

Aiyub Palmer

“The Heart We Mean is not the Pinecone Shaped Organ of the Body,” Negotiating the Soul between an Avicennian Spirit/Body Anthropology and the Sufi *Barzakh*

Sufi epistemology is based on an assumed theological anthropology that begins with the heart as a mode of knowing. I argue that this approach could not have entered the mainstream of Islamic intellectual discourse until Islamic theology in the form of Ash‘arism was able to describe the self in a theological paradigm outside of the metaphysics of bodies and accidents, a system which had dominated the Ash‘arī school up through Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and which has continued to play an important role in Ash‘arism to this day, albeit in a modified scope. This transition eventually reaches its fulfillment in the theological anthropology of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). The view of the heart as something distinct from the physical organs of the body opens the possibility for an intricate exploration of the motivations and diseases of the heart that we find so eloquently articulated in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*. This move was precipitated by an Avicennian notion of the soul as an entity distinct from the body but connected with it. Avicenna’s model was close to, but in competition with an early Sufi anthropology espoused by Sahl b. ‘Abdillāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) and al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 295-300/907-12). I will argue that these two anthropologies provide an alternative to a Cartesian mind/body dualism, initiating a spirit/mind-body dualism where the *‘aql* (intellect) comes to be understood as a *ṣifa* (descriptive quality) of the spirit/soul in the later *Kalām* tradition. Nor are these anthropologies akin to the Hegelian/Aristotelian notion of anima (spirit). Avicenna’s view of the spirit/body has a corollary to al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s (d. 295-300/907-12) notion of the spirit as something that pervades the body but is connected to it at the jugular vein (*al-watīn*). Hence, we find a synergy between these anthropologies of the spirit/soul from both the Sufi and *Falāsifa* traditions that are then synthesized by al-Ghazālī and then made normative in Ash‘arī theology after al-Rāzī. The Avicennian paradigm not only makes possible detailed explorations of the inner world of the heart, but it also has phenomenological and epistemological implications regarding gnosis (*ma‘rifa*) as well as the interaction between the seen and unseen worlds. Despite the normativity of this doctrine, Ash‘arī *Kalām* focuses primarily on the *‘aql* (intellect) and not the *rūḥ/naḥs* (spirit/soul). This provides an opportunity to propose a phenomenology of spirit that is uniquely Islamic and engages directly with modern philosophy regarding an ontology of man.



Aiyub Palmer

University of Kentucky

Aiyub Palmer completed his master’s in education specializing in teaching English as a second language from Cal State Fullerton in 2002. After spending several years living in the Arab world Aiyub returned to the United States to complete a master’s in teaching Arabic as a foreign language in 2009 at the University of Michigan. Aiyub then completed his PhD in Islamic Studies in 2015 again from the University of Michigan. He is currently an Associate Professor of Arabic and Islam at the University of Kentucky. Aiyub’s monograph *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s Theory of wilāya* and the *Reenvisioning of the Sunnī Caliphate* was published by Brill in December of 2019 as part of its Studies on Sufism series. He also has a number of published articles on the influence of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s ideas on the development of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s notion of *wilāya* (Sufi Studies, 2019) in addition to several article entries for Brill’s *Encyclopedia of Islam* 3. He is currently working on a critical edition and translation of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī’s *Kitāb al-Ḥikma*.