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Focal Text: Avicenna, *Šifā'* (Cure), *De anima* I,1; Arabic pp. 12,9ff (*lākinnhu qad yatašakkaku*), Latin pp. 29 (l. 64)ff (*sed dubitatur*).

Background: Having given a definition of soul as "the first perfection of a natural body possessed of organs that performs the activities of life..." Avicenna interrupts himself by airing the following doubts one might have about this definition:

Translation:

- I But one may doubt many things in this subject, among them, one may say:
 - i "This definition does not extend to the heavenly soul, for this soul acts without organs (*ālāt / instrumenta*). But if you left off mentioning 'organs', restricting yourselves to the mention of 'life', that would not help you at all; for the life that belongs to the heavenly soul is not 'being nourished' or 'growing', and also not 'perceiving'. But if you meant by the 'life' which is in this definition that which belongs to the heavenly soul, namely, grasping (*idrāk / cognoscendo*), for example, and intellectual conceptualization (*at-tašawwur al-'aqlī / imaginando intelligibiliter*), and causing volitional motion towards an aim (*at-taḥrīk li-ġāyatin irādīyatan / movendo ad finem voluntarie*), then you have cast plants out of the set of things which have soul.
 - ii "Also, if 'being nourished' is 'life' (*ḥayāt / vita*), then why is the plant not called a 'living animal' (*ḥayawānan / viva sive animalia*)?"
 - iii Also one may say: "What compels you to posit a soul: why does it not suffice for you to say that life itself is this perfection, such that life is the entity from which effuses that whose effusion you ascribe to the soul?"
- II Let us proceed through each one of the responses and resolutions, saying:
- III As for the heavenly bodies, there are two schools of thought on them:
 - i first, that each planet (*kawkab / stella*) is actually composed of this planet and a number of other spheres which are arranged by its motion altogether, a body like a single animal. In this way, the activity of each of the spheres is perfected by a number of parts in motion, which are like organs. But this answer does not hold of each of the spheres;¹
 - ii second, that each sphere has its own separate life, particular to it, and that there is a ninth body, one in actuality, with no multiplicity in it.
- IV As for those who hold the second view, they must admit that the name 'soul', when applied to the heavenly soul and vegetative soul, is used homonymously (*bi-l-ištirāk / quasi aequivoce*). And [they must admit] that this definition [of soul] only applies to the soul which is found in complex beings.
- V If one [holding the first view] were particularly crafty, such that both animals and the heavenly body shared in the meaning of the name 'soul', then the meaning [which befits] plants would be excluded from that group. Even so, it would be a difficult ploy [to force the heavens and animals to share a definition of soul], since animals and the heavenly body do not share in the meaning of the name 'life' (*ḥayāt / vita*), nor in the meaning of the name 'rationality' (*nuṭq / rationalitatis*). For the 'rationality' which exists down here is predicated on the existence of a soul with the two material intellects. But this would be inappropriate for the heavens, as you know. For intellect in the heavens is intellect in actuality, and the intellect in actuality is not constitutive of the soul which makes up part of the definition of 'the rational' (*an-nāṭiq / rationalis*). Similarly, 'sensation' down here is said of the power by

1. Because not every sphere contains an epicycle.

which the soul grasps the sensibles, in the manner of receiving their likenesses (*amṭila / similitudines*) and being affected by them, and this too is inappropriate for the heavens, as you know.

- VI Then, if one struggled, and made the definition of soul “the first perfection of a body which moves according to will and perceives,” so that both animals and the heavenly soul would be subsumed by it, plants would be excluded from that group. And this is the established statement (*wa hādā huwa l-qawlu l-muḥaṣṣalu / et haec dictio est rata*).
- VII As for the question about ‘life’ and ‘soul’, the doubt about that will be resolved as follows:
- VIII It is true that bodies need to contain a principle (*mabda'*) [to account] for the states which are known and ascribed to ‘living in actuality’. If someone called this principle ‘life’ there would be no disagreement with him. But the understood meaning, among the masses, of the term ‘life’ when said of the animal is two things:
- i first, ‘the species’ existing while having within it a principle from which proceed these states [of a living thing]’; or
 - ii second, ‘body’s being in a such a way that these actions truly proceed from it’.
- IX As for the first of these meanings, it is known that this is not in any way the meaning of ‘soul’.
- X As for the second, it also indicates something other than the meaning of ‘soul’. For a thing’s being in such a way that something truly proceeds from it, or being in such a way as to be described by an attribute, occurs in two ways:
- i First, by there being something *other* than that thing itself, from which proceeds that which proceeds, such as existence of the ship, insofar as the benefit of seafaring proceeds from it. This requires there to be a helmsman, in order for seafaring to exist. But seafaring and this helmsman are not one and the same subject.
 - ii Second, by there being something *not* other than that thing itself, such as the existence of a body such that burning proceeds from it, according to he who makes this being itself warmth, to the point that the existence of warmth in the body *is* the existence of this being. [Similarly, the existence of the soul *is* the existence of this being], at least in plain speech.
- XI Except that this [second way actions proceed from a body] does not really fit the case of the soul, for the sense of ‘this thing’ and ‘the soul’ are not one and the same thing. How could it not be like that, when the sense of ‘the thing described’ does not prevent there being some perfection and principle prior to it by essence, because of which, then, the body has this being? But the sense of ‘first perfection’ (which we have sketched) does prevent there being some other perfection prior to it by essence. For the first perfection does not have a principle or first perfection.
- XII Therefore the sense of ‘life’ and ‘soul’ are not one and the same, at least if we mean by ‘life’ what the common people understand. But if we mean by ‘life’ something which agrees with ‘soul’, indicating a first perfection, there is no disagreement; ‘life’ would be a name for what we are trying to posit, namely this first perfection.