

**AVICENNA**  
**THE CURE: THE SOUL V.6<sup>1</sup>**  
On Memory and the Intellect

That which must be known about the state of the forms which are in the soul is what I have said. As for imaginations and what is connected to them, whenever the soul turns away from them, they are retained in the faculties to which preservation belongs and they are not perceived in reality, for otherwise [these faculties] would be simultaneously perceptive and a storehouse. Rather, they are [merely] storehouses, and whenever the perceptual, judgmental faculty returns to them—be it estimation, soul, or intellect—it finds [the forms] realized. And if it does not find them, then it will be necessary to recover them through sensation or recollection. If this were not the explanation, then when any soul is preoccupied and forgets a form, one would have to doubt whether this form is existent, or whether it is only potentially existent, and it would be unclear how it could recover it. For if it is not in the soul (*'inda al-nafs*), then in what thing could it be, and to what thing could the soul conjoin in order to make this form return?

**/245** But the faculties of the animal soul are distinct [from one another], and a single instrument is made for each faculty, so that there is a storehouse made for the forms to which the estimative faculty is not paying attention, as well as a storehouse for the intentions to which the estimative faculty is paying no attention, since the estimative faculty is not a place which fixes these things, but is the judge. So let us say that the estimation may look upon the preserved forms and intentions in the domains of these two faculties, or it may turn away from them.

So what must we now say about the human soul and the intelligibles that it acquires and then forgets for something else? Are they existent in it in complete actuality? For without a doubt it understands them in complete actuality. Or does it have a storehouse in which it preserves them, this storehouse being either in itself, or in its body, or in something corporeal which belongs to it?

But we have said that its body or whatever is attached to its body is something which is not suitable for this, since it is not fitting that the intelligibles should have a place, nor is it fitting that the intelligible forms should have a position. But their conjunction with the body would make them have position, and if they came to be in a body which possesses position, they would cease to be intelligible. Alternatively (*aw*) let us say that these intelligible forms are things subsistent in themselves, each form among them being a species of a thing which is subsistent in itself, which the intellect considers at one time and ignores at another. So whenever it considers them, they are represented in it, and whenever it turns away from them, they are not represented. Thus the soul is like a mirror, and they are like external things, for sometimes they appear in it and sometimes they do not appear, this being in proportion to the relations which there are between them and the soul. Or the agent principle emanates one form after another upon the soul in proportion to the seeking of the soul, such that whenever [the soul] turns away from it, **/246** the emanation ceases. But if this is the case, why does it not need to learn from the start every time?

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<sup>1</sup> Translation © Deborah L. Black, 2009. From the Arabic text edited by Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's De anima, Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'* (London, 1959); This follows shortly after excerpt #8, paragraph 5, in McGinnis and Reisman, eds. *Classical Arabic Philosophy* (Hackett, 2007), p. 204.

But we say that the truth is the latter disjunct. This is because it is impossible that this form should be existent in complete actuality in the soul but [the soul] not understand it in complete actuality, since “it understands it” means nothing other than that the form is existent in it. It is also impossible that the body should be its storehouse; and it is impossible for it to be its own storehouse, since its being a storehouse for [the form] is nothing but the intelligible form existing in it, and by means of this it understands [the form]. Likewise it is not memory and the formative imagination, because the perception of this form does not belong to them, but rather only its preservation. For the perception of it belongs only to another faculty, whereas the existence of the remembered and imagined forms in anything is not an act of perception, just as the existence of sensible forms is not in anything which is a sense. For this reason bodies—in which are the forms of the sensibles—are not capable of perception, but rather, perception must belong to that whose nature is to be imprinted by these forms in some way, through which [impression] it is a perceptive power. As for memory and the formative imagination, forms are only imprinted on them inasmuch as they are organic and have a body which preserves these forms close to the bearer of the perceptual power, namely, the estimative faculty, so that it can consider them whenever it wishes, just as sensible forms are preserved near to the sense so that the sense may consider them whenever it wishes. But while the memorative and formative faculties can support this interpretation, the soul cannot support it, for the existence of the intelligible forms in the soul is **/247** its very act of perceiving them. Moreover, we shall show later, in metaphysics, that this form does not subsist independently. Thus it remains that the correct disjunct is the last one, and that learning is the search for the perfect disposition for conjunction with it [i.e., the Agent Intellect], until the understanding which is simple comes from it. Then the forms differentiated by means of cogitation emanate from it into the soul. Thus the disposition before learning is imperfect, whereas the disposition after learning is perfect. So if one has learned, then it is part of his nature whenever something which is conjoined to the intelligible being sought occurs to his mind and the soul turns in the direction of consideration—for the direction of consideration is the return to the principle which bestows [forms] to the intellect—then he will conjoin with [the Agent Intellect]. Then the power of the abstract intellect, upon which the emanations of distinction follow, will emanate from it. But if it turns away from it, [simple understanding] returns, and this form becomes potential, although it is a proximate potency very close to actuality.

Thus the first learning is like the treatment of the eye, for if the eye becomes healthy, then whenever it wishes it will gaze upon the thing from which it takes up some form; and whenever it turns away from this thing, this [form] becomes potential, but a potency which is very proximate to actuality. And so long as the common human soul is in the body, it is impossible for it to receive the Agent Intellect all at once. Rather, its condition is as we have said. Whenever it is said that so-and-so knows the intelligibles, this means is that whenever he wishes, he can make its form appear in its own mind. This [in turn] means that whenever he wishes, he has [the ability] to conjoin with the Agent Intellect through a conjunction by which the intelligible is conceptualized; it does not [mean] that this intelligible is present in his mind and always conceived by his intellect in actuality; nor [does it mean] that it is just as it was before learning and attaining this type of actual intellect. And this is the power which arises in the soul so that through it [the soul] understands whatever it wishes. **/248** Thus it conjoins whenever it wishes to, and the intelligible form emanates. This form is in fact the acquired intellect, and this faculty is the actual intellect in us, inasmuch as it is up to us to understand. As for this acquired intellect, it is the actual intellect inasmuch as

it is a perfection. As for the conceptualization of imagined things, this is the soul's return to the storehouse of the sensibles, although the former looks upon what is above, whereas the latter looks upon what is below. But if it is freed from the body and from bodily accidents, then it will be able to conjoin to the Agent Intellect in a perfect conjunction, and then it will encounter intelligible beauty and eternal pleasure, as we will discuss in its [proper] place.