasp the universal forms or intelligibles, which is called by various names, including the core self (*lubb*):

> Know that human beings alone, to the exclusion of all other living beings, possess a faculty capable of grasping the intelligibles (*darrāka li-l-maʿqūlāt*). This faculty is sometimes called the rational self, sometimes "the tranquil self" [Q 89:27], sometimes the sacred self, sometimes the spiritual spirit, sometimes the commanding spirit, sometimes good word (*kalima ṭayyiba*) [Q 14:24], sometimes word that unites and separates, sometimes the divine secret (*sirr ilāhī*), sometimes governing light, sometimes chief commanding light, but sometimes true heart, sometimes core of the self (*lubb*), sometimes understanding (*nuhan*), and sometimes brains (*ḥijan*). It exists in every single human being, young or old, adolescent or adult, insane or sane, sick, or sound (Avicenna, *Risāla al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*, 195, trans. modified, in Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 68).

Avicenna continues his discourse on human flourishing by stressing the importance of performing religious duties, and by urging to control the desires of the lower self that "incites to evil" (i.e., the Qur'anic term for the lower self, *al-nafs al-ammāra*) so that it can be transformed into the "tranquil self" (*al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna*), which he equates with the rational self of the philosophers. Avicenna says:

> Purification (*tazkiya*) through works is accomplished by methods mentioned in books on Ethics and by assiduous performance of religious duties (*al-waẓāʾif al-sharʿiyya*), both legal and traditional, such as observances relating to [the functions of] the body, one's property, and to a combination of the two. For being restrained at the places where religious law and its statutes place such restraints, and undertaking to submit to its

> commands, have a beneficial effect on subjugating the self that "incites to evil" [Q 12:53] [and thus transforming it] into the rational self which is "at peace," (*bi-l-sūʾ li-l-nafs al-nāṭiqa al-muṭmaʾinna*) i.e., making the bodily faculties of the soul, the appetitive and the irascible, subservient to the rational self which is "at peace" (Avicenna, *Risālat al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*, 197 (trans. modified), in Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 71).

On the next stage of human flourishing, he suggests (like al-Kindī and the Greek philosophers before him) that in order to receive divine effluence (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī*) and realize one's true self one has to turn away from the body or things bodily (i.e., avoid physical pleasures or excessive attachment to sensual things), since this would prevent the intellect from detaching "forms" (*ṣuwar*) from their embodiment:

> As long as the rational self is associated with the human body, no corporeal entity can be completely ready to receive the divine effluence. But when a person expends all his efforts to purify [his rational self] through knowledge, he acquires the propensity for contact with the divine effluence (i.e., with the intellective substance which is the medium of the divine effluence and which is called "angel" in the language of Revelation and "active intellect" in philosophical terminology) [Avicenna, *Risāla al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*, 197, trans. modified, in Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition,* 73].

Finally, the very last paragraph of Avicenna's magnum opus, *al-Shifāʾ*, summarizes what one should do in order to realize flourishing or happiness. It furnishes a comprehensive account of how the ordinary self should purify itself through attaining virtues and prophetic qualities:

> Since the motivating powers are three—the appetitive, the irascible, and the practical—the virtues (*al-faḍāʾil*) consist of three things : [(a)] moderation (*hayʾa al-tawassuṭ*) in such appetites as the pleasures of sex, food, clothing, and comfort, [as well as] other pleasures

> of sense and imagination ; [(b)] moderation in all the irascible passions, such as fear, anger, depression , pride, rancor, jealousy, and the like ; [and (c)] moderations in practical matters. At the head of these virtues stand restraint, wisdom (*ḥikma*), and courage; their sum is justice (*ʿidāla*), which, however, is extraneous to theoretical virtue. But whoever combines theoretical philosophy (*al-ḥikma al-naẓariyya*) with justice is indeed the happy person. And whoever, in addition to this, wins the prophetic qualities (*al-khawāṣṣ al-nubuwwa*) becomes almost a human god (*rabban insāniyyan*). Worship of him (*ʿibādatuhu*), after the worship of God, exalted be He, becomes almost allowed. He is indeed the world's earthly king and God's deputy (*khalīfat Allāh*) in it (Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. Marmura, modified, 378).

In a similar manner, Mullā Ṣadrā also avers that the self attains happiness or flourishing (*saʿāda*) and felicity (*bahja*) by pursuit of deeds and acts which purify the self (*ṭahārat al-nafs*) and refine the mirror of the heart from dirt and pollution (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 9: 169). Like his predecessors, Ṣadrā also makes use of the Platonic tripartite model to explicate how the self should control its evil tendencies. Following the Neoplatonic tradition, Ṣadrā distinguishes three "faculties" that are responsible for one's moral behavior. These three primary faculties are also called souls: the appetitive soul, the irascible soul, and the reasoning soul. As in al-Ījī, all of the moral qualities emanate from these faculties [for the Platonic tripartite self and Plato's self in general, see Barney et al. (eds.), *Plato and the Divided Self*, parts I and II. Plato discusses his tripartite soul in the *Republic*, *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*. These dialogues portray human nature as both multiple and diverse—and yet somehow also one—divided into a "reasoning part" (*logistikon*), a "spirited part" (*thymoeides*) and an "appetitive part" (*epithumètikon*). However, the overall Platonic self is much more complex than what is presented in the tri-partite model, see

e.g., Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern*, 6, 34-37, 44, 115-117]. Like Plato and Avicenna, Ṣadrā puts reason and intellect in charge of all other faculties, and claims that when the faculty of knowledge (*quwwat al-ʿilm*) is balanced and made beautiful, it is able to perceive the difference between truth and falsehood in speech, real and the futile in beliefs, and beauty and ugliness in deeds (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 9: 119). Moreover, he maintains that when the irascible faculty/soul (*quwwat al-ghaḍab*) is in a deficient state, the traits of lowliness, weakness, and low self-esteem become apparent in one's personality. However, he also claims that the excess of this faculty results in hastiness, conceit, haughtiness, uncontrolled anger, false pride, and vanity, while its balanced constitution gives rise to bravery (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 9: 120). Furthermore, the excess of appetitive faculty/soul (*quwwat al-shahwa*) brings about viciousness, dullness, while its deficiency causes covetousness, impudence, boasting, flattery, jealousy, and malice, and its balance chastity, modesty, and generosity (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 9: 120). Ṣadrā also adds that the faculty of justice (*quwwat al-ʿadāla*) restrains the irascible and the appetitive faculties through religious injunctions and the intellect (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, 9: 119; cf. *Asfār* 8: 161-62).

Concluding Reflections

All in all, the foregoing shows how Muslim thinkers present an ethics of human flourishing through a distinct moral and spiritual view of selfhood. The fact that they talk about the self in myriad ways using various terminologies such as *nafs*, *qalb*, *rūḥ*, and *ʿaql* should not cause us to think there is no unity in their discourse. As alluded to earlier, the significance of using multiple terms in relation to the concept of the self is that it is a multidimensional entity (Faruque 2021). Hence, one has to find common connotations of the various expressions denoting the self in Islamic languages such as Arabic, Persian, showing that they all in fact belong to the same spectrum concept, namely the self. Despite a rich diversity of various accounts of selfhood across

time and space (from a physicalist to a quasi-physicalist to an immaterialist notion of the self), the texts analyzed in this study nonetheless show an overarching concern regarding selfhood and human flourishing.

Although the self is ultimately indefinable as it is no specific thing (especially in post-classical Sufism), the basic of sense of the self involves an ethical "split" within itself in terms of its higher and lower nature—the higher nature being the state of *fiṭra* or primordial purity while the lower nature being the site of negative thoughts and emotions. It is also helpful to view selfhood as both received and achieved. That is, a self is not something that we automatically are, rather a self (i.e., the true self) is something we must become. Thus, it is possible to describe the self (the received aspect of the self) in terms of scientific and social facts (some thinkers in this study defined the self as a principle of life or an immaterial substance), but at the same time it is equally possible to articulate it in terms of aspirational ideals that are yet to be realized (i.e., the achieved aspect). For Muslim ethical writers, the aspirational ideals are expressed in terms of self-knowledge, purification, self-transformation, and the *fiṭra*—the last of which represents the pinnacle of human flourishing. This is because as a state of primordial purity, the *fiṭra* enables one to drink from the ocean of divine love, peace, and beauty. And therein lies the meaning of being a human being.

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