

IBN SĪNĀ AND ABŪ AL-BARAKĀT AL-BAGHDĀDĪ ON
THE ORIGINATION OF THE SOUL (*ḤUDŪTH AL-NAFS*) AND
THE INVALIDATION OF ITS TRANSMIGRATION (*IBṬĀL AL-TANĀSUKH*)

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This article presents a comparative survey of Ibn Sīnā and Abū al-Barakāt's views on the problem of the origination of the soul and its transmigration (*tanāsukh*) and contrasts their arguments and interpretations. The article identifies similarities and differences in the views of these two scholars, both of whom believed in and argued for the origination of the soul and rejected its transmigration, with particular focus on the way they differ in defining their views.

Keywords: Ibn Sīnā; Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī; psychology; the origination of the soul; *tanāsukh*, the transmigration of the soul; *Kitāb al-muṭabar fī al-ḥikmah*; *al-Shifā'*; *al-Najāt*; *al-Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah fī al-maʿād*.

Introduction

The problem of the temporal origin of the human soul (*ḥudūth al-nafs*) and its immortality after the death of the body (*baqā' al-nafs ba'da fanā' al-badan*) is one of the many important issues pertaining to the nature of the human soul. Moreover, this problem overlaps other fundamental problems concerning the nature of creation, the reality of the God-soul relationship, and the nature of human knowledge.

In his *Kitāb al-muṭabar fī al-ḥikmah*, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī reex-

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amines the philosophy of the earliest thinkers on this problem, especially the Aristotelian point of view as expounded by Ibn Sīnā, and evaluates it before expressing his own views. The central question here is whether the soul is originated or eternal, and whether the notion of the transmigration of the soul promoted by those who believe in the eternity of the soul is valid.

The origination of the human soul and the impossibility of its transmigration, according to Ibn Sīnā

Ibn Sīnā's view on the origination of the human soul and the impossibility of its transmigration is stated clearly in his major works, especially in *al-Shifā'*, *al-Najāt* and *al-Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah fī al-maʿād*. He says that the human soul is "the first entelechy of a natural body possessing organs (*kamāl awwal li jism ṭabīʿī ʿalī*) insofar as it acts by rational choice and rational deduction, and insofar as it perceives universals."¹ It is also "an immaterial substance independent of any material substratum" (*jawhar qāʾim bi dhātihī*)² and it therefore is something 'spiritual' (*rūḥānī*), free from any material basis.³

So, in this conception, the soul is an immaterial substance which is somehow connected actively to the body. In its relation to the body it plays the role of an agent for all actions and perceptive activities undertaken by the human being. This basic notion of the soul and its role in the body is commonly understood. However, when we try to think of the nature of

1. Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 25 and Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1985), 197. See detail explanation on this definition in Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *Physics*, Book 6 (*Kitāb al-Nafs*), ed. G. Anawati and Saʿīd Zayed, (Cairo: al-Hayʾat al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1975), 6-10, hereinafter cited as *Kitāb al-nafs of al-Shifā'*.
2. Ibid., 22-26. Also see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, ed. Sulayman Dunyā, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d.), 2: 350-355.
3. On the argumentation on how the human soul is free from any material basis, see Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-nafs of al-Shifā'*, 187-196. On the definition and nature of the human soul in Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, see Ibrāhīm Madkūr, "Introduction" in Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-nafs of al-Shifā'*, viii-ix. Also see Ibrāhīm Madkūr, *Fī al-falsafah al-islāmiyyah manḥaj wa taṭbīq*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1968), 1: 154-169; Yahyā Huwaydī, *Muḥāḍarāt fī al-falsafah al-islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1965), 207-208; Maḥmūd Qāsim, *Dirāsāt fī al-falsafah al-islāmiyyah*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1967), 43-4; A. Naṣrī Nāder, *al-Nafs al-bashariyyah ʿindā Ibn Sīnā* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1968), 15.

the soul prior to the existence of the body, many difficult questions come to mind. Did the soul exist at all, prior to the existence of the body? If so, how could this universal soul have become individuated and play its role in separate bodies? What then separates each individual from another and makes them differ from each other in their respective individuality despite partaking of a common universal soul?

These are among the questions often raised in considering and understanding the ontological history of soul. Ibn Sīnā believes that all these questions would be reasons enough for taking the stand that the soul cannot pre-exist the body, but in fact originated with the body.

Ibn Sīnā, in his argument for the origination of the human soul,⁴ stresses that the soul can neither be a single entity nor multiple entities before it exists in the body, and that, logically, something which is neither singular nor multiple is non-existent; therefore, the soul does not exist before the body. It is also impossible for the soul to be multiplied when it is attached to the bodies because an immaterial entity which is free from any bodily or materialistic elements is indivisible. Furthermore, it is absurd to think that the soul remains numerically one while attached to different bodies because such a phenomenon would imply that there is only one soul which is attached to various individual bodies. Ibn Sīnā explains in *al-Shifā'*⁵ and *Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah*⁶ that if the conception of a single soul attached to different individuals is true, then every individual will be similar to one another in all respects. Thus, if there is only one soul, every single person or individual will know and acquire the same knowledge as the others.

Similarly, the soul could not have been multiplied before the existence of the body because any multiplication of the soul at that stage would necessitate certain accidents (*awāriḍ*) or inseparable properties (*lawāzīm*) in the soul. Ibn Sīnā explains that “the multiplicity of the species of those things with pure essences is only due to the substrata which receive them

4. See the argument in Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, 222-223; Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 56-58 and 105-106; Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-naḥs of al-Shifā'*, 198-201 and his *Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah fī al-maʿād*, ed. Ḥasan ʿĀsī, 2nd ed. (Beirut; al-Muʾassasah al-Jāmiʿīyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzīʿ, 1987), 115-116. Cf. Y. Huwaydī, *Muḥaḍḍarāt*, 238-239 and Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Abū Saʿdah, *al-Wujūd wa al-khulūd fī falsafah Abī al-Barakāt al-Baghḍādī* (Cairo: Maktabah Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1993), 215-217.

5. Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-naḥs of al-Shifā'*, 200.

6. Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah*, 123.

and to what is affected by them or due only to their times.”⁷ Therefore, since all these accidental elements exist only with the material body, and since the soul at this stage is free from any materiality, then the soul is indivisible. On the other hand, the numerical multiplicity of the soul could not be ascribed to its very quiddity (*al-māhiyyah*) and form (*al-ṣūrah*) because the form of the soul is one, and therefore the multiplicity of the soul would only be possible if there is a recipient of the quiddity (*qābil al-māhiyyah*) such as the body.

Thus, based on the above consideration, one should not claim that the multiplicity of the soul is due to another body before this present body, because this would mean that the soul transmigrated from that earlier body. This is absurd because transmigration of the soul from one body to another is impossible.⁸ Ibn Sīnā’s stance on the impossibility of the transmigration of the soul is based on his doctrine of the soul’s resurrection in the Hereafter. Since he believes that only the soul and not the body will be resurrected in the Hereafter, and that the existence of the soul at that stage does not require any body, he rejects the idea of transmigration, however it is conceived. He devises special arguments to refute the idea of transmigration apart from his argument on the immortality of the soul.⁹

7. Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna’s Psychology*, 57.

8. Cf. Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu‘tabar fī al-ḥikmah* (Hyderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyyah, 1358 H.), 2: 371. Ibn Sīnā discusses the question of the transmigration of the soul and relates it to the immortality of the soul in *al-Shifā’* and *al-Najāt*, and with the Hereafter (*al-Ma‘ād*) in *Risālah al-‘aḏḥawīyyah*; see Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-naḥs* of *al-Shifā’*, 202-207; his *al-Najāt*, 223-227; and his *Risālah al-‘aḏḥawīyyah*, 114-126. This is understood because Ibn Sīnā believes in the origination of the soul, and, since it is proven and established that the soul exists with the existence of the body, he thinks that it is not necessary to discuss the impossibility of transmigration of the soul before the body. However, when he claims that the soul is immortal and that there is life after the death of the body, then the explanation on whether the soul is possibly transmigrated or not is needed. His explanation of the impossibility of the transmigration of the soul after the death of the body thus implies that transmigration is impossible in whatever situation, before or after the death of the body. This is quite different in the case of Abū al-Barakāt, who sees both issues, i.e., the question whether the soul is eternal or originated and the question of transmigration of the soul, especially before the existence of the body, as two interrelated issues which should therefore be reconsidered at the same time.

9. See his argument for the immortality of soul in, for instance, *Kitāb al-naḥs* of *al-Shifā’*, 202-207; *al-Najāt*, 223-227; Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna’s*

Although aware of the opinions and sometimes sophisticated arguments of those who support the idea of transmigration, either before its attachment to the body or after the death of the body, he presents his views and explanations on the absurdity of the transmigrationist arguments in his *Risālah al-ʿaḍḥawīyyah*.¹⁰

There are several considerations to note when studying Ibn Sīnā's argument for the impossibility of transmigration. As discussed above, Ibn Sīnā has established that the soul comes into being only when the body is prepared to receive it. It means that the readiness of the body to receive the soul is among the essential requisites for the emanation of the soul from its cause.

Ibn Sīnā believes that all these processes, i.e., the readiness of the body to receive the soul as well as the emanation of the soul from its cause, do not occur accidentally because that would imply that the body, which is an element of the multiplicity of the soul, could exist prior to the soul. If this is the case, then the multiplicity of the soul would not necessarily follow from the essential cause (*al-ʿillah al-dhātīyyah*), which in this case is the soul, but rather due to the accidental cause (*al-ʿillah al-ʿaraḍīyyah*), which is the body. This is unacceptable because the essential cause is logically prior to the accidental cause. On the other hand, one should not claim that individual bodies are varied, where some are ready to receive the incoming soul while others are not, because "the individuals of a species do not differ in matters which constitute their essence."¹¹ Hence, it is clear that whenever there is a body, it must surely be ready to receive the soul which will govern the body, and that this same receptivity should be common to all bodies.

Having explained these basal principles, Ibn Sīnā then expresses his argument for the impossibility of transmigration. He claims that if transmigration were possible, then it must be logically possible to have two souls attached to the same body at the same time—one soul which transmigrated from the previous body and another soul which come into

Psychology, 58-63 and 109; Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah al-ʿaḍḥawīyyah*, 143-144. Also Ibrāhīm Madkūr, *Fī al-falsafah al-islāmīyyah*, 1: 177-190; Maḥmūd Qāsim, *Dirāsāt fī al-falsafah al-islāmīyyah*, 44-46 and his *Fī al-naḥs wa al-ʿaql li falāsifah al-ighrīq wa al-islām*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Maktabah al-Anglo al-Miṣriyyah, 1969), 168-174; and Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 163 ff.

10. Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah al-ʿaḍḥawīyyah*, 114-126.

11. See Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 64. Cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-naḥs of al-Shifāʾ*, 207 and his *al-Najāt*, 227.

existence with this present body. As this is evidently not possible, transmigration of the soul too is impossible.¹²

Furthermore, according to Ibn Sīnā, the soul-body relationship is an active relationship. The soul plays the role of governing the body and the body is influenced by its actions. There is thus a conscious relationship between the soul and the body, and each of them is aware of the presence of the other. If we assume that there are two different souls in one body, we should necessarily be aware of the presence of them both. Since we do not feel and are unaware of any soul except the unique soul which governs and occupies our body, a second transmigrated soul into our body is an impossibility. Besides, it is absurd to claim that there is actually an unrealized additional soul in the body because this means that this additional soul is bereft of any relationship with the body and therefore is not the soul we are discussing about. Hence, transmigration is absolutely impossible.¹³

Such is Ibn Sīnā's stand on the origination of the human soul and the impossibility of transmigration. The soul, according to Ibn Sīnā, does not pre-exist the body but comes into existence when there is a suitable body to receive it, and which the soul governs and uses as its instrument. "This mutual suitability of the body-soul complement gives to the soul its particular character which constitutes its unique individuality," and therefore "after the death of the body, the soul preserves its individuality and survives as such."¹⁴

Ibn Sīnā explanation and discussion in *Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah*¹⁵ indicates a clear interrelation between the origination of the soul and the impossibility of its transmigration. The theses of the origination of the soul and the impossibility of its transmigration are complementary. Ibn Sīnā uses the proof for the origination of the soul to establish the impossibility of transmigration; he rejects the idea of transmigration based on the establishment of the origination of the soul.¹⁶ It is this circular aspect of his

12. Compare the idea that a soul can have only one particular body with Aristotle, *De anima*, ii, 3, 407b: 13-26 and ii, 2, 414a: 19-29. Also see Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 109.

13. See Ibn Sīnā's argument for the impossibility of transmigration in his *Kitāb al-naḥs* of *al-Shifāʾ*, 207; *al-Najāt*, 227; *Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah*, 124-125; and Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 63-64 and 109. Cf. Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Muʿtabar*, 2: 371.

14. Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*, 106.

15. Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah al-ʿaḏḥawīyyah*, 121.

16. Ibn Sīnā stresses that among the main confusions of those who believe

argumentation that causes Abū al-Barakāt to criticize Ibn Sīnā and accuse him of being mired in a vicious circle. In the following discussion, we will see Abū al-Barakāt's viewpoints on this issue through his comments on Ibn Sīnā and his own approach in dealing with the problem.

The origination of the human soul and the impossibility of its transmigration, according to Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī

Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī bequeathed us far fewer works compared to earlier philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Abū al-Barakāt focused more on re-examining the thoughts and ideas propounded before him than on an elaborate interpretations of them. Therefore, his philosophical works appeared in the form of compressed renditions and evaluations of major earlier ideas.¹⁷

The question of the soul was among the major questions Abū al-Barakāt dealt with in his philosophical works. It appears in various parts of his writings, and especially thoroughly in his major work *al-Mu'tabar fī al-ḥikmah*.¹⁸ He also discusses the issue in his other treatises such as *Kitāb*

in the soul's transmigration is that they think the soul exists before the body. Therefore, instead of answering each argument posed by them, he works on establishing the fact that the soul does not pre-exist the body, believing that, by establishing this, the whole argument based on this proposition is necessarily invalid. Ibid.

17. See Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, *al-Jānib al-naqdī fī falsafat Abī al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2004), 46-47, hereinafter cited as *al-Jānib*. On his contribution and works, see for instance Sulaymān al-Nadwī, "*Kitāb al-mu'tabar wa ṣāḥibihī*," appearing at the end of the Hyderabad edition of *al-Mu'tabar*, 3: 230-252; Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Abū'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi's Physics and Metaphysics* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press and Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979); and Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, *al-Jānib*, 46-53. Also see Jamāl Rajab Saidabī, *Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī wa falsafatihi al-ilāhiyyah* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1996), 24-25 and (in Malay) Wan Suhaimi Wan Abdullah, "A Biography of Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī," *Jurnal Usuluddin (Journal of Uṣūluddīn)*, Kuala Lumpur: Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya, no. 9 (July 1999), 73-96.
18. The question of the soul is primarily addressed in chapters sixteen ("On the state of the soul before its connection to the body and on what has been said on its eternity and originality"), seventeen ("On re-examining the arguments [concerning the origination and the eternity of the soul]"), and eighteen ("On clarifying the origination of the soul and invalidating the eternity and the transmigration of the soul"). These are to be found at pp. 368-379 of the Hyderabad edition. The psychological part of *al-Mu'tabar* is the longest part of the six books of its second volume. I have studied Abū al-Barakāt's psychology and established a

*ṣāḥih adillat al-naql fī māhiyyat al-ʿaql*¹⁹ and (briefly) in his *Kitāb fī ʿilm al-naḥs*.²⁰

According to Abū al-Barakāt, those who believe in the eternity of the soul and that the soul existed before the body also believe that the soul is an immaterial substance. On the contrary, those who believe in the origination of the soul and assert that it exists together with the body claim that the soul is an accident.²¹ After listing all the arguments of those who believe in the eternity of the soul, Abū al-Barakāt mentions several arguments on the origination of the soul including the views of Ibn Sīnā, which Abū al-Barakāt quotes without mentioning his name.²²

Abū al-Barakāt examines the arguments of all parties in order to clarify their weak points before presenting his own views and counter-arguments. In criticizing Ibn Sīnā's view for the origination of the soul, based on the idea that immaterial entities are indivisible and therefore cannot exist prior to the body, Abū al-Barakāt asserts that it is not proven that all immaterial entities are indivisible. According to Abū al-Barakāt, divisibility of the soul is possible if we say that something material is divisible because of its physical dimensions (*aqṭāb*) and that anything attached to it (including immaterial realities) is also divisible.²³ Abū al-Barakāt also rejected the uniqueness of the soul in its quiddity (*al-māhiyyah*) and form (*al-ṣūrah*) which implies that the multiplicity of the soul is possible only when there is a recipient of the quiddity (*qābil al-māhiyyah*) such as the

critical edition of this section of *al-Muʿtabar* in my doctoral dissertation at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Kuala Lumpur, entitled "Abū al-Barakāt's Psychology: Critical Edition of the Section on Soul (*al-naḥs*) from *al-Muʿtabar fī al-Ḥikmah* with Analysis and Translation of Selected Texts" (2007, unpublished).

19. Edited and published by Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib in "Un traité d'Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī sur l'intellect," *Annales Islamologiques*, L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale in Cairo, t. xvi, 1980, 128-147. Cf. Roxanne D. Marcotte, "La conversion tardive d'un philosophe: Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (mort vers 545/1150) sur 'L'Intellect et sa quiddité' (*al-ʿAql wa mahiyatu-hu*)," *Documenti e Studi Sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale*, vol. XV, 2004, 201-226.

20. The manuscript remains unedited in Aya Sofia, 4855 in seven folios, hereinafter cited as *Kitāb fī ʿilm al-naḥs*. We plan to work on this manuscript in our next project. The question of the soul is addressed in folio 5.

21. Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Muʿtabar*, 2: 368.

22. *Ibid.*, 2: 370-371.

23. *Ibid.*, 2: 375.

body.²⁴

As mentioned previously, when Abū al-Barakāt criticizes the arguments for the origination of the soul and the impossibility of its transmigration, he does not mean to oppose the underlying stand on the issue. Abū al-Barakāt as well as other thinkers before and after him criticize Ibn Sīnā's views as part of an honest quest to search for the truth. A clear understanding supported by a strong argument must always underlie the acceptance or rejection of any view. He did not find the arguments and explanations presented by the earlier thinkers sufficient in terms of intellectual rigor. Now we will see how Abū al-Barakāt himself views the issue and how he defends own argumentative alternatives.

Abū al-Barakāt clarified his stand on the origination of the soul and the impossibility of its transmigration in several sections of his "Book of the Soul" (*Kitāb al-naḥs*) in *al-Mu'tabar*. His argument is based particularly on the idea that the soul is always active and effective (*fa'ālah mutaṣarrifah*), and that among the essential activities of the soul is the one related to perception. He argues that to establish the existence of the soul prior to the body means to establish our perception and memory as well, and that this perception must apply as well to the state of the soul before being attached to the body. This implies, inversely, that, if we could feel and recall how we were before inhabiting our bodies, we could prove that our souls had existed prior to our bodies. That we do not experience such memories indicates that the soul does not exist prior to the body.²⁵

Furthermore, as far as acquiring knowledge is concerned, he says that we know that the human soul develops from being ignorant to becoming knowledgeable. This development would not be possible if there is no involvement of an instrument or organ in relation to the body. Thus we can argue that if this single soul, which is present in every individual body, existed before this body, it was either previously in another body or it was itself free from attachment to any body (*mufāriqat li al-abdān kullihā*). In other words, it must be either active and effective (*fa'ālah mutaṣarrifah*) or is inactive and unaffactive (*mu'atṭal 'an al-fīl wa al-infī'āl*). Since the latter is not possible because existential natures (*al-ṭibā' al-wujūdiyyah*) cannot be inactive, the soul at that stage must therefore be active and effective.

24. Ibid., 2: 376. Cf. Yaḥyā Huwaydī, *Muḥāḍarat*, 242; Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, *al-Jānib*, 304-306; and Jamāl Rajab Saidabī, *Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī*, 192-198.

25. Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Mu'tabar*, 2: 377-379 and his *Kitāb fī 'ilm al-naḥs*, folio 5a-b. Also see Yaḥyā Huwaydī, *Muḥāḍarat*, 234.

He further adds that the activity and effectiveness of the human soul is of two categories: a rational perception (*idrāk ʿaqlī*) and a physical movement (*taḥrīk jismānī*) which includes sense perception (*idrāk ḥissī*). When there is perception, there must necessarily also be memorization. This memory could not be located in any physical part like the body, because the body is limited compared to memorized objects. Therefore, the memory must reside in the soul, either in its very self or in a faculty attached to the soul.

If we assume that the memory is in this faculty attached to the soul, one may ask further: on what conditions is this memory faculty related to the body and the soul? Is it its attachment with the soul that makes the soul's relationship with the body possible, or it is the other way round, i.e., that the soul's relationship with the body has led this memory faculty to be attached to the soul?

Abū al-Barakāt believes that the memory faculty could not be directly related to the body because this implies that its relationship with the body is either as a permanent accident (*al-ʿaraḍ al-qārrah*) or as an effective agent, like our soul-body relationship. Both relational possibilities are impossible. As for the former, the accident is too limited to bear a huge stock of perceptions, whereas, in the case of the latter, the faculty acting like the soul would have us perceive two souls active in a single body (which does not occur). Thus, if we realize that this memory faculty is actually none other than that very soul of ours, then it is not worthwhile to contemplate all alternatives.

Instead, according to Abū al-Barakāt, we can simply say that the memorization faculty is in the soul itself, for if the memory faculty is merely attached to the soul and thereby became related to the body, then it must at all times be with the soul, whether before or after the soul comes into the body. This will then necessitate that the memory faculty will remember and memorize all the soul's experiences and knowledge as perceived before the attachment of the soul to the body, just as it could conceive in memory phenomena from when the soul is present in the body. Since we do not have any knowledge or memory of that particular realm in which the soul was not yet attached to the body, we can establish that the soul, before being in the body, had neither perception nor memorization. Therefore it does not pre-exist the body but is originated by virtue of the origination of its attachment to the body (*ḥadīthah bi ḥudūth taʿalluqihā bihī*).²⁶

26. Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Muʿtabar*, 2: 377-379 and his *Kitāb fī ʿilm al-naḥs*, folio

Such is Abū al-Barakāt's own argument for the origination of the soul. He considers this argument a kind of 'first principles of the mental faculties' (*al-awwaliyyah fī al-adhhān*), and as something of which all human beings are aware and conscious. Furthermore, he believes that this is also the correct argument for rejecting the views for the transmigration of the soul. According to Abū al-Barakāt, if the soul had existed before the body, that is, prior to its (supposed) transmigration to its current particular body, then we should be able to remember and perceive certain realities of that pre-bodily period. Since we do not recollect anything from that period, the notion of transmigration itself becomes logically impossible.²⁷

Concluding remarks

It is evident from the above discussion that both Ibn Sīnā and Abū al-Barakāt believed in and argued for the origination of the soul and rejected its transmigration. Both of them gave their own arguments to support their thesis. They differed in how they defended their views. In what follows, I propose some personal observations concerning their arguments.

It is to be observed that Ibn Sīnā's stand for the origination of the soul displays a certain inconsistency, because in his works such as the *Qaṣīdah al-ʿayniyyah* he shows a clear inclination toward the idea that the soul existed before being attached to the body, and that the soul is emanated from the Active Intellect.²⁸ Abū al-Barakāt is more consistent in his views, since he rejects the doctrines of emanation and of the Active Intellect.²⁹

As far as Abū al-Barakāt's argument for the origination of the soul is concerned, one may question whether it is absolutely applicable or whether exceptions are possible. Do we have any unquestionable proof that no human being has any knowledge and perception whatsoever of that realm where the soul pre-exists the body, such that we can therefore unequivocally

5a-b. See also Abū Saʿdah, *al-Wujūd wa al-khulūd*, 217-219.

27. Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Muʿtabar*, 2: 379. Cf. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmah al-mutaʿāliyah fī al-asfār al-ʿaqliyyah al-arbaʿah* (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002), 8: 296-297.

28. Cf. Yaḥyā Huwaydī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 238-239; Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, *al-Jānib*, 303-304; and S.M.N. al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990), 37, hereinafter *The Nature of Man*.

29. See Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Muʿtabar*, 3: 145 ff. Cf. Yaḥyā Huwaydī, *Muḥāḍarāt*, 239-240; Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, *al-Jānib*, 379-394; Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 154 ff.; Abū Saʿdah, *al-Wujūd wa al-khulūd*, 168-173; and Jamāl Rajab Saidabī, *Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī*, 101-110.

cably assert that all souls are originated by its attachment with the body? Abū al-Barakāt himself stresses that we will not find any concrete evidence to escape this inductive circle. The only available answer we have for this question is that which was revealed to us or whatever we may have heard from the experiences of others. This available support we have, according to Abū al-Barakāt, should not be taken as something applicable for every person in general. We cannot thus make a blind generalization in this matter, believing that what is or is not in our memory would be identical to that of others, since souls are different in their substance and quiddity. What we can be assured of is that the majority of human beings do not have such a memory.³⁰ Such is the manner by which Abū al-Barakāt qualifies himself.

On the other hand, we cannot be certain as to what is in Abū al-Barakāt's mind when he qualifies himself thus. Does he mean that there is a special kind of soul which can acquire memory of the pre-bodily state, and therefore that this kind of soul is not 'originated' as the other type of soul? How then would he explain the state of this particular soul before being attached to the body? How would this alter the question of transmigration? Is it then possible for certain souls to transmigrate and not others?

Plato argued that the soul had all knowledge and perception before its pre-bodily existence, but when it became attached to the body its situation changed and the soul forgot all (or almost all) its pre-bodily knowledge. The bodily soul's inability to recollect this pre-bodily knowledge is not sufficient proof that it did not have that pre-experiential knowledge, because when the soul came into being in this material world it became overly occupied and forgot that prior state.³¹ Abū al-Barakāt does not directly address these possibilities here, nor does he account for the idea of the holy covenant (*al-mīthāq*) sealed between God and humanity and which was mentioned in *al-A'raf*: 172, which implies that the pre-physical human souls know "God in His Absolute Unity as...Lord[, a knowledge which] has bound man in a covenant determining his purpose and attitude and action with respect to his self in his relation to God."³²

30. Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Mu'tabar*, 2: 379 and *Kitāb fī 'ilm al-nafs*, folio 5b-6a.

31. See, for instance, A. Raḥmān Badawī, *Aflātūn* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1944), 194-202. Cf. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Counterpoint, 1984), 147-156 and 163-172.

32. On the reality of this covenant, see S.M.N. al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), 45-46 and 143-145.

Also problematic is Abū al-Barakāt's claim that if the soul had existed before the body it should not be "inactive from any action or affection (*mu'attal 'an al-fīl wa al-infī'āl*)" because "the existing natures (*al-ṭibā' al-wujūdiyyah*) cannot be inactive." One could argue conversely that an immaterial substance like the soul could very well be active and effective before being in the body. Could we then say that the inverse is true instead, that is, it is the body which causes the soul to forget all knowledge it acquired before, hence becoming less active and effective in its post- rather than pre-bodily period? It is thus quite possible to think that the soul was active and had knowledge before coming into the body, and the fact that now it does not retain any knowledge or memory of that particular pre-bodily realm does not necessarily mean that it did not exist before. It simply means that it 'forgets' itself due to over-occupation of the body and 'addiction' to bodily pleasures derived from over-attachment to the physical, sensual world. That Abū al-Barakāt bases his claim for the origination of the soul merely on the fact of the post-bodily amnesia of the soul causes his argument to lose much of its force.³³

Such argumentative weaknesses led later thinkers like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī³⁴ and Mullā Ṣadrā³⁵ to criticize Abū al-Barakāt, particularly in relation to his view on the soul's memory before its attachment to the body as well as his view on the soul's pre-bodily inactivity. These views are not rigorous enough to constitute cogent arguments for the origination of

The nature of the soul's pre-existence, as al-Attas explains, "refers to a state of being unlike that of existence that is known to us, but to an existence in the interior condition of Being, in the consciousness of God. To this state of existence refer God's words in the Qur'ān when He asked all souls: *'Am I not your Lord?'*, and they answered: *'Yes indeed!'* By virtue of the power that God gave them to respond to His call, we infer that the soul knows God as its Lord; it knows itself as His creature; it knows other souls as distinct from itself; and it possesses power to apprehend what knowledge communicates." He adds further that "this also means that the soul already has some form of knowledge of the realms spiritual before its attachment to the body. The human body and the world of sense and sensible experience provide the soul with a school for its training to know God also, this time through the veils of His Creation." Al-Attas, *The Nature of Man*, 38-39.

33. See Abū Sa'dah, *al-Wujūd wa al-khulūd*, 219-220.

34. See *ibid.*, 220-221 and Abū Sa'dah, *al-Nafs wa khulūdihā 'indā Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Cairo: Sharikat al-Ṣafā li al-Ṭibā'ah wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Nashr, 1989), 248-249.

35. See Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shirāzī, *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah*, 8: 296-298.

the soul. However, in regard to the argument for the impossibility of the transmigration of the soul, we find that al-Rāzī accepts and supports both Ibn Sīnā's and Abū al-Barakāt's arguments,³⁶ while Ṣadrā accepted only the former's argument but criticized the latter's.³⁷

36. See Abū Sa'dah, *al-Nafs wa khulūdihā 'indā Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 258-261.

37. See Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah*, 8: 297 and Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 247. On this particular subject we presented a paper entitled "Mullā Ṣadrā's Critique on Abū al-Barakāt's argument on the origination of the Soul, with translation of the related text from *Asfār*" at the International Conference on Philosophy, held in Athens, Greece, June 1-3, 2006.