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Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Beyond. By JARI KAUKUA. Cambridge:

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It would be an understatement to say that the study of Islamic philosophy is very much alive today in the modern academy. A staggering amount of work is published or undertaken yearly, including an unprecedented amount of textual and philological research that facilitates the establishment and publication of reliable texts, which in turn become the objects of further analysis and study. All of this activity has helped foster a growing awareness in the field of Islamic intellectual history that the discipline of Islamic philosophy is far more expansive than has hitherto been conceived. This also entails that Islamic philosophy's own, indigenous concerns are brought to the forefront of the discussion, demanding from the researcher both a wider historical lens and a deeper philosophical apparatus in order to fully appreciate the complexity of the problems dealt with in a variety of thinkers and intellectual perspectives, particularly from Avicenna (d. 1037) onward.

With this latter point in mind, Jari Kaukua's *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy* covers much uncharted territory, probing the problem of self-awareness as conceived by Avicenna and as received and reformulated by his illustrious successors, chief among them Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640). Although the premodern, non-European occupation with the self has already been aptly demonstrated by Richard Sorabji (Chicago, 2006), Kaukua seeks to fill in the gaps with a more sustained account of Islamic models of self-awareness. He approaches this topic with impressive historical range, sensitivity

to the many technical nuances inherent in the subject matter, sound philological skills, and forensic philosophical precision.

A good majority of Kaukua's study is rightly dedicated to Avicenna, who carved out a distinctly unique notion of self-awareness that cannot be concretely traced back to the ancient Greeks. Although Aristotle's *De Anima* III.2 charts out a general sense of phenomenal awareness (or, to be exact, "perception of perception"), Avicenna seems to have relegated Aristotle's treatment of this problem to his cognitive theory of the internal senses. The notion of self-awareness seems, at least in some way, to be indirectly indebted to *De Anima* III.2 and a variety of other psychological texts that made their way into Arabic, and with which Avicenna was familiar, yet Kaukua cautions against reading too much into this, arguing for the unique nature of Avicenna's explanation and defense of human self-awareness.

Kaukua demonstrates his intimate familiarity with the large body of secondary scholarship on this very topic, taking account of the contributions of Michael Marmura, Deborah Black, and Dag Hasse, and offering his own unique reading of the relevant Avicennian texts along the way. It can be noted in passing that Ahmed Alwishah, in particular in "Avicenna on Self-Cognition and Self-Awareness" (in *Aristotle and the Arabic Tradition*, ed. idem and J. Hayes [Cambridge, 2016], 143–63), is a recent voice on self-awareness in Avicenna that seems to challenge at least some of Kaukua's conclusions.

Avicenna conceives of the problem of self-awareness in a thought experiment, commonly known, from Etienne Gilson onward, as the "flying man"—not to be confused with the Andalusian 'Abbās Ibn Firnas (d. 887) who attempted human aviation. In fact, Avicenna spoke of a "suspended" or "floating" (*mu'allaq*) man. Among the texts in which Avicenna

frames this scenario, one that is perhaps the best known and most self-explanatory is found in the psychology section of *al-Shifā'* I.1, which in Kaukua's translation (p. 35) reads:

So we say: one of us must imagine himself so that he is created all at once and perfect but his sight is veiled from seeing external [things], that he is created floating in the air or in a void so that the resistance of the air does not hit him—a hit he would have to sense—and that his limbs are separated from each other so that they do not meet or touch each other. [He must] then consider whether he affirms the existence of his self. He will not hesitate in affirming that his self exists, but he will not thereby affirm any of his limbs, any of his intestines, the heart or the brain, or any external thing. Rather, he will affirm his self without affirming for it length, breadth or depth. If it were possible for him in that state to imagine a hand or some other limb, he would not imagine it as part of his self or a condition in his self. You know that what is affirmed is different from what is not affirmed and what is confirmed is different from what is not confirmed. Hence the self whose existence he has affirmed is specific to him in that it is he himself, different from his body and limbs which he has not affirmed. Thus, he who takes heed has the means to take heed of the existence of the soul as something different from the body—indeed, as different from any body—and to know and be aware of it.

It would be a great injustice to Kaukua to attempt to summarize the intricate nature of the many arguments that he advances based on his close reading of this passage and a host of other cognate texts in the Avicennian corpus. So I shall confine myself to the most salient

features of Kaukua's findings: the fact that, for Avicenna, self-awareness is (1) a constant, continuous phenomenon that is (2) identical to human existence itself and (3) indicates the function of what we would normally call the "soul."

It is on the score of self-awareness being a constant form of first-personality that Avicenna's notion of self-awareness is distinct from Aristotle's "perception of perception." For Avicenna, this latter would, it seems, correspond to "awareness of awareness," which itself is a form of second-personality on account of the fact that it requires non-continuous intellectual consideration. Put more simply, "awareness of awareness" entails reflection. Reflection stands apart from and is inferior to self-awareness, which is clearly a much more fundamental, primitive condition for all other forms of cognition.

As for the conclusion that self-awareness is identical to human existence and indicates the function of the soul, this will have serious repercussions with some of the later parts of Kaukua's study when he gets to Mullā Ṣadrā. But before this, the book examines related ideas in Abū l-Barakat al-Baghdādī (d. 1164/5) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210) in passing, and focuses on the one philosophical giant who stood between Avicenna and Ṣadrā, namely, al-Suhrawardī.

In many ways, al-Suhrawardī's understanding of self-awareness is directly indebted to Avicenna. But, as Kaukua demonstrates with thoroughness and attention to all manner of detail, al-Suhrawardī's metaphysical and epistemological commitments lead him down different and creative avenues. His main departure from Avicenna lies in his emphasis on the simple given-ness or even matter-of-factness of self-awareness. It has no relationship to substantiality, and hence is not related to a subject in any way. This entails that self-awareness is not to be associated with incorporeality, which is to say that it does not point to the human

soul. Rather, self-awareness is a simple, brute fact of human experience. Because of its comprehensive and general scope, self-awareness is in no need of explanation, much less definition or some kind of taxonomic qualification.

The main differences between Avicenna and al-Suhrawardī in their understanding of self-awareness go back to their respective positions on the nature of knowledge acquisition. For Avicenna, knowledge is representational, which entails that the forms of knowledge are impressed upon the soul; for al-Suhrawardī, knowledge is presential (*ḥudūrī*), meaning that the forms of knowledge, by way of illumination (*ishrāq*), present themselves to the human soul in something of an experiential and direct manner. Knowledge is thus not the result of an imprinting of the forms of knowledge upon the human soul as much as it is the result of an illuminative encounter by the soul with these forms.

Kaukua's discussion of Mullā Ṣadrā's stance on the question of self-awareness is as enlightening as it is challenging. He covers the necessary background very well as far as Ṣadrā's presentation of animal self-awareness is essentially a recasting, in his own terms, of the well-known Avicennian explications of the "flying man" scenario. In the process Ṣadrā also seeks to defend Avicenna against some of the criticisms of al-Rāzī, with whose writings Ṣadrā was thoroughly conversant. The wholesale appropriation of the arguments of his predecessors (or even his own arguments from his other writings), along with a rebuttal of his predecessors' opponents, all cast in the framework of his own overarching metaphysical project, is a relatively common feature in Ṣadrā's writings.

Kaukua highlights very well the unique manner in which Ṣadrā frames the question of self-awareness. Although in a sense dependent upon both Avicenna and al-Suhrawardī, his entire perspective on self-awareness is colored by his fundamental insight concerning the

primacy of being or existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*). Kaukua demonstrates that, for Ṣadrā, self-awareness is in the final analysis a kind or mode of mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), and this point is correct. Yet here we need a more extended discussion of self-awareness's relationship to not only the notion of mental existence, but also self-knowledge, thereby bringing the problematic of self-awareness under the wider scope of Ṣadrā's noetics and epistemology. More particularly, since Ṣadrā's notion of the primacy of being entails that all things are simply modes (*anḥā*) of *wujūd* that participate in the dynamic process of *wujūd*'s own graded self-unfolding and self-refolding, the same insight also applies to the more general category of knowledge. As Ibrahim Kalin has demonstrated (*Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy* [New York, 2010]), for Ṣadrā, knowledge is yet another mode of *wujūd*, even though it in many ways behaves like *wujūd* in its general pervasiveness and indefinability. As the various modes of *wujūd* are characterized by where they stand on their respective levels of intensity and diminution, knowledge, as a mode of *wujūd*, is also either more or less intense.

Self-awareness as only a form of mental existence would therefore be on a much less intense scale of *wujūd* than other forms of self-awareness. This implies that the more intense our *wujūd*, the more intense our self-awareness, thereby rendering our self-awareness all the more real. This is why Ṣadrā places such a premium upon spiritual practice, since access to higher grades of *wujūd* and consequently the self cannot be obtained through "thought" alone. Rather, a programmatic, method of self-remembrance is in order. This method, Ṣadrā tells us in *Sih aṣl*, will not only lead to higher forms of being and awareness, but also higher modes of self-knowledge and presence (see M. Rustom, "Philosophical Sufism," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy* [New York, 2016], 407).

Kaukua's discussion of the complicated problem in Mullā Ṣadrā concerning the nature of a stable self amid the constellation of changes that the substance of the soul undergoes in accordance with Ṣadrā's novel doctrine of substantial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*) is excellent. He is able to demonstrate how Ṣadrā's commitments to his own philosophical doctrines form the ground for a series of tensions with respect to his insistence on self-awareness as a continuous phenomenon on the one hand, and how the notion of a stable self remains somewhat opaque (to itself) on the other. But here, too, one wonders how the notion of self-reflexive opacity matches up with Ṣadrā's emphasis on the higher forms of awareness at which the human soul arrives precisely through the soul's *tajrīd* or "peeling away" from materiality through its increase in *wujūd*, self-remembrance, and self-knowledge (for a related and profound discussion, see W. Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart*, ed. M. Rustom et al. [Albany, 2012], ch. 19.)

Now that we have a broader understanding of the interdisciplinary and geographical vastness of post-Avicennian Islamic philosophy, there is at our disposal a minimum of knowledge that allows us to carry out substantial research on the variegated intellectual strands that intertwine so firmly in the post-classical period of Islamic intellectual history, thereby expanding our horizons when it comes to envisioning the nature and scope of Islamic intellectual activity over the past one thousand years. This entails that, at minimum, we have a number of categories in the study of Islamic intellectual history that are no longer mutually exclusive. There is, for instance, a sizeable amount of literature now on the manner in which Avicenna was naturalized into both Islamic theology and Islamic mysticism. This allows for two sub-disciplines in the study of Islamic philosophy to emerge—Islamic philosophical theology and philosophical Sufism respectively. And these two sub-fields also splinter off into

other unique and original synthetic forms, potentially taking the sphere of coverage of Islamic philosophy to unforeseen heights.

Kaukua's *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy* is therefore not only relevant to the mainstream Islamic philosophical tradition. Self-awareness becomes, for example, a major area of inquiry among the followers of Ibn al-'Arabī, with their own points of interest, technical language, and emphasis on the nature of the self/Self, thereby presenting new possibilities for envisioning the scope and efficacy of this key insight in Avicenna, al-Suhrawardī, and Mullā Ṣadrā.

Of course, asking of Kaukua to have also included in his inquiry the manner in which self-awareness functions in the writings of the more philosophically-oriented Sufis would be equivalent to demanding another book. Within the confines of his inquiry Kaukua has indeed covered all the necessary ground. This in itself is a major feat and a serious scholarly accomplishment. By way of an Avicennian *ishāra*, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy* also points to the need to examine the problem of self-awareness and a cluster of other related issues in metaphysics and psychology within the wider tapestry of the post-classical Islamic intellectual tradition, philosophical Sufism being one of its most important yet seriously understudied dimensions. Suffice it to say, awareness of this need would not have been possible without the necessary ground covered by Kaukua's phenomenal study.

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