The Font of Well-Being: Fitted Dynamics in Avicenna’s Natural Philosophy

by

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# Approval

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Abstract

This thesis reads Avicenna’s (d. 1037) treatise, *The Canon of Medicine*, alongside his philosophical and esoteric works to uncover the material conditions of human well-being. For Avicenna, well-being is complex; it is not only a state of being, but also an activity. For Avicenna, in order for a person to flourish, he/she must exercise the uniquely human part of his/her psyche, viz. the rational soul. Framing Avicenna’s perspective: a doctor cannot be considered a *good* doctor if he/she does not perform the activities of a doctor and a person cannot be considered a good person if he/she does not perform the activities of a person. In order for these potential activities to become actualized they must occur within fields of action that are fitted to humanity’s unique nature. This thesis argues that Avicenna’s *Canon* is philosophically relevant, offering insights into the most intimate of these fields: the human body.

**Keywords:** Avicenna; Ibn Sina; Islamic Philosophy; Medieval Medicine; Well-Being; Perfection
To Jessica and Mabel: You draw me out of my head and plant me into the ground.
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# Table of Contents

Approval ................................................................................................................. ii
Abstract ................................................................................................................ iv
Dedication ............................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................... v
Table of Contents .................................................................................................. vii
Preface ................................................................................................................... viii

## Chapter 1. Introduction .................................................................................... 1

1.1. Thesis Schema ............................................................................................... 5
  1.1.1. Fittedness .................................................................................................. 5
  1.1.2. Well-Being ................................................................................................ 5
  1.1.3. Political Fittedness ................................................................................... 6
  1.1.4. Medical Fittedness .................................................................................... 7

## Chapter 2. Fittedness ..................................................................................... 10

2.1. Fittedness’ Ancient Roots ............................................................................. 12
2.2. Natural Basis, Ideal Development ............................................................... 14
2.3. Natural Motion .............................................................................................. 17
2.4. Non-Natural Motion ..................................................................................... 19
2.5. Animal Psychology ...................................................................................... 23
2.6. The Human Good .......................................................................................... 26
2.7. Conclusion .................................................................................................... 28

## Chapter 3. Well-Being .................................................................................. 30

3.1. Introduction ................................................................................................... 30
3.2. Perfection ....................................................................................................... 31
3.3. Human Perfection: A Positive Account ..................................................... 34
3.4. Perfection and the Intellect ........................................................................... 38
  3.4.1. Theoretical Perfection ............................................................................ 38
  3.4.2. Practical Perfection ................................................................................ 40
3.5. Perfection and Cosmology ........................................................................... 42
3.6. Preparation .................................................................................................... 44
  3.6.1. Corporeal Preparation .......................................................................... 45
  3.6.2. The Preparation of the Intellect .............................................................. 47
3.7. Conclusion .................................................................................................... 50

## Chapter 4. Political Fittedness ...................................................................... 52

4.1. Essential Dissolution .................................................................................... 52
4.2. Civil Society and Cosmology ..................................................................... 57
4.3. Avicenna’s Recital ....................................................................................... 59
4.4. The Noble Lie ............................................................................................... 64
4.5. Gray-Scale Perfection .................................................................................. 65
Preface

Until quite recently the great weight of Avicennan scholarship has characterized Avicenna’s philosophy as preoccupied with the transcendent elements of human existence. He has been depicted as eschewing the study of our material existence in favour of the relationship between the immaterial rational soul and the Agent Intellect (the celestial being responsible for the conveyance of forms to the sublunar world). As the philosophical import of this relationship is epistemological, cosmological, and soteriological in nature, it is understandable why humanity’s connection to the Agent Intellect has attracted such attention.

Avicenna’s transcendental philosophy was also the focus of so much research because it, along with all other ‘Arab’ philosophy, was mistakenly viewed as being grounded in religious doctrine. As Ruth Reyna asserts, “The Arabs, influenced by the theology of the Qur’an, deviated from the strict biological and physical dissertation of Aristotle and attempted to show how through philosophy the individual may rise to union with God” (133). Taking up the same interpretive tradition, but speaking directly to Avicenna’s philosophy, Patrick Lee tells us that, “man's intellectual life is a heavenly affair, almost totally unconnected with earthly or sub-lunar agents and causal efficacy” (48). Lee grounds this interpretation in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, “In the eyes of St. Thomas, Avicenna was driven to " Platonize " man, in order to ensure the spirituality of the intellect” (Patrick 51). That Lee sources much of his criticism of Avicenna’s philosophy on Aquinas’ interpretation of Avicenna’s works on psychology is indicative of the longevity and authority of this interpretation.

It is the view of this thesis, this long-lived myopathy with regards to the material world has impoverished our understanding of Avicenna’s epistemology. By way of example, Lee tells us that “sub-lunar beings do not cause [the imprinting of intelligible forms], says Avicenna, but they only prepare for the cause, which is itself outside natural beings” (Lee 46). This statement is not objectionable due to inaccuracy; in fact, this thesis makes the exact same point. It is objectionable because, given the received view, he takes it as given that the human activities (i.e. the preparations) that go into human
knowledge acquisition hold little importance to Avicenna. This position presents but a caricature of Avicenna’s philosophy, whereby the ideal human is the blessed sage who secludes himself (for the sage is a he), shunning the material world, in favour of a life of quiet contemplation. This simplistic image of the good life diminishes the nuance and pragmatism present in Avicenna’s conception of science and its consequence, human well-being.

Recently there have been some significant deviations from this interpretive tradition. Notable exceptions are the works of Jon McGinnis. His research revolves around Avicenna’s natural philosophy and philosophy of science and his research has illuminated the material conditions that Avicenna establishes for the acquisition of human knowledge. Contrary to the above reading offered by Reyna and Lee, McGinnis believes that “Avicenna would happily endorse W. V. O. Quine’s position, ‘Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject’” (*Avicenna’s Naturalize Epistemology* 147). McGinnis argues that Avicenna’s approach to epistemology cannot be understood outside of our physical context.

Looking at Avicenna’s *Book of Demonstration*, McGinnis finds that the preparatory activities, minimized by Lee in the above quotation, are actually quite central to human knowledge acquisition. As preparation for the reception of knowledge, the diligence and rigor that go into the reason’s proper application to the natural world is of undeniable valuable. Drawing on this text, McGinnis uses the words of Avicenna to secure his position:

The goal of this book is to provide a means for acquiring the assent that is certain and the true and real concepts, and so the benefit of the book is obvious, namely, to arrive at the sciences occasioning certainty and the true and real concepts beneficial to us (*Book of Demonstration* I.1, 7.12–14; 53.15–14 quoted from *Avicenna’s Naturalized Epistemology* 131).

Avicenna’s *Book of Demonstration* provides the methodologies utilized by the sciences such that they produce the conditions that potentiate actual knowledge. The Agent Intellect does not bestow forms upon the rational soul unless these scientific rigors are practiced.
Contrary to Lee and Reyna’s positions, this thesis will argue that it is actually *because* of the transcendence of the active intellect in Avicenna’s psychology that his natural philosophy is so vital to his epistemology. Because the rational soul is a passive storage for ideal forms, Avicenna invests the animal soul and thus the human body with the potencies of cognition. This thesis will find that it is, in fact, the faculty of imagination that Avicenna vests with this vital activity. When submitting to the will of the rational soul, Avicenna refers to this faculty as the cognitive faculty. As an animal faculty, the internal sense of imagination requires a material organ as its source of function. Therefore, our relationship to knowledge cannot be understood without the consideration of our physical being.
Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the 11th-century Persian polymath, Avicenna, whose works and influences, both philosophical and medical, have endured to this day. Born in the hinterlands of the Islamic empire, Avicenna's intellectual aspirations were anything but provincial in their scope and precision. Focusing on his conception of the good life, this thesis will consult the breadth of Avicenna's translated corpus. In addition to those works of central philosophical import, it will look at his fantastical stories (which are collectively called his recital) and his medical text the Canon of Medicine. Utilizing these texts in conjunction with those of a strictly philosophical nature, this thesis will present a robust reading that highlights the significance of the material cause in Avicenna's conception of human flourishing.

Human well-being, or flourishing, is one of Avicenna's primary philosophical concerns. His approach to this subject is teleological, or ends based. For Avicenna, this means that a being finds its well-being not only in the achievement of this end but also in the activities that bring it about. Both a being’s end and the means to achieve this end stem from its essence. It is our essential nature that is the engine that drives us toward this end, or reason for which we exist (Physics 1.14.9). As both the cause of a being’s telos and the means to achieve it, essence is at the center of Avicenna’s concept of well-being. However, as we shall learn, the activities of an essence alone are not enough to cause a being’s actual flourishing.

If, as has been explained, all creatures are driven by their essences to achieve their well-being, one would expect the world to be devoid of failed potential. Nonetheless, a brief glance at the world around us is enough to witness the fact that not every being flourishes as its essence would dictate. The internal logic of an essence only describes a being’s ideal ascent to well-being; it is unable to provide any explanation for
why a being would not perpetually move toward its end. Therefore, the failure to flourish
that we see all around us must have an extra-essential cause.

In attempting to uncover the cause of this failure, this thesis will provide a
methodology for analysing Avicenna’s natural philosophy. In the second chapter I use
the term fittedness to describe this method and define it as: the cooperation of powers
with a correlative field. The logic of fittedness necessitates the contextualization of an
essential nature. That is to say, if one is to understand the cause of a being’s actual
flourishing or failure to flourish, the field of action within which a being strives for its end
must also be taken into account. Because the essential trajectory of a being’s existence
is an idealization that applies to all beings of the same kind, Avicenna’s concept of
essence does not address the particularization that is a concomitant of corporeality. By
looking at the unique expressions of essence in the natural world and contextualizing
them within a particular field of action, a fitted analysis explains the actual trajectory of
the essences that we witness around us. Although the concept of fittedness is not
attributable to Avicenna, it is a useful analytic tool in understanding the existential
struggle presented in his natural philosophy.

This thesis will argue that, for Avicenna, human flourishing is dependant on our
ability to find an environment that cooperates with, or is fitted to, those actions that make
us most human, viz. the activities of reason. Therefore, to understand the actual
conditions of a human’s flourishing (or its opposite) one must consider the field of action
that our rational faculties function within. In the introduction to his translation of
Avicenna’s Physics, Jon McGinnis explains that it is the human body that constitutes the
field of action for human reason, “For Avicenna, the human intellect is not the form of the
body, but an immaterial substance that is the perfection of the body and that uses the
body as a tool” (Physics xxii). While on earth, the intellect works within the confines of its
body, finding the potential for meeting its end only in this context. Therefore, according
to the fitted logic of Avicenna’s natural philosophy, just as an oak tree will not flourish in
the sand of a desert, if in some way a person’s body is not able to meet the needs of the
rational soul, this uniquely human part of that person will not flourish.
It is in the fitted relationship between the human body and the rational soul that Avicenna's medical writing becomes philosophically relevant. Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine* deals exclusively with the states and composition of our material existence. Addressing the proper functioning of the body, Avicenna's medical theory provides insights into the optimization of our rational faculties' activities. Finding a body that is properly prepared for its activities, a person's rational soul will have the opportunity to flourish.

This thesis will argue that Avicenna puts forth a further fitted relationship that encourages the flourishing of the rational soul. A just, civil society is another prerequisite to the actualization of our intellects. We will see in the third chapter, titled *Political Fittedness*, that, in both his *recital* and *Metaphysics*, Avicenna clearly states that a person is not able to be fully human outside of a proper political order. While there is undoubtedly a thick layer of racism sitting atop the philosophical point that Avicenna intends to make, there is something of value to consider in this position. A person living as a subsistence farmer does not have the time or energy to contemplate the deepest Truths that reality has to offer. By living together in cities, the theory goes, we are able to generate enough wealth that some people need not perform physical labour to sustain their lives. Because of this, arts, sciences, and philosophy all have the potential to flourish in urban settings. Under a ruler who sees the value in these activities, a person may have the opportunity to engage in them. If, as Avicenna believes, the performance of these activities constitutes that which makes us most uniquely human, then one can understand, without necessarily accepting his conclusion, why he would make such claims.

Cities have one other feature that makes them appealing to the human psyche. Within cities people are forced to negotiate moral terrain. Living in such close quarters, it is inevitable that conflict will form part of each citizen's life. Developing the moral character that makes it possible to live in such conditions exercises the practical intellect. Humans are not only unique due to our ability to intellect the Truth; our ability to

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1 Elsewhere Avicenna calls “Turks” and “Negros” natural slaves, as they do not come from climes that permit such political order (*Metaphysics* 10.5.7).
reason morally also distinguishes us from other animals. If a person is isolated from other people, he/she will never need to exercise his/her faculty of practical reason.

We will find that the ruler of a city must do more than simply lay down laws to ensure the safety of his\(^2\) subjects and their belongings. In addition to this task, a just ruler must ensure that his subjects are situated in vocations that are fitted to the material conditions of each person’s body. A person who tends to think along very cold logical lines will not be equipped for the activities of a soldier and a person who is quick to anger will not find a suitable field of action for their talents in an administrative setting. Ensuring that each person is able to actualize his/her natural talents is the task of the just ruler. By doing so, he ensures the flourishing of every citizen, relative to his/her aptitudes.

We will find that there are two material conditions for humanity’s achievement of its end. A person’s body must be receptive to the activities of the rational soul, and people must be situated in vocations that allow them to attain those ends that their bodies are suited to. In the final chapter of this thesis it will be argued, according to Avicenna, the medical sciences provide the right kind of knowledge to perform the assessments that determine each person’s placement. Avicenna is clear that it is not the rational faculty that differentiates one person from another; rather, we differ because of our material composition. Therefore, the diversity of talents and aptitudes observed across humanity is caused by the varying conditions of the human body. By understanding the proper functioning of the body, given the fitted relationship, a physician is able to determine what psychic faculties are most apt to be expressed by each person. It will be argued that, according to Avicenna, medical knowledge provides insights into the activities that constitute each person’s unique good.

The material element within Avicenna’s philosophy of well-being will be highlighted in this thesis. It will be argued that the material element of our nature contributes to our potential to actualize our rational faculties. When read in the light of the human fitted relationship, Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine offers practical guidance in

\(^2\) I will be using the masculine throughout this thesis in reference to the ruler, as Avicenna is clear that the ruler must be a man.
the attainment of each person’s well-being. This thesis will conclude that in order for our essential nature to flourish we must attend to our material needs, as they constitute the field of action within which our ends may, or may not, be achieved. This will be explored in the context of the presence of a just or unjust ruler and how he may impact upon his citizen’s ends.

1.1. Thesis Schema

1.1.1. Fittedness

The first substantive chapter of this thesis will define the concept of fittedness. This concept will be applied to various contexts within Avicenna’s natural philosophy in order to offer examples of how fittedness functions and its usefulness as an analytic tool. The dynamism that Avicenna attributes to the natural world is central to this discussion. Corporeal beings are self-moving, and thus are responsible to the attainment of their particular ends. Each being has an ideal development attributable to its essence. It is concluded that, as humans, it is our responsibility to situate our activities such that our natures can flourish.

1.1.2. Well-Being

The previous chapter assumes the meaning of well-being, flourishing, perfection, and the good/end without properly defining these synonyms in Avicennan terms. This chapter defines well-being in the context of Avicenna’s natural philosophy. The abstract concept of well-being, which applies generally to all beings, is first delimited. In using the term perfection as a synonym for well-being, Avicenna includes not only a being’s achievement of its end within this concept, but also the activities that bring about this achievement. This brings me to the conclusion that, for Avicenna, well-being is an activity, rather than a state. That is to say, living well is an ongoing, active process that continues until the end of life. Following this, well-being is applied to the specifics of the human essence. We learn what Avicenna intends as humanity’s end, viz. the attainment of knowledge. Those activities that lead to this end are perfections and one finds persistent well-being in the continued pursuit of knowledge.
Humans, as rational animals, first access the material world through our senses. Avicenna tells us that the absorption of corporeal forms requires the sensual study of natural objects. This absorption is a necessary step in the process of knowing, as they provide the raw material that one works upon in preparation for knowledge acquisition. It is therefore argued that the continued pursuit of knowledge requires the continued use of bodily, i.e. material, faculties. We learn that Avicenna does not allow humans the proximate responsibility for moving from an opinion to having actual knowledge of a subject. The proximate cause of knowledge is what Avicenna terms the Agent Intellect; the heavenly being from which descends both ideal and corporeal forms. It is our function to prepare ourselves for the reception of ideal forms from their source. Thus, that Avicenna’s ideal of human life, i.e. a life of well-being, is one filled with the activities of scientific investigation and the application of reason to those corporeal forms taken in through the senses. With these facts in mind, it is concluded that the human material body is, for Avicenna, active in the life of one that flourishes.

1.1.3. Political Fittedness

This chapter argues that the proper field of action for humanity is a just civil society. Justice, as understood by Avicenna, is structural in nature. A city, like a person, is just when it is properly ordered. Like Plato’s kallipolis, Avicenna’s just city is stratified. In a city there are those who rule, those who enforce the laws and protect the city, and those who practice the trades. For a city to be just, those who are wise must rule; those who are strong and quick to anger must guard; and those who are good at working with their hands must work in the trades. In a just city every person is able to put his/her aptitudes to good use; thus, each person is able to attain the relative good to the extent that his/her constitution permits.

In portraying justice in this manner, I argue that Avicenna tacitly accepts it as an accidental evil (i.e. an evil that is the consequent of a more general good) that not every person may attain humanity’s ultimate well-being. Because of the nature of humanity’s field of action, it is a necessary consequence of Avicenna’s natural philosophy that some people are born with, and some without, the aptitudes that potentiate humanity’s ultimate end. Avicenna gives principled reasons for why this is the case. Humanity’s general
good demands a just city. It is accidental to this good that some must work in the trades and some must protect the citizens in order to ensure the continued existence of the city. To do so, their natural talents must draw them to activities other than the quiet contemplation of nature. Only those apt to rule are equipped to achieve the good that defines humanity’s essence. Avicenna is clear that the many must labour so that the few may flourish.

This chapter argues that, while not everyone can achieve what Avicenna characterizes as humanity’s ultimate good, there are relative goods that the lesser of us can achieve. Every person has talents that may contribute to the functioning of the city. By finding their proper place, each person finds an outlet for the activities that define his/her relative well-being. I argue that a person can be said to live well, in this relative sense, if they perform the activities that come naturally to them. For example, the hot-tempered citizens find their well-being is guarding the city and protecting its laws. If such a person were forced into the trades, they would not find a productive use for their natural talents and would not flourish in any sense of the word. It is the ruler’s job to infer each person’s particular nature and to ensure that each person’s talents are put to good use. This chapter concludes, leaving open for the next chapter, the question of how the ruler is able to fulfil these duties, and thus potentiate his citizen’s highest relative well-being.

1.1.4. Medical Fittedness

This chapter argues that understanding Avicenna’s medicine is vital to addressing the question left open in the previous chapter. It is because of our material composition that we diverge in the ends that actually constitute each person’s relative good. For Avicenna, medicine is the science that speaks to this element of humanity. This chapter argues that the human body is the field of action for the rational soul. As this soul’s initial source of information about the world, the human body must be well maintained to ensure that a continuous stream of corporeal forms are introduced to our internal senses. These senses (i.e. the common sense, memory, imagination and faculty of estimation) play a role in the stripping of accidents from the essences of corporeal forms. This activity, Avicenna explains, is the necessary activity in preparation for the
rational soul's acceptance of the ideal form from the Agent Intellect. Thus, it is argued that our material senses cannot be disregarded with reference to human well-being.

This chapter then argues that the same is true of the internal senses. Avicenna explains that each internal sense has its seat in a particular part of the brain. The faculty of imagination, for example, finds its seat in the anterior part of the brain. It plays a particularly vital role in a person's ability to reason. The faculty of imagination is the first point of contact between the rational soul and the material body. It may be governed by the faculty of reason, and when this occurs Avicenna refers to it as the cognitive faculty. I argue that the rational faculty uses this internal sense in the process of stripping corporeal forms of their accidents. The functioning of each sense requires a different set of elemental qualities (i.e. hot, wet, cold, and dry) to function. If a particular part of the brain is too hot or cold, wet or dry, then the faculty that resides in that part of the brain will malfunction. Thus, if the anterior part of the brain is too dry (for example), the imagination will not be able to perform some or all of the vital tasks for which the rational soul uses it. Medicine is the science that teaches how to ascertain these qualities within a human body and then alter them accordingly. Thus, I argue that, when taken in tandem, the logic of Avicenna’s medicine when combined with his human psychology insinuates the healing arts into humanity’s ultimate end.

This chapter concludes by taking this conclusion and turning back to humanity’s field of action, i.e. the just city. I argue that medical knowledge is vital to the proper functioning of a city. A person studied in the art of medicine can read a patient’s material composition (what Avicenna refers to as a temperament) and assess the functioning of his/her organs. The brain, for example, can be assessed to determine a patient’s ability to utilize his/her internal senses. Because of what was argued earlier in the chapter, a derivative of this knowledge is further knowledge of the patient’s ability to utilize his/her rational faculties. If one’s brain is not well-tempered and this condition is not due to illness, but rather is simply part of the patient’s natural state, then a physician can determine his/her unsuitability for the duties of ruling. The medically trained ruler will also be able to determine, by reading the temperaments of other parts of a patient’s body, what talents he/she does possess and where in society they will find their relative good.
With the role that medical science plays in the constitution of a just city in mind, this thesis concludes that Avicenna’s *Canon of Medicine* is philosophically informative. It makes his vision of a just society practical by offering a key to decrypting the relative good for each person. Viewed in this light, the ruler is able to use medical analysis to sort his citizens into the various strata of society based upon actual knowledge, as opposed to uneducated opinion. In other words, this thesis concludes that the study of medicine can make the difference between a just and unjust ruler and thus impact the well-being of all those who live under him.
Chapter 2. Fittedness

Fittedness is a concept that I will be applying in my analysis of Avicenna’s natural sciences. Fittedness refers to a relationship that is found implicitly within Avicenna’s work. A fitted relationship will be defined later as existing when a being finds a cooperative field of action, i.e. an environment that is conducive to the peculiarities of that being’s variety of flourishing. By investigating fitted relationships, this chapter will endorse a reading of Avicenna’s philosophy that highlights the dynamic relationships in nature. These relationships contextualize the difference between a fulfilled versus an unfulfilled existence. This is because the form of analysis that this thesis will utilize (i.e. fittedness) will look at the good, not from the perspective of an individual essence, but rather in the light of an interactive relationship between a being and its environment. The internal logic of an essence does not provide insight into the failure of that essence to flourish in the natural world. When the acquisition of the good is viewed as contingent upon cooperation between a being and its environment, Avicenna’s natural philosophy takes on a holistic element, otherwise unseen. By entering into this thesis with an examination of how a fitted analysis applies to Avicenna’s conception of nature, this chapter will open the door to a robust interpretation of his account of the good life and how it can be achieved.

I can find no better expression of fittedness than in Frederick Woodbridge’s Aristotle’s Vision of Nature. Here Woodbridge explains the dynamism that Aristotle finds in nature. It is this dynamism, Woodbridge argues, that Aristotle struggles to express throughout his entire natural philosophy (27). In this book he explains that Aristotle is trying to understand the activities of nature and find the roots of their possibility. The activities that Aristotle is primarily interested in are those kinds of natural progressions that, for instance, bring acorn to oak, cub to lion and the ignorant to knowledge. Seeing instances of these, and similar progressions, all around him in nature, Aristotle could not conceive of an external force causing such change (Woodbridge 29). The acorn turns to
oak by its very nature. There is no cause of this growth other than the possibility for such growth contained within the acorn itself. This is the meaning that Woodbridge intends when discussing the dynamism in nature.

Of course, the acorn itself will only sprout under certain conditions, e.g. moisture, darkness…etc. For the sprout to become a tree it must receive nourishment and water from the soil and sunshine. Outside of these conditions, the possibility of an acorn turning into an oak is essentially voided. There is a relationship between the environment and the acorn that adds another layer to the dynamism present in nature. Woodbridge uses broad terms, to be as inclusive as possible, when he writes, “an act and a field of action are as different as can be, but it is only the cooperation of the two that is ever effective” (46). An acorn may act to turn into an oak tree, but only if there is cooperation with its field of action (its environment). Not only is the acorn a source of dynamism (activity) in nature, but so too is the acorn’s cooperative relationship with its proper field of action. The two coming together create a fruitful activity.

Woodbridge uses vision as his example of how action and field of action must cooperate, “if we are to see anything we can see it only in a world which has already been lit up by the action of light” (46). The actions of the eye are only possible in a field of action that cooperates, viz. one that is lit. The fact that this action/field of action terminology can be used to discuss such disparate things as the growth of an oak tree and sight shows the power and usefulness of such a distinction. Woodbridge expresses the importance of this relationship when he writes:

It is in the light of this [viz. action/field of action] that all the form and matter business is to be interpreted. It is this cooperation of powers with a correlative field that Aristotle tries to work out in detail (46).

Using action and field of action, as a form of analysis, cuts to the core of Aristotle’s philosophical thought, as Woodbridge claims, right down to the basis of all corporeality: matter and form.

A “cooperation of powers with a correlative field” is as succinct a definition of fittedness as can be drawn. It is the definition that I will be using in my analysis of Avicenna’s natural philosophy. It will ground my interpretation of Avicenna’s natural
philosophy, bringing to clarity the philosophical significance of the corporeal world within the majestic context of the cosmos. This chapter will defend the expansion of usage of this definition into the context of Avicennan philosophy.

2.1. Fittedness’ Ancient Roots

The great Neoplatonic commentators of late antiquity recognized the indelible necessity of a field of action. It is their conception of body, as a field of action for the soul, which will provide the primary material for this discussion. John Philoponus, for example, writes of a secondary, pneumatic, body and even a tertiary body, which he calls luminous, both of which persist even after the death of the terrestrial body (Sorabji 222). These are housings, or vehicles of the soul, that permit the soul a field to act within. Richard Sorabji, in Volume 1 of The Philosophy of the Commentators 200-600 AD, sources this idea to the Platonic dialogues Phaedrus, Timaeus, and Phaedo (221). Throughout these dialogues the image of a fitted soul/body relationship is repeatedly reinforced.

According to Platonic doctrine, every phase in a soul’s existence is housed in a body of one sort or another. In the Phaedrus 250C6, Plato likens the human body to an oyster (Sorabji 221), the container apt to hold a pearl, i.e. the metaphorical soul. According to the Timaeus 41D-E, after their creation, awaiting descent to a human body, the souls are distributed among the stars in the heavens, each star serving as a body for one soul (Sorabji 221). After the death of the earthly body, as we learn in the Phaedo 113D, a vehicle is used in delivering the soul to Acheron (Sorabji 221). From these examples, we can see that Plato conceived the body/soul relationship as a cooperative one; the body is the requisite field of action for the activities of the soul.

The fitted relationship between body and soul that Plato intimates is reinforced by moral considerations. The development of a just person requires a beautiful environment, rich with the ingredients of justice. “Fine words, harmony, grace, and rhythm” are the environmental ingredients that Plato points to in the creation of a good, or simple (i.e. harmonious), character (Republic 400e). I gather that since, the bodily natures of all growing things are imbued with each of these ingredients and their
opposites (Republic 401a), the environment can sway one to either side: towards grace or gracelessness, harmony or disharmony...etc. Plato is claiming here, that the world around us offers sensual examples of all of these traits. The fine and graceful works of craftsmen [sic] (or their opposites) are taken in by the senses, shaping the soul by their example (Republic 401c-d). The soul cannot see, hear, feel...etc. without a body. What the body takes in becomes the fertile ground for the development of character. One's soul cannot become just or unjust without its coordination with the body that it inhabits. Thus, considering the normative trajectory of humanity, Plato sees our (clamshell) bodies as a field of action for the human soul.

Philoponus and Olympiodous also draw on moral necessity in defending their agreement with Plato’s view. The soul itself is immaterial. As pain and pleasure are experiences derived from the human body's materiality, a disembodied soul could not have these experiences. Thus, in order for the evil among us to get the torment that they deserve in the afterlife, their souls must be housed in a vehicle, material in origin. This vehicle is what Philoponus refers to as the pneumatic body, and it must be elementally composed (Sorabji 222-223). Olympiodous makes this consequence quite plain when he writes, “Note that the souls which have lived wicked lives remain here [Tartarus] a certain time, until their vehicle pays the penalty” (Sorabji 223). The vehicle ‘pays the penalty’ because the incorporeal nature of the soul makes it immune from effect except through what Philoponus terms the sympathetic affection of a soul to a body (Sorabji 222).

Put in more general terms, the soul requires a container with which it shares sympathy in order for it to access certain experiences. Once the punishment has been meted out these experiences are no longer necessary. One might thus conclude that a body itself is no longer necessary. As Philoponus maintains, this is not the case. A luminous body is believed to be eternally attached to the soul (Sorabji 223).

Philoponus makes the luminous body a condition of the eternal existence of the soul. He claims “the soul always has the luminous body, since this [i.e. the luminous body] is eternal” (Sorabji 223). The implication here is that if the soul is to be eternal then
it must have an eternal body within which it can work. The soul is, in fact, always present within some kind of body.

The senses possessed by the luminous body are described as better and purer than either of our other bodies (Sorabji 227). Thus, the soul is not weighted down and can ascend. As I read Philoponus, he is indicating that it is the material body’s affections to corporeality that keep it out of the higher planes. Without the cravings associated with the material body’s particular brand of sensuous existence, the soul is able to act untainted by desire. This is what the luminous body offers the soul that has purified itself of coming-to-be, anger, and appetite: a field of action that does not permit the tainting of thought by desire.

An oddity, to be sure to our minds today, I believe that the action/field of action distinction makes coherent the rationale supporting the idea of pneumatic and luminous bodies. Each of our bodies (this terrestrial one included) is a conduit through which the activities of the soul are made possible. An action does not occur in a vacuum, it requires an arena or context. As we have seen, the kinds of activities that souls exhibit may vary based upon the bodily context within which they reside. A hotly debated subject in their time, we will now see how Avicenna addresses the activities of the soul in its various fields.

2.2. Natural Basis, Ideal Development

It is the fitted relationship that underlies all of the major principles of Avicenna’s natural philosophy: motion/rest, actuality/potentiality, and matter/form, to name a few. For now, I would like to focus upon Avicenna’s psychology and physics, leaving the fittedness of the above principles to unfold naturally through my analysis.

In Avicenna’s Porphyrian tree of the sciences, psychology grows as a branch of physics. Physics being psychology’s genera means that nothing can occur within the psychological realm that is outside the field of physics. This is my starting place in understanding Avicenna’s psychology: psychology is an entirely natural science. With
this in mind, I shall contribute some words to the meaning that nature holds for Avicenna.

I should open this discussion with a quote, gleaned by Woodbridge from the works of George Santayana. Santayana uses this principle in understanding Aristotle's natural philosophy: “Everything ideal has a natural basis and everything natural an ideal development” (Woodbridge 76). Referring to Aristotle’s conception of human nature, one could easily, without knowing the referent, think that he is directing this comment at Avicenna. Avicenna applies a highly rational, and decidedly non-magical, focus that to nature (Santayana 9) that is reminiscent of Woodbridge’s presentation of Aristotle’s approach to understanding the world. Occult causes and events are not given space to breath within nature’s framework, for either philosopher.

More than a few words need to be said here about the key word, nature, in the quotation from the preceding paragraph. Avicenna has a technical use for this term. It is the job of the natural philosopher to investigate nature and to discover its essence (Physics 1.5.4). Avicenna alludes to Aristotle’s Physics 2.1.19b21-23 when defining nature as “the first principle of motion and rest in that to which it belongs essentially rather than accidentally” (Physics 1.5.5). By first Avicenna means proximate, and by principle of motion he intends “for instance, an efficient cause from which proceeds the production of motion in another (namely, the moved body)” (Physics 1.5.6). With these terms explained, we can now understand a body’s nature as “the power that gives rise to its producing motion and change, which are from [the body] itself, as well as its being at rest and stable” (Physics 1.6.1). The broad scope of this definition allows us to investigate the various natures of all corporeal bodies, be they simple or complex.

Now that we have a functional definition of nature, we can apply it to the relevant branches of natural philosophy. The manner in which Avicenna defines the subject matter of physics, the genus of the natural sciences, supports the breadth of my application of the term nature. Avicenna defines the subject matter of physics as, “the sensible body insofar as it is subject to change” (Physics 1.1.1). According to Avicenna’s definitions of physics and nature, physics is the study of nature. Psychology is the branch of natural philosophy that addresses ensouled beings. Viewed in this light,
psychology for Avicenna is the study of natural bodies that move insofar as they possess souls. Whether vegetable, animal or human, the motions caused by these souls come naturally to the being that possesses them.\(^3\)

Nature is, by definition, dynamic. It is their nature that empowers plants to grow, absorb nutrients and reproduce; animals to move locally; and even clods of earth to fall to the ground. Like Aristotle before him, Avicenna saw that the power to move exists within every corporeal being. Far from being too metaphysically top-heavy, Avicenna’s conception of nature is grounded in the observed behaviours or activities of everyday objects. Avicenna’s Physics makes it clear that in order to understand movements in the corporeal world, one need not look beyond this world.

With this conception of nature in mind, we can now examine the meaning of the first half of Woodbridge’s conjunctive quotation: *Everything ideal has a natural basis*. As I explained above, Avicenna and Aristotle share an initial intuition about the source of natural motions, viz. that natural motions arise from the essences of beings. This shared conviction insinuates Aristotle’s scientific mindset throughout Avicenna’s physics. That is, it is a principle of the physical sciences that beings exhibit activities particular to their kind, species, or, as Avicenna puts it, essence. Thus, when we read that *everything ideal has a natural basis*, we can understand that the acorn is the natural basis and the oak tree is the ideal towards which it strives. We can now look to the second half of the quote. From *everything natural [has] an ideal development*, we now understand that every natural being has essential activities that may bring that being to its ideal state. The power to move towards this ideal state is contained within each living being. In this we see that Aristotle and Avicenna share a deep conviction about the natural world.

The image of an acorn growing into an oak tree is both beautiful and powerful. One can easily be swept away by its intuitive appeal. The power of this imagery can subdue a reader’s rational curiosity. The rigor of one’s thought can be suspended by the simplicity of a beautiful image, redirecting one’s thought away from a more complex

\(^3\) Avicenna uses the term ‘nature’ broadly to describe any motion that is derived from the essence of a being, and in a more limited way to describe only invariable/involuntary (elemental) motion. I will be using nature in the broader sense.
science of natural processes and towards the more esoteric principles of Avicenna’s thought. Often, the natural basis is left behind in favour of the ideal, while the significance of development is forgotten all together. When this is done, the image of Avicenna’s corporeal world is made static. The persistent theme of this thesis, fittedness, embraces the dynamics of Avicenna’s image of corporeal existence. It is through this lens that we shall discover the ugly side of corporeality, where the same dynamicity that allows the ideal to become actual also has the power to snuff this potential out.

2.3. Natural Motion

By looking more closely at Avicenna’s concept of natural motion we learn of the causes of quashed potential. It is one thing to be able to explain the natural progress of life, and another to be able to explain why this process sometimes (or likely, most often) fails. An oak tree can produce millions of acorns in its maturity, and only a small fraction of them grow to the ideal of oak-treeness. Surely, natural processes must be stunted or prevented in some way to make this possible. For, in the same way that death makes possible new life (Physics 1.7.4), the failure of the majority to thrive makes possible the flourishing of the few. While Avicenna focuses primarily on the potential of an acorn reaching its ideal, we can cobble together the beginnings of an explanation of this mass of failing of natures in the discrete divisions he observes in motions, both terrestrial and heavenly.

Avicenna creates a matrix that all natural motion fits into. The categories that he assigns are voluntary or involuntary, and variable or invariable. Based upon these four criteria, there are four possible permutations: 1) varying motion that is voluntary; 2) varying motion that is involuntary; 3) invariable motion that is involuntary; and 4) invariable motion that is voluntary. The first three of these permutations of motion relate to corporeal beings, while the last kind of motion is only accessible to the heavenly bodies. Permutations 1) and 2) relate to the animal and vegetative motions respectively. Permutation 3) relates to elemental motion (By elements Avicenna intends: earth, air, fire and water). All corporeal bodies have a nature by which they move; these permutations are the first layer that we can peel back to analyze a natural being’s potential failure reach its ideal.
Motion is a broad concept for Avicenna. It captures not only local movement, i.e. motion from place to place, but also qualitative, quantitative and positional movements. Qualitative motion encompasses, for example, change from one colour to another. Quantitative motion speaks to change of the sort found in the growth or shrinkage of natural bodies (Compendium 25). Positional motion relates to rotational motion. Of these, qualitative and quantitative motions are active in the life of an oak tree: viz. they grow and change colours. Thus, a rough sketch of what it means to be an oak tree is to change qualitatively and qualitatively in an involuntary yet variable manner, i.e. through a vegetative nature.

In his Compendium on the Soul, Avicenna, in writing about the movement of ensouled beings, distinguishes between their two causes of motion. Avicenna writes of what he terms natural (elemental) and spiritual (psychological) causes of motion (Compendium 23). The spiritual causes of motion cannot be derived from the individual natures within the elemental mixture that composes their bodies. For, while the elements' natural motions are invariably in the direction of their proper place, living beings either move along or under the surface of the earth, or, like birds, force themselves above it (Compendium 23). The elements cannot naturally move in unnatural ways, thus, there must be two causes of motion within ensouled beings.

It is important here to draw our attention to the notions of proximate and remote causes. Avicenna points out that the elements do not move based upon their most primitive principle, viz. qua corporeal body (Compendium 22). While corporeality is a cause of their existence (something without which there could be no motion), the elements move in accordance with their essences or forms. The same is true for living beings. While the elements compose part of our existence, as living beings, per se, we do not move ourselves based upon this aspect of our being. Like the elements, we too move in accordance with our essence or form. So, it is true that with reference solely to their elemental mixture, the motions of living beings is non-natural. However, the motions of a living being, qua living being, are due to its essence or form and are thus,

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4 Earth’s natural place is the center of the universe; water naturally sits above earth, air bubbles up through water, and fire burns upwards through air. Therefore, we find earth and water moving downwards, while air and fire venture upwards.
natural. With reference to the definition of motion, the motions deriving from the soul are entirely natural.

Before moving on to the subject of non-natural motion, I should sketch the nature of our beatific example of ideal growth, i.e. an acorn’s motions. The psychic powers of a plant are three: first to nourish, and through this nourishment, to grow; finally, through growth, and the resulting maturation of the plant, reproductive potencies are made actual (Compendium 38). It is clear from the way Avicenna relates these powers to the reader that they are dynamic potencies that actualize in a linear progression. The psychic faculties are stacked such that the actualization of a posterior potency is conditioned on the actualization of those prior to it. Put in plain language, the sprouted seed will grow given nutrients, and seedlings will reproduce when they have grown to a mature state.

This is how Avicenna would have the story of an acorn’s life progress, if all that one considers is its essence and natural activities. This is an inspiring story indeed, but not one that can be counted on universally to come true. The vast majority of acorns do not become reproductive members of their species. With these premises in mind, the essence of a being alone cannot be pointed to as an explanation for such failure to flourish. We must look beyond essence to grasp such an explanation. In what follows, we will look beyond essential activities to find the dynamics that contribute to a creature’s well-being, or lack thereof.

2.4. Non-Natural Motion

Having considered both the faculties of the vegetative soul and the vegetative souls’ natural motions (i.e. variable/involuntary), using the framework of fittedness we can begin to comprehend the failure of a nature to actualize its potential. In doing this, I should begin by explaining in greater depth the meanings Avicenna ascribes to the terms variable/invariable and voluntary/involuntary.

In the matrix I laid out previously, we had four possible permutations that a being’s natural motion could fall into. It will be fruitful to illustrate elemental motion as it is
the most simple of these, and its juxtaposition with the more complex motions will highlight some significant details that might be otherwise overlooked.

Through observing the movement of each of the elements in nature Avicenna sees that each has its own proper place (Physics 4.10.2). Each element moves, of its own accord, towards its proper resting place. The elements do not move to their proper place incidentally. Rather, it is their natural inclination to perfect themselves that moves each to its unique place in the cosmos. As Avicenna points out, the weight of water exists due to its inclination to move downwards, to reside under the air and just above the earth. It pushes down on the object suspending it, creating the sensation of weight. When water is in its proper place, it no longer exhibits this property (Physics 1.6.2). When the inclination to find its proper place has been sated, this aspect of water’s perfection has been achieved. Thus, there is no more push downwards and water’s weighty property disappears. This natural desire for perfection will be expounded upon in greater detail in the following chapter.

The natural place of each element is as follows: Earth’s place is in the center of the universe. Water resides in a layer above earth. Air is above water and fire’s place is in the outermost ring before the realm of the heavenly spheres. The nature of each of the four elements is such that they are inclined to reside within their respective proper place, and when not in that place, unless otherwise hindered, to move so as to arrive there (Physics 1.13.6). It seems obvious to Avicenna that the features of natural elemental motion are quite plain to anyone engaged in active observation of the elements.

With reference to the activities of the elements, Avicenna explains that, “in the case of the simples [that is, the elements], the nature is the very form itself, for water’s nature is [for example] the very essence by which it is water” (Physics 1.6.2). Put plainly, water is as water does, and the same holds for each of the ‘simples’. The simplicity of elemental natural motions is reflected in the regularity of their activities; after all, their motion is naturally invariable/involuntary. This aspect of the elements makes them ideal specimens for observing non-natural motions. Since internally caused motions are
derived from a being’s nature, observed deviations in these natural motions can only be attributed to a non-natural cause.

*Non-natural,* in Avicenna’s sense of the term, refers not to something contradictory of nature, but rather to motion that is accidental, i.e. not essentially derived. Each element has its unique terminus, or place, towards which it moves in the most direct way possible. This is evinced by the inspection of a falling clod of earth. A clod of earth will move invariably and involuntarily towards the centre of the universe (the centre of the earth) unless interfered with along the way. For instance, a clod’s landing on a hill will alter the natural, absolute downward motion of the clod. In this case, the clod will continue to move, as much as possible towards its proper place, rolling down the hill, though not in its natural, absolute, downward trajectory. This non-rectilinear motion is a product of an external interference with a natural motion, creating a non-natural motion. Another instance of non-natural motion is the case of a projectile intersecting a clod’s motion. The projectile’s contact with the object will alter the natural downward motion of the clod, creating a temporary non-rectilinear motion. In both of these examples of non-natural motion, it is apparent to the observer that an external force is acting upon the clod of earth temporarily altering its natural motion.

The elements’ natural activities are fitted to their field of action. If the world were only populated by the unmixed elements there would be a perfect nesting of the elements around the center of the universe. Because mixing does occur, the elements find themselves improperly located and moving in non-natural ways. Water finds itself drawn up into plants that stretch high into the air and earthy bodies are often found floating in water. Instead of insisting upon moving in an absolute downward motion, the clod or earth coordinates with the hill as it rolls down it. It does not simply stack on the side of the hill, but rather accepts a non-natural motion. It coordinates with its field of action to generate the most perfect expression of its nature in a world not perfectly suited to that nature.

With Avicenna’s conception of natural and non-natural elemental motions in mind, we can begin to extrapolate some of their implications for more complex beings. The first piece of information we have is that natural motion should progress in a regular
manner unless an external cause interferes with it. As we have just learned, another way of looking at this is through the necessity of compromise. Just as the clod of earth may find itself in a field of action not perfectly suited to its nature, so too may complex beings. Although there is an ideal field of action that would potentiate the full actualization of a nature, compound beings are not always in such a field.

Utilizing this principle in the context of an acorn’s natural motion, I can now infer how Avicenna’s physics permits the failure of so many acorns to become oak trees. My rationale is as follows: An oak tree finds itself dropping acorns in a field of action used by many other beings, all of which (save other oak trees) have different natural activities that find their perfection in similar fields of action. It is only reasonable to assume that these divergent activities will interfere to varying degrees with the well-being of others who are inclined to flourish within the same field. The world is not set up in such a way that it accommodates only and every need of the flourishing acorn. If it did, the ideal field of action for an acorn would persist to the exclusion and detriment of all other beings. The world we see around us would be one giant oak forest. For the world to be as it is, I reason, fields of action must come mingle and the ideal field must be set aside in favour of compromised perfection.

Taking this discussion out of the abstract and into the concrete, I will demonstrate, in what I believe to be a common-sense manner, how this comingling entails substantive consequences for those sharing a field of action. Consider first, the field of action fitted to the activities of a deer. The grass that grows under an oak and the shade of an oak’s great branches provide sustenance and shelter. Both of these promote the well-being of a deer. We can thus say that the drop-zone for acorns is part of a deer’s field of action. This overlapping of fields may lead to an imperfect field for one or both of these beings. Consider the field of the acorn when impacted by the weight and diet of a deer. The deer’s eating of the grass within the acorn’s drop-zone removes the damp darkness that it needs to germinate. The weight of a deer will tamp the soil so that the tender sprout cannot penetrate the dense pack to set roots. Further, acorns may be crushed accidentally under the weight of a deer. Putting my reasoning in Avicennan terms, a deer’s natural activities may negatively effect an acorn’s attainment of its ideal state by inhibiting the acorn’s ability to express its essence through natural activities.
When you consider the multitude of other natures that encroach on the field of action of an acorn, it is not surprising that so few of them grow to become seedlings, let alone reach reproductive age. Thus, utilizing the theoretical framework of fittedness we can understand how Avicenna’s natural philosophy can accommodate the failure of essences to flourish.

Utilizing Avicenna’s conceptions of natural and non-natural motions we have begun to solve the problem of failed natural potential. Just as a clod of dirt, upon reaching an incline, must compromise its ideal trajectory in order to actualize at least some of its nature, so too must ensouled beings upon meeting their own suboptimal conditions. A clod may roll fast, or slow, or not at all depending upon the incline it meets and thus attain most, some, or none of its perfection. The same is true of an acorn. Upon touching ground, an acorn may find soil that is lush and fertile, barren, or anything in between. Thus, following the same logic as the clod of dirt, depending upon what it finds, an acorn may either flourish, fail, or its ends may be frustrated. What is most important to take away from this interpretation of Avicenna’s natural philosophy is that one cannot look solely to a being’s essence to understand why it has failed to flourish. A being’s essence gives it ends that it is driven towards by its nature. There is nothing, however, within the internal logic of Avicenna’s conception of essence that accounts for a being’s failure to flourish. Therefore, any deviation from these natural activities must have an accidental cause, that is, by definition, external to a being’s essence. The extra-essential logic of fittedness has been used to describe, in Avicennan terms, the possible effects of a being’s environment on its well-being.

2.5. Animal Psychology

My analysis of Avicenna’s definition of nature has brought us from an understanding of natural motion to an understanding of non-natural motion in both the elemental and the vegetative realms. However, the last of the three relevant permutations of the natural motion matrix has yet to be discussed. This permutation, of course, addresses the natural variable/voluntary movements of animals.
Considering the conditions that contribute to the failed flourishing of vegetative psyches, we can begin to look at the nature of animality. The motions of animals are more complex than either the elements or plants. This is because, in addition to exhibiting qualitative and quantitative motions, the animal psyche permits voluntary local motion. Further, those possessing an animal soul also possess the vegetative soul (Compendium 25-26). While their aptitude for local motion makes an animal's potential field of action more expansive than a plant's, their fields of action differ in size not kind. That is, their actions' relationships with their fields of action still must be cooperative to achieve their ideal. The relevant difference in fields, between plants and animals, being of size and not kind, makes explanation of failed natural development in the realm of animals unnecessary. Instead, I should say a few words about the faculties possessed by animals and how they function within a fitted relationship.

Avicenna understands animal psychology as far more complex than vegetative psychology. None-the-less, at base, he admits that animal faculties are driven by vegetative desires. Although they manifest differently through the animal faculties, the desire for nourishment, reproduction and, in general, the good of the animal are vegetative motivations. It is towards these and away from their opposites that animals move locally. Avicenna names the proximate powers causing these motions, the lusting power and its opposite, the angry power (Compendium 47). Lust and anger (or more broadly, impulsion and repulsion), are the two most primary causes of natural animal motion.

Animals are mobile and thus, according to Avicenna, sentient; for, to be otherwise, would be “harmful” (Compendium 43). Without some faculty of sensation, an animal would not be able to direct its natural motions: i.e. what it should lust after and what should invoke the activities of the irascible spirit. This information is initially gained from the senses (Compendium 44-46). Through trial and error an animal determines which sensations are good and which are harmful.

The senses are clearly vital to an animal’s well-being. I have discerned that there is a fitted relationship that exists for each of the faculties contained within each animal. Each of the senses (be it internal or external) has a kind of object that is proper
to it. The eye’s object is that which is seeable, the ear’s object is what is audible... and so on. When viewed in this way, perceiving the proper object of each of the senses is the end of the particular activities of each of the senses. When the proper object of a particular sense, for example the eye, is present before that sense in its proper field of action, the eye’s natural activities find fruition.

The seeable object is only seen when light is cast upon it. As I have understood Avicenna’s position, light creates the eye’s field of action by illuminating its proper objects. Jon McGinnis explains Avicenna’s approach to sight in ways that confirm this understanding. He tells us that non-luminous, opaque objects cannot be seen without an external light source and a transparent medium through which it can pass. The light rays “convey the object’s sensible image” to the eye through this medium (McGinnis, Avicenna 107). Thus, in the absence of light “there is nothing stimulating one’s visual system... [in darkness] one is simply not seeing at all” (McGinnis, Avicenna 106). The eye functions only in a particular set of circumstances, or field of action.

Within Avicenna’s natural philosophy, the action/field of action analysis is a very powerful device. Using it, one can explain the gradations of sight made possible by the eye. When situated in a field that has only a dim light, the eye will see shapes, absent of colour. Remember that the oak tree’s good is actualized relative to its nature’s ability to perform its activities, given its field of action. Given this, I reason analogously that the eye’s good is found in its natural activity of seeing and thus also performs this task as best it can, given its field of action. The senses coordinate with their particular fields of action to attain their good through the performance of their natural activities. This is the very meaning of fittedness that was defined earlier in this chapter, viz. “a cooperation of powers with a correlative field.”

All of the other senses function based upon the same principles that constitute the eye’s power to see. There is a particular object that is proper to each of the senses. When a sense comes into contact with its object, the sense faculty is stimulated and functions as best it can given the conditions of its field of action. Coming into contact with its proper object is the good of each sense. With these principles in mind, we should now move on to the unique station of humanity and our most striking fitted relationship.
2.6. The Human Good

Humans are unique among animals, as we are rational. We can reason, and thus, are actually able to know the world. Knowledge is the teleological cause of the human intellect’s being; it is the end for which the intellect exists. Deciphering exactly what Avicenna intends by *intellect*, requires that one subtract the animal faculties from the human ones, distilling out the essence of the intellect.

Just as Descartes would deduce in his *Meditations* centuries later, Avicenna establishes that the rational part of humans is different in kind from the material part (*Compendium* 79-83). The details of how Avicenna’s argumentation establishes this fact, do not interest me here. What is of interest is that, through this duality, a divide is created within a person. The rational soul works through the human body. The body is distinct from the rational soul, and thus, can then be established as its field of action. Because it is distinct from reason, the body may help or hinder the flourishing of rational thought.

In contrast with Descartes’ belief that animals are nothing more than automatons, moving but incapable of thought, Avicenna’s assessment of animality attributes some robust cognitive powers to the non-human animal kingdom. The rational soul is not encased in a mechanical vehicle, but rather a vital, organic body that contributes to our well-being. The animal psyche senses the world, remembers past experiences, imagines counterfactuals, and uses these faculties to judge the merits of their future activities. Far from being hydraulically powered machines, Avicenna includes in animality much of what we regard as thought.

Considering these powers and applying them to my own life, I do not think it is an overstatement to say that the use of the animal faculties represents more than a majority of my day-to-day conscious thought. I roam the rooms of my house, wander the streets of my neighbourhood, attain sustenance; and interact with my environment and the people in it, largely without the use of what Avicenna defines as rational thought. I do not reason my way to the bathroom from the kitchen. Rather, what I experience is a desire to evacuate waste, recollect the room suited to this activity and estimate sufficient directions for getting there. According to Avicenna, human activities of this sort utilize
animals faculties. We are the same as animals, with the addition of one key factor: rationality.

Animals are able to meet their physical needs through the use of their faculties; there is nothing more that is necessary for animals to meet their proper end. Humans, on the other had, are able to look beyond their immediate needs to find higher order ends. I have found the words of Christine Korsgaard useful in understanding the differences that Avicenna uses to distinguish between animality and humanity: “Intelligence can find new means, but when we enter the realm of reason, we begin to find new ends” (117). Animals have intelligence in the way I have described above. Humans have the potential to enter the realm of reason. Looking at the situation in this way, animals have desires (ends) set out for them by their natures; they are intelligent in that they find means of attaining these ends. Avicenna accepts it as a principle that, by “Divine Providence,” creatures are bestowed nothing that is “either wasted or harmful, nor [is there withheld from them] either the necessary or the useful” (Compendium 43). In order that their nature is helpful and not harmful, animals must be sentient. In order to function, Avicenna reasons, animals must be able to lust after and be angered by the right things while accurately estimating their relevant relations to them. They have the faculties necessary to maintain their well-being in a shifting and varied field of action.

Humans need this ability too. However, we can infer from the rational soul’s existence that, in addition to this ability, “Divine Providence” has dictated that rational thought is also a necessary or useful faculty for humans to possess. Through reason, we are able to contrive new and diverse ends that do not relate, immediately, to our physical well-being. We create ends such as art, ethics, politics, and friendship and develop means to achieve them. We reason that achieving these ends will enhance our well-being; creating a shared security, an abundance of food, a deeper understanding of pleasure, and joy in the presence of another. We are able to see past our immediate needs to develop higher order ends. That reason is deemed necessary or useful (and not wasted or harmful) entails that the ends that reason produces must be part of the good, or end, of humanity.
These higher order ends bridge the gap between our more base necessities and our highest end. Broadly put, this highest end is the activity of reason. Avicenna describes these activities in this manner:

the understanding power... unifies the many and multiplies the one through analysis and synthesis. As to multiplication, it is such as the analysis of one man into essence, body, nourishment-getting, animal, speaking (rational). As to unification of the many, it is such as the composition (synthesis) of this one man out of essence, body, animal, speaking (rational) into one notion which is mankind (human being) (Compendium 75).

With these powers of analysis and synthesis we can break down complex forms into their constituent parts or know the essence of a being (i.e. its kind). Like the faculty of sight, the faculty of reason has its own proper object: ideal forms. I will not here lay out in detail the fitted field of action that potentiates our ability to perceive these objects of knowledge. This is a matter that requires a great deal of explanation and cannot be adequately addressed in few words. Therefore this subject is taken up in the following chapter. What I shall highlight now is that the rational soul is not beholden to a material nature and can develop non-subsistent practical and theoretical ends, guiding a person’s activities creating a most uniquely human manner. It is this uniqueness that ought to be fostered by each person, as humans need these higher order ends to achieve our ultimate good. A person can live without achieving, or even aiming, at these ends. However, as we shall see in chapter 4, the picture that Avicenna paints of a human living outside of the realm of reason is not an attractive one. Living purely by our animal faculties denies us of much of our rightful flourishing. Human well-being requires a proper field of action\(^5\), without this, Avicenna discloses, we become quite wretched creatures.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the concept of fittedness can be applied to a wide range of subjects within Avicenna’s natural philosophy. From the most simple of beings

\(^5\) It will be argued in chapter 4 that this field of action is civil society.
(the elements) to the most complex living beings on earth (humans), this form of analysis offers insight into the dynamics that bring about their good. This chapter has only explained the logic of fitted relationships such that we may understand how each being’s good may be brought about. Humanity’s good is the subject of this thesis. Thus, the following chapters will apply this form of analysis to better understand how we may attain well-being and what pitfalls may hinder this end.
Chapter 3. Well-Being

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will build upon the concept of fittedness from the previous chapter, applying it to Avicenna’s general conception of well-being. As we learned in the previous chapter, creatures flourish when their actions are derived from their essence. Far from being an amorphic, grandiose concept, Avicenna provides a rigorous study of well-being, utilizing the concept of perfection. Through the lens of perfection we will find that well-being, in addition to being a state, is an active process. As such, Avicenna’s conception of well-being requires a field of action to work within. The field of action in which well-being is achieved will also become apparent through Avicenna’s concept of perfection. This will lead to the conclusion that a creature’s well-being is fitted to its/his/her particular kind of being, i.e. one’s species.

The second half of this chapter will look at how human well-being is fitted to each person through our species. Avicenna states that well-being is an activity, and in addition, that human activities are voluntary/variable in nature. He then builds on these conditions to establish the idea of agency with respect to our ends. Humans may, or may not, choose to act in ways that promote their well-being. With this in mind, this chapter concludes with a discussion about what constitutes human well-being, and to what extent we are able to cause our own flourishing.

This chapter will utilize the concept of fittedness from the first chapter and apply it to the human condition. This is a significant, preparatory stage in this thesis. The following two chapters will be expositions of a person’s ability to direct their actions at the right ends and to manipulate their field of action, making it fitted to his/her right actions. Thus, first we must define what a right action is, qua human, and the most
proximate field that these actions work within. This will be the preoccupation of this chapter.

3.2. Perfection

In this section, we will see that, according to Avicenna’s definition, perfection is both a state and an activity. When perfection is looked upon as a state, Avicenna terms this a first perfection. When viewed as an activity, it is a second perfection. To clarify what Avicenna intends by both of these terms, Robert Wisnovsky isolates four distinct methods Avicenna uses to flesh them out. The isolated groupings that follow are paired first/second perfection:

1) the principle of activity/the activity itself,

2) the form/the function,

3a) that which is necessary for existence/that which is necessary for well-being and,

3b) that which is necessary for existence/that which is not necessary for existence

(Wisnovsky 120)

While we must understand all of these pairings, as they each represent one method for illuminating first and second perfections, Wisnovsky reasons that 3a) best captures the essence of the concepts (125-126).

A being’s second perfections spring from its first perfections. Methods 1 and 2 express this idea quite nicely. According to 1, if an activity is to occur, it must spring from the principle that makes it possible. A being cannot walk without the principle of walking, fly without the principle of flight, or grow without the principle of growth…etc. When put like this, however, the concepts of first and second perfections seem quite vacuous. They amount to little more than saying, “the creature walks by its ability to walk.” What 1 does do is lay a groundwork that can be built upon with the other methods. Method 1 informs us that there must be some foundation upon which every action is based.
Wisnovsky determines that ‘principle’ in 1, refers to the starting point for an activity (125). Thus, the groundwork that 1 lays down for our understanding of first and second perfections is the idea that every activity (a second perfection) has an origin in something (a first perfection). The first perfection is the foundation upon which a second perfection is based. Accepting this, one naturally wants to know what that origin is. It is with this question in mind that we can look to method 2.

With the understanding that each of these methods addresses the same subject matter, just in a different way, method 2 adds definition to method 1. Since the relationship that form has to function is the same as the relationship that the principle of an activity has to an activity, form is to the principle of activity, as function is to the activity (Wisnovsky 121). As such, function finds its origins in form, or put another way, form is the foundation for function. With the addition of 2, first and second perfections gain substantive content.

Looking at the second perfection from method 2, i.e. function, we can better understand what Avicenna intends by ‘activity’. For it is not just any activity that is deemed a second perfection, but only those that relate to the function, or purpose, of the first perfection, i.e. form. Avicenna expresses this point in his Psychology of the Healing:

The second perfection is a kind of acting or being-acted-upon that attaches as a consequence to the thing’s species, such as the cutting that “sword” has, and such as the distinction-making, deliberating, sensing and moving that “human” has (quoted from Wisnovsky 121).

Here, Avicenna is pointing out that a being’s functions are defined as those activities that are derived from its species, form or first perfection.

A thing’s functions are those activities that follow, as a consequence, upon its species’, i.e. its form. In most cases method 2 is sufficient for the analysis of first and second perfections. The form of a sword is what gives it its function. The purpose of a sword is to cut. Without a certain form, this purpose cannot be achieved. According to the logic used by Avicenna, a sword cannot cut without a bevelled edge. One forges a sword for a reason and that reason dictates the form that it takes. A purpose necessitates a form, and a form makes the concomitant activity possible.
This mode of analysis is very useful. Applying it to the animal kingdom, one can now make more than the vacuous claim that, ‘birds can fly because, within them, is the principle of flight’. We can now look to the form of the bird to see why it can fly. From method 2, we can ask, ‘what is it about the form of a bird’s wing that allows it to fly?’ The natural sciences can grow using a form/function analysis. Despite the usefulness of this method, McGinnis points out that Avicenna could not have meant for this analysis to be put to unfettered use.

In the context in which I am writing, Avicenna uses the term *form* in the sense of shape (Wisnovsky 121). An axe can cut and a bird can fly due to their specific shapes. In case of human beings, however, this method breaks down, for, rationality is not a consequence of the shape of a human (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 93). Rationality is a function of the human soul, and the human soul is immaterial. In light of this, Avicenna uses the term ‘perfection’ and not ‘form’ in his definition of the soul (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 93). So, while the form/function method of distinguishing the first from the second perfection is enlightening, its scope is limited to the corporeal realm. An incorporeal substance, such as the human intellect is immune to the analysis brought about by method 2. We should look to the last method of distinguishing first from second perfections to see if method 3 is applicable to all modes of existence.

Method 3a pairs ‘that which is necessary for existence’ with ‘that which is necessary for well-being’. If I now compile 1 and 2 into 3a, the first perfection can be expressed as such: a principle of activity and a form are that which is necessary for existence. Form is a principle of existence (Physics 1.10.9). That is to say, in order to exist a created being must possess a form and be able to move.

Compiling Avicenna’s three expressions of second perfections we end up with this statement: a function is the kind of activity that is necessary for well-being. A being does not exist well if his/her/its functions are never made use of. Because, every first perfection necessarily has a function, the first perfection would be incomplete if its function was not put to use. A part of the first perfection would not be made actual and the first perfection, understood as the principle of activity, would languish as a mere potential. To actually exist is surely better than to potentially exist. Thus, in this
preliminary sense, I understand Avicenna to be pointing out that our functions are part of what we are, and without their use, there is something lacking in the individual. This lacking is the opposite of how Avicenna understands well-being.

3.3. Human Perfection: A Positive Account

Up to this point I have developed a negative image of well-being. A person cannot be said to flourish, or live well, if he/she does not actualize his/her second perfections. However, simply turning this statement around to say, that a person attains well-being through the actualization of second perfections, is as troubling as saying, that an action must be derived from a principle of action. A complex being is composed of numerous forms. For example, a person’s liver is one form, his/her heart is another, and brain another…etc. The second perfection of each of these forms is the activity of each of their unique functions. However, the activities of the liver, for instance, do not constitute the second perfection of the whole person. In fact, these activities do not constitute the second perfection of anything other than the liver itself. The simple fact that a person’s liver is functioning, does not mean that a person is flourishing as a whole, in the sense of a second perfection. We will now see how the activities that come from a person as a whole are what Avicenna refers to as flourishing, or living well.

Avicenna explains that essence is a unifying agent, stating, “The quiddity is the very composition that combines form and matter. The unity that comes about through both is due to this one [composition]” (Metaphysics 188). What Avicenna is describing here is analogous to what Korsgaard refers to as a constitution. For Avicenna, a being’s essence is the cause of its end, its purpose, or telos. So, we can see that Avicenna’s and Korsgaard’s positions are in alignment when she writes: “On this view, to be an object, to be unified, and to be teleologically organized, are one and the same thing. Teleological organization unifies what would otherwise be a mere heap of matter into a particular object of a particular kind” (28). It is one’s constitution that provides one’s

6 I.e. essence
telos. Therefore, a constitution, like an essence, is not only the source of a being’s natural activities, but also unifies a being’s components.

Both a constitution and an essence make an entity, which would otherwise produce a series of discordant functions, into an agent with a unified, normative end (i.e. an end that we ought to aim for). As Korsgaard puts this matter, “I am going to argue that what makes actions good or bad is how well they constitute you” (25). Korsgaard is telling us that, as a human, one’s actions are good if they constitute you as a human. That is to say, we ought to perform actions that are human per se. Both Avicenna and Korsgaard agree that those actions that constitute a person, as such, are those actions that are derived from our rational faculties (Korsgaard 25).

Korsgaard tells us that those actions that constitute a person rely upon constitutive standards. She defines these standards in this way: “The normative standards to which a thing’s teleological organization gives rise are what I call ‘constitutive standards,’ standards that apply to a thing simply in virtue of its being the kind of thing that it is” (28). This definition runs parallel to how Avicenna defines a being’s nature. Recall that Avicenna defines a being’s nature as, “the first principle of motion and rest in that to which it belongs essentially rather than accidentally” (Physics 1.5.5). What Korsgaard calls a constitutive standard is synonymous with Avicenna’s natural activities. Thus, they both would agree that in order to be acting as a human, and therefore be a good human, one’s actions must conform to the standards (nature) dictated by the reason for which we exist (essence). The results of this synonymy are identical too. For example, they both would agree that a human left unsupported in the air will fall and that this action, i.e. falling, is not an action that occurs because the unsupported being is a human, but rather, because this being is heavier than air (i.e. composed primarily of earthy matter). Because falling does not spring from a person’s teleological organization, this activity does not meet that person’s constitutive standards and thus, does not contribute to a person’s constitution, or well-being, as such. Because actions are normatively evaluated based upon how well they constitute a person, actions that do not meet their agent’s constitutive standards are bad.
Avicenna’s and Korsgaard’s conceptions of essence and constitution, respectively, agree in the sense that they both serve the same purpose. That is, they both serve to bring all of their constituents together, as one; providing guidelines for appropriate activities, they motivate the behaviours of a being. The actions of an agent that are not in accordance with its constitution, or essence, cannot be said to have come from that agent, as such. So, for example, a person’s arm may be used to perform innumerable functions. However, only those actions that meet the constitutive standards, or are essentially derived, of a person can be said to be from that person. Let us consider two cases of an arm’s activities: 1) an arm is being used to hold an object up to the light so that one may better understand that object, 2) an arm spasms. In both cases the arm performs an activity. However, in case 1 the arm’s activities are derived from the aforementioned source of human activities, i.e. the rational faculties. An arm’s spasm on the other hand is non-agential and therefore cannot be rationally derived. When 2 is the case, the appearance might be that the person is acting in certain way, but in reality he/she is not. A part of a person may act in ways that are in line with his/her constitution/essence, or not, depending upon the source of the activity. The constitution, like Avicenna’s conception of essence, determines what the being is and how it, per se, can act.

The cause of an essence is the same as that of a constitution. Wisnovsky explains, that according to Avicenna, the final cause accounts for the essence of a being (182). Considering this point in concert with their shared unifying actions, the constitution/essence of a thing can be understood as unifying matter and form through a shared end. It is as though an essence or constitution puts matter and form on the same trajectory, unifying their motion in the direction of a shared essential purpose.

If my analogy is correct, an essence, viewed as a constitution, provides the parameters within which one’s actions can be said to come from the whole. When one acts essentially, they act as they are. Another way of saying this is that a human action (qua human) expresses the humanity of the agent. I can fall like a stone, or float like a cork, but these are expressions of my elemental composition, not of my humanity. I can ingest nutrients and move from place to place, but these are expressions of my animal and vegetable psyches, not my humanity. Both Avicenna and Korsgaard agree that the
end for which the matter and form that make up a person are unified, is rational thought. This activity is what perfects the person as a whole, for it is the cause that brought the person’s constitutive parts together.

Avicenna writes, “all ends proceeding from nature, in the case where there is neither opposition nor obstacle, are goods and perfections” (Physics 1.14.9). If by ‘opposition’ and ‘obstacle’ Avicenna means mediation, as I believe he does, this quote speaks directly to the well-being of a creature being tied to actions issuing from its essence. Actions issuing from an essence are unmediated. Consider an action issuing from a desire of the vegetative faculty, for example, the desire to eat food. If the person eats food based solely upon the dictates of the faculty of nutrition, his/her action is unmediated, however, he/she is not acting as a human. If, on the other hand, the desire for food is passed up to the rational faculty for consideration and then acted upon, the action is a human one, however, it is mediated. In either case, one cannot perfect oneself, as a human, if he/she is acting on vegetative desires, as those actions are either not human or mediated. For brevity, I will not run through a parallel argument, however, the same is true of actions issuing from the animal faculties. In sum, the above quote supports my reading of Avicenna’s position: viz. that the human purpose can only be achieved through human actions.

Thanks to Korsgaard’s insights into what it means to constitute oneself as a human we have a positive account of well-being and its relationship to the human essence. For Avicenna, the thing that makes us human, and not some other kind of animal, is our intellect. Taking this information and applying it to what has been argued above, we can establish that human well-being (our second perfection) is found in reasoning. When one reasons, he/she is acting as a human (i.e. through his/her essence) and those actions are unmediated. Now that this has been determined to be the case, we should look to the nature and activities of the rational soul. Doing so will give us more specific guidance pertaining to Avicenna’s prescription for well-being.
3.4. Perfection and the Intellect

3.4.1. Theoretical Perfection

We should now apply the same reasoning to the rational soul and the faculties that comprise it. We shall enumerate these faculties and find the end for which they exist. Finally, the activities that constitute this end will be made plain.

Avicenna breaks the rational soul down into two constitutive parts: the theoretical and the practical intellects. The theoretical intellect has a developmental trajectory: from the material intellect to the habitual, from the habitual intellect to the actual, and finally from the actual intellect to the acquired intellect. Each of these stages represents a step towards the full actualization of the theoretical intellect. This is what we shall presently discuss. Details of the practical intellect will follow this discussion.

About the material intellect, Avicenna writes in his Psychology that it is the state of the intellect when it has “not yet received any of the perfection that is its due” (On the Soul 29). The material intellect is named as such because, like prime matter, it does not yet possess any of the forms, yet is the “object of all forms” (On the Soul 30). When the material intellect receives the first intelligibles, i.e. what Avicenna refers to as its perfection, it becomes the habitual intellect (On the Soul 30). By first intelligibles Avicenna intends those premises foundational to all logic (i.e. analytic truths). It is through the application of these premises to sensory information that the secondary intelligibles (middle terms arrived at through syllogistic inferences) are acquired (Metaphysics 384 n2). When the habitual intellect acquires these secondary intelligibles, they are stored in what is called the actual intellect (On the Soul 30). At this point, most, but not all, matter has been stripped of the intelligible object. All of this activity is in preparation for the intellect’s reception of entirely intelligible objects from the Agent Intellect (McGinnis, Avicenna 32). When this occurs one possesses an acquired intellect. The activities, beginning in sensation and ending in the imprinting of essences (i.e. middle terms) on the intellect, is the intellect’s preparation for the imprinting of the fully immaterial intellectual objects (i.e. knowledge) (McGinnis, Avicenna 36).
Avicenna indicates that it is through the motions of discursive thought and selective attention to essential features of perceived objects (i.e. philosophizing) that we prepare ourselves for the reception of intelligible objects (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 132). Once properly prepared, we receive fully intelligible objects by means of the Agent Intellect (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 131). Since the reception of the intelligibles is the perfection of the intellect (McGinnis 124), and activity is the state of the acquired intellect (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 138), it stands to reason that intellection is the second perfection of the theoretical intellect. Our highest state of well-being is the result of philosophical practice in preparation for the reception of the grace of the Agent Intellect (i.e. fully intelligible objects).

In accordance with my analysis of Avicenna’s use of first and second perfections, the completion of human perfection is not static. The existence of a rational soul is a person’s first perfection. However, the rational soul’s existence alone is not enough to live well. We must perform the activities associated with our first perfection to attain well-being.

Deducing and searching for the middle term, or essence of a thing, prepares us for the activity of actually comprehending fully intelligible objects. Habituating ourselves to this kind of activity is another form of preparation. Through training our focus on the intelligible, we deny ourselves a preoccupation with the pleasures of our other, material faculties (viz. those associated with the vegetative and animal souls). After our bodily death, the rational soul persists. If it has been well trained to the intelligible realm, no trace of bodily cravings will be present and it will be free to contemplate the intelligibles. This is human salvation, the completion of the human essence (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 214).

If, on the other hand, one has spent his/her life in servitude to his/her lusts and aversions, this servitude will persist even after the material souls have decomposed. The pain that this person is to suffer in the afterlife is the inverse of the pleasure of the perfected soul (*Metaphysics* 9.7.18). We can see that Avicenna puts high stakes on our habituation to contemplation. Surely, the means to this lofty end, i.e. our salvation, also
claims great importance in Avicenna’s view of humanity’s well-being. This is, indeed, the case, as we shall see by considering the practical intellect in the section that is to follow.

3.4.2. Practical Perfection

The human soul looks both ‘up’ and ‘down’ (McGinnis, Avicenna 211). As we have seen, the theoretical intellect looks ‘up’ to the Agent Intellect to receive intelligible objects. Now we shall see what it means for the practical intellect to be responsible for looking ‘down’, in the governance of the body. Avicenna envisions this governance as the practical intellect applying itself to the various faculties that compose the vegetative, animal and human souls (McGinnis, Avicenna 212). For instance, when the practical intellect applies itself to the estimative faculty and the compositive imagination, it generates the crafts, such as medicine or carpentry (McGinnis, Avicenna 212). When the practical intellect applies itself to the theoretical intellect, it generates ethical beliefs and applies them in relevant circumstances (McGinnis, Avicenna 212). We should now determine which applications of the practical intellect are of the highest order and what constitutes its perfection in action.

Since all human cognition begins with sensory experience (McGinnis, Avicenna 211), it is natural that Avicenna makes distinctions between what is moral and immoral originate in this source as well (McGinnis, Avicenna 212). McGinnis explains this position quite clearly. He states that according to Avicenna, in the same way the theoretical intellect gathers information about physical objects, the practical intellect receives information about the social mores and conventions of the society in which that a person lives in (McGinnis, Avicenna 212). Given these mores and conventions, the practical intellect reasons its way to what is properly moral behaviour. Depending upon the kind of society that a person lives in, they will come to different conclusions about what is the right or wrong course of action in a given situation.

Beyond the virtues or vices of a people, the well-being of individuals within a society is staked upon the conclusions that can be drawn from its mores and conventions. McGinnis explains, “that Avicenna views the practical life as part and parcel of the theoretical one, or, to be more exact, the contemplative life simply is the perfection
and completion of the life aimed at in the practical philosophies” (McGinnis, Avicenna 210). Much as the theoretical intellect must prepare itself to receive intelligible objects from the Agent Intellect, the proper functioning of the practical intellect is preparation for the contemplative life. We must reason our way to the activities proper to our species. Without the proper social influences, the practical intellect will not have the material it needs to generate correct conclusions in this regard.

Some social mores and conventions are more conducive to the human end, contemplation, than others. In a society that does not value the practical sciences, its people will likely reason that the practices of science are unimportant, or worse, immoral. It stands to reason that some societies will be more conducive to human well-being than others. This highlights the importance of a properly ordered society and makes plain the necessity of a wise ruler. Without the guidance of a wise ruler, social conventions may not be guided in the direction fitted to human well-being.

Avicenna tells us that there is a normative element to the fulfillment of our human end, “vice is a decided deficiency of the proper human perfection, namely, the activity of the intellect” (McGinnis, Avicenna 213). In other words, a vicious person is one who does not act as a human. The vicious act as animals or plants ought to; finding perfection not in contemplation, but rather in the satisfaction of base desires. The virtuous person acts in accordance with his/her human soul. Given the concept of fittedness that pervades Avicenna’s natural philosophy, it stands to reason that actions of a human nature must find their flourishing in an appropriate field of action. Human well-being is fitted to certain social orders. The subject of the following chapter will be Avicenna’s conception of a field of action that is properly ordered to fit with the human good.

7 We will find in the next chapter that there are a great deal of practical considerations and preparations that go into potentiating the contemplative life.
3.5. Perfection and Cosmology

Avicenna’s normative stance, that is, what he believes humans ought to do, cannot be fully appreciated without understanding his conception of the cosmos. First of note is that all beings that move voluntarily possess the same basic qualities. Avicenna enumerates the qualities of what he terms the motive soul:

It is… corporeal, transformable, and changeable, and it is not denuded of matter; rather, its relation to the heavenly sphere is the same as the relation of the animal soul that belongs to us, except that in some fashion it apprehends intellectually in a manner adulterated by matter (Metaphysics 9.2.11).

The properties possessed by those that move in a voluntary manner are all the same, whether of a heavenly or earthly nature. There is only one Being that is entirely denuded of matter and thus, does not move.

Of this immobile Being, Avicenna tells the reader,

That which moves the mover without undergoing change through intent and desire is the end and the objective toward which the mover aims. It is the object of love. And the object of love, inasmuch as it is the object of love, is the good for the lover. Indeed we say: [For] everything that undergoes a motion that is not compulsory, [such a motion] would then be for [the sake of] something and due to the desire of something (Metaphysics 9.2.12).

The immovable Being is the final cause of all motions, no matter how remote. It provides other beings with purpose: something towards which our actions ought to be directed. In this sense, It is the grounding for all normativity in Avicenna’s philosophy.

The completely immaterial Being acts as Avicenna’s Archimedean point. It is capable of affecting motion in everything existent because it, itself, does not move. All voluntary motion is caused by desire. Avicenna determines that any desire indicates a lacking in perfection. Avicenna further determines that this immobile Being is entirely self-sufficient, lacking in no amount of perfection; It is complete. Being pure intellect, It “neither changes, undergoes transition, nor is mixed with what is in potency” (Metaphysics 9.2.10). It desires nothing, yet is ultimately the object of all desire.
The pure Intellect moves all things as an ultimate object of desire. In other words, it provides beings with purpose, it is the final cause for all actions. Avicenna is very clear about what he intends by purpose with reference to the final cause. He writes that, “By “purpose,” we mean the cause for whose sake the existence of something different from it is realized” (Metaphysics 6.1.2). The purpose of a being is something other than itself. If a being’s purpose were itself, it would have completed its purpose upon existence. In this case, there would be no activity from within that being. When a creature is working towards well-being, it partakes in activities natural to its kind, activities derived from its essence. It is our essence, according to Avicenna, that gives us purpose, makes us strive for something more than ourselves. As we will learn, the reason for which our essence exists causes each individual to move, to change and to perfect his/her self.

For those beings tainted by matter, attaining a perfection requires an act of change. Perfecting change is a technical term for Avicenna. He defines this kind of change in the Physics, explaining that, “what is understood by [a body's] being perfectible is that it comes to have something that did not exist before, without itself losing anything” (1.2.13). This transition has three requisite conditions that are spelled out clearly by Avicenna in his Physics:

That which undergoes perfection must also include [three factors]: [(1)] a determinate being that was imperfect and then was perfected, [(2)] something presently existing in it, and [(3)] a privation that preceded [what was presently existing in it] (1.2.13).

A perfection replaces a privation, which is the absence of a form within a being (Physics 1.2.17). Whether material or intellectual, the form is imprinted in a substance that was once lacking.

All forms, whether intelligible or corporeal, proceed from the Agent Intellect, also referred to as the Giver of Forms (Metaphysics 9.3.23). While a person, for example, is created by the Agent Intellect’s imprinting of a corporeal human form onto appropriate matter, it also impresses intelligible forms, or objects, upon our intellects. In either case, i.e. intelligible or corporeal, the process is the same. However the result is different. In both cases the essence of something is imposed upon another object, creating a new existent with this form’s particular suchness. Just as a corporeal form may be impressed...
upon the matter of a seed, creating a tree, the intelligible form of tree may be impressed upon the human intellect, creating the knowledge of treeness.

Avicenna refers to the process that occurs prior to the imprinting of a form as preparation. Both the corporeal and intelligible imprinting of form requires preparation. In light of this, Avicenna offers a principle: “the lesser may prepare its instrument and matter for the better, so that it will come into being in certain things through some other cause” (Metaphysics 9.2.13). The ‘lesser’, e.g. an embryo, may alter its material composition such that it receives a new form, i.e. the form of fetus, from some other cause. This other cause is the Agent Intellect. Our ability to perfect ourselves extends only so far as our ability to preparer ourselves for change. However, the significance of this ability should not be dismissed, for, as we will find, the Agent Intellect must provide a form to that which is deserving, i.e. properly prepared.

3.6. Preparation

The position that has been presented so far has concerned humanity’s ultimate end. Rational thought, or the practice of philosophy, is the activity that constitutes our second perfection. More specifically, humans should make actual the potencies of the theoretical intellect. Avicenna is clear that each of our other faculties serve this end. The practical intellect should submit to the control of the theoretical intellect, and the animal and vegetative faculties ought to submit to the will of the practical intellect (On the Soul 28). Notice that the way that Avicenna expresses these relationships is prescriptive, as opposed to, descriptive. As is empirically true, human’s do not, of necessity, act to perfect ourselves. To attain the human end, or good, as such, one must choose to have all of his/her faculties submit to the right guidance of the theoretical intellect.

Avicenna writes extensively and specifically on the subject of the human end and what activities constitute that end. From these discussions, one gathers that we must choose to utilize our rational faculties. However, given the fitted framework that I have presented, actions require a proper context, or field, if they are to achieve their end. Given the fitted relationship, without an environment conducive to our second perfection, our ends will be stifled in their conception. The proper context is generated through a
complex of natural and agential processes. The following chapters will cover the specifics of these processes. What will presently follow in this chapter is an analysis of Avicenna’s concept of preparation, the term he uses for the natural and agential processes that generate a proper context for perfecting activities.

The efficient cause of all corporeal existence is the Agent Intellect. The Agent Intellect will only imprint a form into properly prepared material (Physics 1.2.17). We are to understand that properly prepared material must contain a privation. Avicenna describes privations as having “a certain mode of being, since it is a privation of some thing, bringing along with itself a certain predisposition and preparedness in some determinate matter” (Physics 1.2.17). For Avicenna, a privation is not simply a lacking, but rather a lacking of some thing in particular. Preparation is directed at a particular end, which is a form. In order to receive a form, one must create a predisposition to receive that form. In what follows we will learn how Avicenna envisions this creation.

Wherever a form is to be received, preparation must first occur. Reception of forms may be either corporeal or intelligible. I will now, in turn, cover both the corporeal and intelligible preparatory processes.

3.6.1. Corporeal Preparation

In his Canon of Medicine Avicenna speaks to the significance of the material component in an individual’s reception of their first perfection. Each individual has the capacity to receive the good due to the preparation of his/her matter (Canon 145). Avicenna explains, for example, that “water cannot be water (lit., have the “form” of water) and at the same time receive the “form” of human nature” (Canon 145). Water, as water, cannot receive the perfection of the human form. The organs that compose the human body are the kind of material that can receive the perfection of humanity. The composition of these organs is responsible for their capacity to receive the human form.

It is a principle of Avicenna’s life sciences that only compound bodies can receive life (Canon 146). With the blending of elements comes the possibility of life: “It is the mingling of substances in the compound bodies which accounts for their ability to receive life” (Canon 146). Obviously, the same blending of elements cannot receive all
forms (Canon 145). Each form requires a specific blend. The preparation that takes place in order that a body may receive life is a balancing of the elements (or more accurately, their qualities) in such a way that they are blended in a body to suit the particular form that it is to receive (Interpreting Avicenna 16).

A blending may be more or less harmonious in its constitution. “The more harmonious the blending, the more adapted is the resultant compound for being the vehicle, not merely of life, but of a very particular kind of life” (Canon 146). The particular kind of life that Avicenna is referring to here is human life. The balancing of the elemental qualities (what Avicenna refers to as an equilibrium) in a human is as close to perfect as is possible. It is to this, that Avicenna attributes the possibility of a life of reason. The life of reason, therefore, is potentiated by the material conditions of the body (Canon 146).

The ultimate end of humanity begins with the body’s material conditions. The material conditions that contribute to the potential for a life of reason (i.e. the activities of a human, qua human) are found in what Avicenna refers to as the breath⁸. The breath potentiates a human’s secondary perfections. Composed of the lighter, attenuated portions of the humors, the breath stands as a receptive intermediary between the body and the rational soul. So fine is this breath that Avicenna refers to it as “a luminous substance” and a “ray of light” (Canon 146). It is the quality of our breath that makes our being much like that of the celestial beings (Canon 146). To possess the instruments of rational life, the body must generate this ethereal substance⁹.

The breath serves other functions of life as well. Generally speaking, the breath acts as an intermediary between the faculties of the souls and the body. It allows the body to function in accordance with the vegetative, animal and rational souls. The breath is an intermediary; it applies universally to the organs, imparting the nutritive, reproductive, sensitive…etc faculties to each organ according to its needs. It is liminal

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⁸ The breath that Avicenna is referring to is not the respiration attributable to the lungs. The breath is a compound substance found within a living body that is responsible for bringing the psychic faculties to the organs of the body.

⁹ More will be said of the breath and the humors in the fifth chapter of this thesis.
with regards to the immaterial, rational soul. It is fine enough to receive the will of the intellect, and course enough to transmit that will to the organs of the body.

The humors serve as the matter for the form of the human breath. With the equability, or a balancing, of the humors the breath attains a temperament that is receptive to the life of reason. With proper preparation, there is a material basis for the perfection of human life. From the most basic elements that compose a human body come the ethereal breaths. Material preparation makes us able to receive the form unique to humanity.

3.6.2. The Preparation of the Intellect

Once a person is born, the perfecting process may continue, if one directs oneself towards the correct activities. The human perfecting activities could not be achieved without this material basis. An equable state in the body is necessary for effects of the intellect to find actuality. With a properly prepared body, the intellect may impose its will upon the bodily organs. The intellect must be able to control the organs of the body to acquire knowledge of natural things. The intellect’s reliance upon the body, integral to human perfection, will now be elaborated upon.

The body is necessary for the reception of sensible forms and their primary processing, or preparation. With reference to the reception of sensible forms, human’s “intellectual perception of the essences of natural things comes from first sensibly experiencing those essences as they exist in the material things around [him/her] that make up our world” (McGinnis, Avicenna 133). The sense organs of a human’s body must be properly directed so as to take in the corporeal forms that present in nature. If one were in a catatonic state, wherein his/her intellect could not direct their sense organ’s attention, the perfections that that person would receive would be very limited.

Avicenna establishes the humors as vital to human cognition. The humors of the body prepare the sensible forms, such that the intellect may receive an intelligible form. They are responsible for stripping essences of the material accidents that they present with in nature (McGinnis, Avicenna 133). The process that leads to the imprinting of
forms upon the intellect is the movement from the fully material, through the liminal, ending in the fully intellectual form.

Avicenna provides a schema for the process leading to human cognition. Perception moves from the five external senses to the internal senses\(^\text{10}\). Once sensations are internalized, basic rules of inference can be applied to them. Taken in by the internal senses, the particulars (corporeal forms) that are experienced go through a process of abstraction, stripping their essences of material accidents. The corporeal forms reach their liminal state in the retentive imagination, where they may be manipulated by the compositive imagination (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 133). Up to this point, the essences are still sensible (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 133); they are not yet intelligible objects.

What is of note is that the process of abstraction that brings essences to their liminal state ends in a product (i.e. an abstracted, yet, sensible essence) that is able to be manipulated by the human intellect. Far from being a purely intellectual activity, the “manipulation of the image takes the form of separating and dividing the humors in the brain in which the sensible image is impressed” (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 133). Avicenna attributes these manipulations to the activities of the intellect. These manipulations are preparations of a sensible essence, turning it into a potentially intelligible form, i.e. the privation of an intelligible object. Once this state has been achieved, the Agent Intellect imprints an intelligible form onto the intellect.

Drawing upon what we already know of privations, a privation cannot be indifferent to the form that will replace it. A privation is prepared for the reception of a specific form (*Physics* 1.3.4). Just like a human fetus is not prepared to receive the form of dog, or oak, a privation in the intellect holds the place for only one form. As a requisite for the imprinting of a form, a privation is the third principle of corporeality, in addition to matter and form (*Physics* 1.2.14). Avicenna calls a privation a principle, in the sense that it is that which necessarily comes before the existence of something else. Thus, a privation has a purpose: viz. the reception of a specific perfection.

\(^{10}\) The internal senses include, among others, the imagination, common sense, estimative faculty, and memory.
Our activities, in our quest for perfections, prepare that which possesses only minimal existence (i.e. privations). Avicenna explains that “Everything of which privation is predicated is the nonexistence of some instance of what we have called form in that which is capable of acquiring it [that is, in the material]” (Physics 1.3.10). A privation is an absence. Our purpose is to prepare absences within ourselves to attain fulfillment, or perfection. This is the most that we, as agents, can do, according to Avicenna, in the process of perfecting ourselves.

This is a principled position taken by Avicenna. He explains in his Metaphysics that:

[Privation] is thus said of that whose prerogative is that it [duly] belong to some existent but [which] does not belong to [some particular existent] because it is not the prerogative [of the latter] that [the former] should belong to it, even though [the] prerogative of [the former] is to exist for some thing [or another] (Metaphysics 7.1.6).

Avicenna follows this definition of privation with an example to illustrate what he intends. Sight, Avicenna points out, belongs to something, but it is not the prerogative of the seen object that it be seen. When the eye comes across a visible object in the right conditions (i.e. when light is present), it is its prerogative to see. In darkness, the eye has a privation of sight. The sun (Avicenna’s metaphorical Agent Intellect) shines light (the metaphorical form) upon an object, activating the eye’s prerogative to see (i.e. perfecting it) (McGinnis, Avicenna 135). Thus, it is not in the particular existent’s power to perfect itself, as such. Instead, it is the particular’s prerogative to prepare the field within which the action of perfecting can come about. For sight, this would be to have a healthy, open eye in the presence of a visible object. In the fitted relationship that Avicenna describes, with reference to perfection, the particular existent’s initiative is to prepare the field of action, in this case, the matter, so that it can receive the perfection. Just as is the case with sight and the eye, the privations that we prepare are necessarily imprinted with a form by the Agent Intellect (Physics 1.13.8).
3.7. Conclusion

It is not for us to perfect ourselves, but rather to perform preparatory activities. In Avicenna’s words, “the virtuous disposition which we achieve through action does not have the action as its cause” our actions can only “[impede] the opposite of the virtuous disposition” (Metaphysics 9.2.14). If, as was quoted above, “For Avicenna, then, vice is a decided deficiency of the human perfection, namely, the activity of the intellect, for in acting viciously one rejects the conclusions of the human intellect in preference for irrational bodily desires” (McGinnis, Avicenna 213). One is virtuous when he/she is acting to perfect his/her intellect. The virtuous person acts like a person (i.e. not like an animal or a plant) and, for this, is gifted with a first perfection.

It is my contention that those activities that Avicenna terms second perfections are the very same as those that constitute the preparatory process. It has been established that first perfections have concomitant second perfections. It has further been established that to be in actuality is better than to be in potentiality. With this in mind, one can say that possessing first perfections, that is, actualities, makes a person live well. Second perfections are those activities through which well-being is attained. From these premises one can infer that the activities that potentiate first perfections are second perfections. The previous section has explained that preparatory processes are responsible for the reception of first perfections. Thus, well-being comes about through preparation. With all this in mind, it is my view that the second perfections are those that prepare a privation within a subject, such that it can receive a new form. Anything that is preparatory in this way, generates well-being and is thus a second perfection.

The part that humans play in our own perfection is the preparatory process. Since this thesis is concerned with that which is within our control, the details of the preparatory process will be the subject of the following two chapters of this thesis. The field of action within which we find ourselves (whether this is the body or the external environment) is that which we can prepare. What the preparation consists of and how it is accomplished will be elaborated in future chapters.

Well-being requires the enacting of all four causes. The final, formal and efficient causes of well-being lie outside of humanity’s potential to control. A final cause cannot
be oneself, for the purpose of a being’s existence must be other than itself. We know that the formal cause of each first perfection in nature is found in the Agent Intellect. The efficient cause of perfections also lies with the Agent Intellect, as it affects the imprinting of the perfections on natural beings. While it is true that we cannot cause the perfections that lead to our ultimate salvation, our inactions can inhibit their imprinting and our actions can be a cause of the cause (i.e. a remote cause) of their imprinting. This is a significant matter, as the Agent Intellect necessarily emanates forms according to our preparations. This amounts to a true causal role that we have in establishing our well-being.
Chapter 4. Political Fittedness

As we learned in chapter 2, in order for activities to find resolution, Avicenna’s natural philosophy tells us that they must occur in a cooperative field of action. We have further come to understand that an acorn’s well-being, for example, is found in its becoming an oak tree. In view of the fitted relationship, the activities that cause an acorn to flourish cannot be met by just any environment. A concomitant of this position is that the conditions that are fecund for the flourishing of an acorn are not the same as those that cause, for example, a chestnut tree, dog or person to live well. Each kind of being has its own natural activities, activities that must be met by an appropriate field of action if they are to be beneficial.

This chapter’s focus will be humanity’s proper field of action. It will explore the environment that cooperates with our natural activities such that we, as a species, and as individuals can flourish. The environment that Avicenna points to as a catalyst to our well-being is a just, civil society. In what follows, we will learn what this society entails, its benefits, and the cost of a human’s living in an impoverished field of action.

4.1. Essential Dissolution

The effect that a field of action can have on an agent is grave. The effect cuts to the essence of the being, causing it either to flourish or wither. In a number of Avicenna’s works he remarks on humans existing outside civil society; noting that their animal and vegetative psyches find greater expression under these circumstances. In this section I will provide a theoretical grounding for understanding Avicenna’s position in this respect: how can an environment affect the essence of a being?

Avicenna’s concept of essence is complicated and must be looked at from more than one angle to fully grasp its role in corporeal existence. To begin, we should look to
his Book of Definitions. Here Avicenna states, that to know the essence of a thing, one must look to its genus and differentia (Books of Definitions in Islamic Philosophy 102). Analyzing a human in this way, our genus is animal and our differentia is rational (Compendium 69). As we have learned, our natural activities come from our essence. The kind of creature we are determines the kinds of behaviours that will be conducive to well-being. It has been argued that rational and animal (as well as vegetative as a concomitant of the animal soul) faculties must be utilized, within a proper field, for our end to be achieved. Thus, when outside of our proper field of action (what I will be arguing is a just civil society) we do not have access to the perfection that is our end.

If, as Avicenna is wont to do, we were to rank our faculties, the rational ones would come first with the others playing a supporting role. After all, what makes one kind of animal different from another is its differentia. One cannot be human, qua human, without actualizing the unique activities of the rational soul. It is in this light that our discussion can become more specific; humans have a proper environment that uniquely meets the needs of our differentia. That is, we need an environment that is conducive to rational thought, for in an environment in which our reason is unable to find a foothold, as we shall see, our animal and vegetative psyches dominate.

Today, Avicenna’s claims about the effect of a ‘state of nature’ (for lack of a better phrase) on humanity are a controversial subject. The idea that a human can lose his/her personhood, which is what his claims amount to, is morally troubling. For this reason it will be helpful to examine another animal, its activities, and proper field of action. Since it has been established that a creature’s unique activities are what tie it to its unique field of action, regardless of the species, the affects of the deprivation of a field fitted to an essence should be informative. With this in mind, I intend to consider the essence of fishness.

In the case of fish, Avicenna might determine their essence to be a gilled animal; where animal is the genus and gilled is the differentia. As long as one understands the words included in the definition of the essence of fish, it is plain that there are certain things that necessarily follow from this essence. From the differentia, we can infer that fish are aquatic and take oxygen from water. From the genus, we can infer that fish must
move and perceive in order to consume nutrients and reproduce. If each of these concomitant attributes are viewed as activities (i.e. being aquatic, taking oxygen from water….etc) and not just states of existence, then we have a better understanding of the relationship between essence and nature. This is simply another expression of what has been established in previous chapters that a being's natural activities are derived from its essence.

Fish offer a good example of natural activities and how they rely upon a proper (and unique) field of action, relative to their differentia. A fish is gilled and thus cannot perform its natural activities in the open air. According to what I have presented of Avicenna's natural philosophy there is a principle that causes a fish to die out of water: the activities that come naturally to a fish are only supported by this field of action. Left in an uncooperative field, a fish will die. It cannot flourish in open air; to the contrary, it will suffocate, starve or be easy prey. The activities that make fish uniquely what they are can only be achieved in their proper field of action: water.

What has been provided so far is an empirical account of the effect that an improper field of action has on a fish. For this account to be pertinent, the death of a fish outside of its proper field must be tied to its essence. The most direct route to this end is through what we already know about the origins of a being's nature: viz. that natural activities are derived from a being's essence. If an improper field of action interrupts the implementation of a being’s natural activities, then that being’s essence has no way of expressing itself. It is my hypothesis that the affect of this interruption is the actual cause of a fish’s death when exposed to an improper field for a sufficient period of time.

The foundation of a proof for this hypothesis is found in Avicenna’s Metaphysics. Here he approaches essence from another angle. He writes of essence (i.e. quiddity), “As for the quiddity, it is that by which it [i.e. a composite being] is what it is; and it is what it is only by virtue of the form being connected with matter” (Metaphysics 5.8.5). We will recall from the previous chapter that Avicenna also attributes the unity that a being’s form shares with its matter to that being’s essence. The significance of Avicenna’s position with respect to this complex conception of essence will now be illuminated.
I will here reintroduce the work of Christine Korsgaard, as it parallels my interpretation of Avicenna’s position with reference to essential dissolution. In the previous chapter I showed that both philosophers utilize the same principles in their expression of what Avicenna refers to as essential nature and Korsgaard calls constitutive standards. It is worth exploring Korsgaard’s position more closely as it will give us a better understanding of the internal logic that these principles exhibit.

We should begin by recalling my discussion of Korsgaard in the previous chapter and the parallels between her notion of person’s constitution and Avicenna’s characterization of essence. A constitution, like an essence, is responsible for both the unity of a particular being and the constitutive standards (or nature) that dictate what it is to be that particular being. Like Avicenna, Korsgaard frames these standards in terms of the functions that make a being the kind of being that it is. When a being performs the functions dictated by its constitution, it is considered good. For example, the constitutive standards of a house dictate that it provide shelter from the elements. A good house is one that performs this function well and a bad house is one that does not meet this end. Consequences of this teleological analysis, when applied to humans, will now be discussed.

Korsgaard paints quite a dire picture of the negative effects of bad behaviour on a person. She tells us that “The ancient metaphysical thesis of the identification of the real with the good follows immediately from this conception [i.e. of teleological organization], for this kind of badness eventually shades off into literal disintegration” (28). Korsgaard uses the example of a house to explain her thinking, “A house with enough cracks in the walls will crumble, and cease to be a house altogether: it will disintegrate back into a mere heap of boards and plaster and bricks” (28). If a house no longer performs its function of providing shelter (i.e. the telos of its organization), then, we are told that it can no longer be considered a house. Analogously, a person would no longer be considered a person once he/she has definitively ceased to perform the functions of a person, i.e. upon death. A person dies when he/she is not able to constitute him/herself as a person any longer.
Put in Avicennan terms, a dying person’s essence no longer finds expression in the body of formed matter that it composes. As I understand it, upon death, the ends of the matter and form, that the essence once unified, diverge and find new trajectories. The human form dissolves as the matter takes on new ends in its decomposition. We stave off this dissolution by maintaining our humanness throughout our lives. A being’s essence is not something that simply exists. It is rather, something that requires tending to; for the ends that it gives to the form and matter that compose a person must find expression in that body in order to maintain the unity of the person. If it does not find a cooperative field in a body, an essence will cease to unify the body’s matter and form. This point will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

Korsgaard has told us that there are ‘shades’ of houseness based upon a house’s ability to perform its function to the constitutive standards of a house. The same is true of all beings, including humans. A perfectly good person, according to Korsgaard’s position, is constantly performing the functions that constitute the standards for which he/she exists. A completely bad person performs none of these functions. Obviously, the vast majority of people fall somewhere in-between these two extremes. It is clear that there is an ontological level to Korsgaard’s position, i.e. through our actions we constitute ourselves more or less as humans. A natural consequent of this position, taken in concert with the teleological framework that Korsgaard utilizes, is that some people will be more human than others. I shall not speak to Korsgaard’s manner of addressing this unpalatable conclusion. Instead, in the following sections of the chapter I will turn back to Avicenna’s philosophy, which certainly does not shy from these consequences, but rather embraces them.

Now allow me to put Korsgaard’s position in Avicennan terms. If an essence cannot find expression the door is left open to a number of potential consequences. We have seen that when an essence and a field of action meet this may result in well-being or death. However, not all cases where an essence is mismatched to its field are quite as drastic as this. For example, water may become hot yet still retain its cool and moist nature. Avicenna maintains that water’s nature still causes a person in a hot bath (when soaking for too long) to cool (Canon 240). Water is cool in itself, and its nature persists despite a field of action contrary to its essence (e.g. over an open flame). Nonetheless,
its essence is stifled in such a field and the good of water is obstructed (for instance, if it is too hot, water will not seek its proper place. Instead of residing just above earth, it will rise as steam). As we shall see, the effect of living outside of our proper, human field is much the same as the effect of heat on water; it causes the suppression of certain aspects of our essence, while allowing others to flourish in their stead. We will see what this entails for humanity in what follows.

4.2. Civil Society and Cosmology

It is plain from Avicenna’s founding cosmological principle, i.e. that from one comes many, that hierarchical concepts are central to his understanding of reality. From the perfect unity of the First (i.e. the Necessary Existent Being) comes all that is, albeit, not directly (Metaphysics 9.4.11-12). Because a perfect unity cannot create a plurality, per se, it is the First Intellect, initially spawned from the First, which is capable of creating a unity of multiplicity. It does this by intellectually apprehending its own essence and possible existence; the necessity of its own existence due to the First; and the First itself (Metaphysics 9.4.11). From the first of these apprehensions, the First Intellect creates “the corporeality of the outermost sphere”; from the second is generated the form, or soul, of the outermost sphere; and through the third of these intellecations the First Intellect generates another Intellect (Metaphysics 9.4.11). The First is not directly responsible for the existence of the many; however, it is a necessary remote cause of their existence. This cosmology is reflected in Avicenna’s image of civil society.

Avicenna is adamant that civil society must be properly prepared to host the activities of humans. The civil order that he realizes is an imitation of the cosmic order. There is one ruler, or legislator. He appoints ministers and functionaries to carry out the administration of the city (Metaphysics 10.4.1). It is from his will that the city is ordered in a just manner. In this light, Avicenna deems the legislator, or ruler, necessary “with respect to the survival and actual existence of the human species” (Metaphysics 10.2.3). Human existence is reliant on the legislator, although, like the First, he does not create the multitudes over which he rules.
There is a natural order that creates human life and motivates a diversity of activities. Thus, not everyone’s temperament is suited to communing with the Truth. Some people are better suited to administration of the city, others guardianship of the city, while still others are adepts in the trades. The legislator divides the city into these groupings, knowing that this is the proper order of society (Metaphysics 10.4.1). The multitudes potentiate their own existence, however, the legislator is a necessary cause of human flourishing. For we, do not, according to Avicenna, lead properly human lives outside of a properly governed, urban environment (Metaphysics 10.2.1).

The city is the proper field of action for a human’s natural activities to take root. It is the legislator that makes this possible. He imposes just laws and enforces them to make possible fair trade practices, such that one can rely on another for the material needs one cannot manufacture for oneself (Metaphysics 10.2.1). If people cannot trust each other to honour their trade arrangements, they cannot live in common. The legislator, by force of his guardians, ensures that trade is fair and if not, that the guilty party is punished. By these means, basic human needs are met: the cobbler is able to safely sell shoes to the butcher, and the butcher can sell meat to the tailor. Because of the legislator, everyone ends up clothed, shod, and fed. The talents of those adept at the trades find a fertile arena in the properly governed city.

Those who are best suited to guardianship also find their perfection within a city. These people are not adept at the trades, but have strong irascible temperaments. They are good at following orders and enforcing laws. In a just city, they ensure that the city is safe from raiders and enforce the laws (especially trade laws). Without a city and a legislator, these people would have nothing to enforce. Further, without the infrastructure of trades people, they would have no means to clothe and feed themselves. Thus, the activities that are most suited to their temperament would not be directed at the just upholding of the laws so as to receive fair payment for their service. Most likely, outside of civil society, the ends of their natural talents would result in theft, plunder, and undue violence. However, in a properly governed city people of this temperament find a righteous outlet for their behavioural tendencies; that is to say, in such a city they find constructive ends for their violent predispositions.
According to the fitted relationship, a person should perform their own activities, not those of another, and only in their own proper field. If a person’s temperament is such that they are adept at some trade, then they should perform the activities of that trade and not, for instance, those of a guardian. It is the legislator’s job to ensure that “none in the city will remain without a proper function and specific place; each will have his use in the city” (Metaphysics 10.4.1). Here Avicenna is indicating that the legislator is responsible for the well-being of those over which he rules: he ensures that everyone has an activity to which they are suited that contributes to the ends of the city.

Avicenna is clear that “The best of people is the one whose soul is perfected [by becoming] an intellect in act and who attains the morals that constitute practical virtues” (Metaphysics 10.1.2). Each of these temperaments finds its perfection in the city. In a fecund field of action, such as a just city, people can perform the activities that come most naturally to them. Practically speaking, not every one can or should be of a contemplative temperament. The full actualization of the theoretical intellect is not for everyone. Despite this fact, the guardians and artisans are actualizing other, human, faculties. The practical intellect is just as unique to our genus as the theoretical intellect. Both the artisans and the guardians must think practically to achieve their ends. The legislator acts as the theoretical intellect of the city. He passes down discovered truths to his people, and they act on them. If they recognize their strengths and work to achieve excellence in their lives, the essences of both those in the trades and the military can express themselves. A person who partakes in the life of a just city finds a proper outlet for the activities of his/her faculties. Anyone participating in this order finds a field of action, as well suited to human life, as the centre of the universe is to the earth element; it is our proper place.

4.3. Avicenna’s Recital

Avicenna’s Recital offers specific insights into the proper ordering of society. Henry Corbin offers a helpful reading of these texts. I shall utilize Corbin’s work Avicenna and the Visionary Recital as an aid in my interpretation of Hayy ibn Yaqzan.
The *Recital of Hayy* tells of an encounter between a man mired in his material body, and a sage (Hayy ibn Yaqzan). Hayy relays his arcane knowledge of the occident and orient. Corbin himself admits that he was not able to schematize, or map, in any detail the climes that are described in the telling of this journey (*Visionary Recital* 151). Nonetheless, Avicenna makes some clear references to certain divisions of the world (or cosmos). The highest order of these divisions is the delimitation of the occident, orient and that place in between them. Of the intermediate zone, we have much information, as this is our place of residence. Thus, it is of the occident and orient about which Avicenna has Hayy tell his interlocutor.

As we know, our world is one of matter and form. Its relative position between the occident and orient makes for a neat division along hylomorphic lines. Reading the recital in this way, Corbin determines that the occident is representative of existence as it relates to matter (*Visionary Recital* 162). The orient, on the other hand is representative of existence as it relates to form (*Visionary Recital* 159). With these major divisions in mind, I should like to examine the most salient aspects of these climes, as they relate to this section of this thesis: human political fittedness.

Reading Hayy’s account of the climes, I am struck by the philosophical themes found in his descriptions of, what Corbin terms, the ‘terrestrial’ and ‘celestial’ occident (*Visionary Recital* 162). As Avicenna covers the terrestrial occident first, so shall I. The seat of the earth is said to be the terrestrial occident, which, at its base, is the “Hot (and Muddy) Sea” where all light terminates (*Hayy* 142). Avicenna’s description of the foundation of the terrestrial occident, the lowest point of all material existence, is reminiscent of prime matter. The place where all light terminates is an amorphic sea of hot mud. The site of light’s termination is where form ceases to hold influence over matter. This, according to Avicenna, is the foundation for the seat of the earth.

The area surrounding this sea is described next as possessing vastness “none can circumscribe” (*Hayy* 142). The theme of matter and its lack of form is continued here. There is no structure to this land. People’s crops do not grow, their buildings crumble and “among those people there is perpetual quarrelling or, rather, mortal battle” (*Hayy* 142). This is a lawless place where ‘might makes right’. Now, as I read the point
Avicenna is making here, he is describing a land without any higher order form, or structure. There is no structure that potentiates natural growth and succession; “Its soil is a desert of salt” (Hayy 142). Its people are ungoverned; they have no structure to their lives and order to their affairs. The light is so dim that there can be no prophet to guide them to the Truth. Humans are incapable of imposing order onto this land, whether agricultural or political. Utilizing the terminology of fittedness, life here is without a proper field of action; it cannot flourish in an uncooperative land.

Despite the uncooperative nature of the field of action, the material is nonetheless fecund; it has all the dispositions necessary to receive form. A hot and muddy sea contains all the qualities necessary for existence to flourish, in the right circumstances. The sea, as I interpret it, is representative of elemental water, providing cold and wet qualities. Mud is representative of elemental earth, providing cold and dry qualities. Finally this sea is also hot, which makes the sea an amorphic blending of hot, cold, wet and dry qualities. Avicenna, of course, here is being metaphorical: qualities are forms and it has been established that form is not present here. In a land where form terminates no qualities at all would exist. With this in mind, I understand Avicenna’s hot and muddy sea to be a metaphor for the pure, productive potential of the material side of reality.

Moving from this description of the field of action, Avicenna continues with the effects that this uncircumscribed land has on its inhabitants. Although cultivation is not possible, plants and animals do live in the terrestrial occident. However, instead of assisting in the flourishing of a person, a person’s natural activities are perverted by the fruits of this field of action. Consumption of the food and water of this region draws a person away from the light; “A human being will be seen there, for example, covered by the hide of a quadruped, while thick vegetation grows on him” (Hayy 143). Instead of providing nutriment to its inhabitants, an improper field of action inhibits the expression of a person’s essential nature (his/her rationality), allowing his/her other psychic faculties to dominate.

In contrast to the seat of the earth, the setting for the Pillars of Heaven (i.e. the celestial occident) offers residence in perpetuity to its inhabitants. Of this clime,
Avicenna writes of the settled residents (all of whom have emigrated there), “there is no war; they do not seize each others’ homes and goods by force. Each group has its fixed domain, into which no other comes to inflict violence upon it” (Hayy 143, emphasis added). In this realm there is circumscription. There is a superstructure here that enforces boundaries. I believe Avicenna intends that, because of these boundaries, there is peace and respect for property rights. It is not immediately clear what this superstructure is. However, the first hint is found in the same passage from which I just quoted. The seat of the Pillars of Heaven is nearer the Window of Light than the climes of the terrestrial occident (Hayy 143). Avicenna uses the metaphor of light again, and as my interpretation would predict, with more light comes more order. Up to this point, we know the remote cause of the order within the celestial occident, viz. its proximity to the Window of Light.

I believe that the proximate cause of this well ordered field of action is something much more mundane and accessible than a celestial being: viz. political order. It is in Hayy’s reports of the first seven climes of the celestial occident that political order and human nature are implicitly linked. If we look to these climes, we find two recurring themes: 1) each clime is described as a kingdom containing a determinate number of cities; and 2) the inhabitants of each clime exhibit distinct behaviours (Hayy 143-44). This pattern points to a relationship between a circumscribed political order and a circumscribed human nature.

Looking for further support for this position, one might look for the opposing consequent\textsuperscript{11} to be expressed in Hayy’s description. This is, in fact, what we find. None of these climes are properly ruled and none of Hayy’s descriptions of the people’s natures mention any of the activities of the theoretical intellect. Of the two rulers that Hayy mentions explicitly, one is a woman and the other is a violent male tyrant (Hayy 144). Avicenna is clear on his stance with regards to women: they are not endowed with sufficient faculties to support philosophical reasoning. Thus, a woman could not rule over a just city. The tyrant, too, despite his sex, is not equipped to guide his people to their

\textsuperscript{11} I.e. that without an organized political superstructure we cannot even begin to direct ourselves towards our unique, human well-being
well-being. This ruler’s irascible faculty dominates his thought, leading his people to behave in violent and perverse ways (Hayy 144). With these two cases in mind, we can make inferences about the other five kingdoms. The peoples of these other kingdoms possess natures that make them, for instance, passionate lovers of “the arts of the writer, the sciences of the stars, theurgy, [and] magic” (Hayy 143). From this we can infer that they too are not properly ruled, for they are not inclined solely to the rational sciences. Political order potentiates a people’s humanness, however, without a proper ruler, the light of theoretical reason does not shine on the citizens.

One may claim that my inference to this relationship is unfounded because it is derived from a reading of a work with a mystical, and not a philosophical, nature. It might be argued, that I am applying a philosophical interpretation to an evocative, rather than a rational, piece of writing. If this is the case, then my application of Avicenna’s philosophical conception of well-being to his esoteric recitals is inappropriate.

In response to this line of reasoning, I should argue that if Avicenna’s story of Hayy only expresses mystical, esoteric knowledge we would not expect to see any of those ideas in his rigorously reasoned, philosophical works. However, this is not the case, as is found by directing our attention to book X chapter 2 of Avicenna’s Metaphysics. Here he explains that,

> Whoever among them, in the endeavor to establish his city, has no knowledge of the requirements necessary [for setting up] a city and who, with his companions, has [thus] been limited to forming a mere association – [such an individual] changes into a genus most dissimilar to people, negating the perfections of people. Nevertheless, even the ones like him cannot escape forming an association and imitating the citizens of a city (Metaphysics 10.2.1, emphasis added).

This passage clearly expresses Avicenna’s philosophical view with reference to the structure of humanity’s fitted relationship; properly ordered cities are the proper field of action for humans. Our well-being (i.e. second perfection) is not possible apart from this field, for our form (i.e. first perfection) is perverted by other circumstances.

Humans are unique with respect to the need for civil order to attain our perfection (Metaphysics 10.2.1). This being the case, one can, without controversy, add political to
humanity’s essence. We are rational animals that need political structure to catalyze our essential nature. Our actions must be circumscribed for us to be human (i.e. maintain our first perfection); hence the requirement of a ruler. Our actions must be justly circumscribed in this way to attain well-being (i.e. our second perfection); hence the need for a wise ruler. According to Avicenna’s *Metaphysics* governance is a necessary part of being human.

Only one out of millions of acorns will become the ideal of oakness. In the same way, with regards to the ideal of humanness, such a temperament is also a rare occurrence. Because the best kind of ruler is not always available, the words of the wise ruler, or prophet, are to be canonized, such that future rulers can be guided by his insights (*Metaphysics* 10.3.1). Doing so will ensure that just legislation will be enacted in perpetuity, guiding the citizens towards their perfection. For humans to behave otherwise than in a rational manner within a political sphere is to diminish us.

### 4.4. The Noble Lie

Avicenna believes that a society is not benefitted by full political transparency. There are some truths that, on balance, do more harm than good. He espouses the virtues, and necessity, of the Platonic Noble Lie. Avicenna is adamant that “it is not for everyone that [the acquisition] of divine wisdom is facilitated” (*Metaphysics* 10.2.5). Teaching this wisdom to those who are not prepared for it is dangerous. For this wisdom will cause the ill equipped to “deny the truth of [God’s] existence, fall into dissensions, and indulge in disputations and analogical arguments that stand in the way of their performing their civil [duties]” (*Metaphysics* 10.2.5). In short, in some matters, having a fully informed public is not in the interest of civil order and thus, human well-being.

Avicenna admonishes the legislator of a city to speak to his subjects of religious matters in “parables derived from what they can comprehend and conceive” (*Metaphysics* 10.2.6). Further, “there is no harm if the legislator’s words contain symbols and signs that might call forth those naturally disposed toward theoretical reflection to pursue philosophic investigation” (*Metaphysics* 10.2.7). In sum, the point that Avicenna is making is that information is only useful to the extent that a person can synthesize it,
making it cohere with what he/she can comprehend. Nonetheless, information about the Truth must not be held back from those who can internalize the Truth. Thus, works of this magnitude need to be encrypted in such a way that the masses cannot appreciate their depth of meaning while those apt to comprehend, can intuit their higher implications. With this in mind, I believe reading Avicenna’s recitals in light of the Noble Lie is more than appropriate.

4.5. Gray-Scale Perfection

From the fact that Avicenna emphasizes a civilly mandated limitation on knowledge we can infer that human second perfections lie on a relative scale. It is clear that Avicenna does not believe that everyone’s earthly well-being is found in the same activities. Not everyone is a philosopher, nor, for the sake of all humanity, should we be. For if we were, our collective needs could not be met. Consider a city where every person found fulfillment in contemplation of the ultimate Truth. No one would farm, make clothing or guard the city. Owing to starvation or defeat in battle, the citizens of such a city would not live long. The purpose of living in common, collective well-being, would not be met. While humanity’s ultimate end, as such, is to access the Truth, not everyone can be suited to attain that end. Those who would contemplate require the activities of artisans and warriors to maintain their well-being.

Viewed in this light, one is left to ponder the just nature of the cosmos, and the God who created it. How can the world be a just place when the vast majority of people are fated, by no fault of their own, to experience less happiness in the afterlife than the people they supported in their ascension? To this question Avicenna would direct his reader to the concepts of general good and accidental evil. Avicenna uses fire as an exemplar of these concepts:

And if fire, among these [elements], were not such that, if the collisions occurring in the course of the totality of things did [not] lead it necessarily to contact the garment of a noble man, [the garment] necessarily burning, then fire would not be [something] from which one derives that benefit which is benefit [to all] (Metaphysics 9.6.9).
Fire is generally helpful, not to mention, being part of the blend of elemental qualities necessary for existence. Our existence would be impossible without fire. It would not be just to do away with fire’s existence simply because an accidental effect of the nature of fire is the burning of a noble man’s clothes.

We can all think of instances when good things have had negative effects. Avicenna accepts this stoically, writing that “[If evilness was prevented from it,] then [these things] would not be what they are, since we have stated that their existence is that which cannot be such that no evil occurs from them” (Metaphysics 9.6.22). Fire does not care if it burns wood to cook dinner or to raze a house. To remove the ability of fire to burn a noble man’s cloak would be to entirely alter the nature of fire. Fire’s qualities cause heating and drying, the effects of which are essential to innumerable natural and accidental processes.

Avicenna establishes that the way that the cosmos is ordered entails certain accidental evils. We have seen that superstructures, like political governance, exist for the general well-being of all. We have seen the ill effects that Avicenna attributes to life outside of civil society. Although not every person can be equipped to rule, at least we are able to be people when situated in a field of action that is proper to our kind. The abilities that come naturally to a person find fruition in this setting. In order for this setting to function there must be some who are naturally disposed to activities other than contemplation. Those endowed with temperaments suited only to the trades or martial arts find exercise for their practical intellects in a properly governed city. In accepting this concession, everyone benefits, given the alternative. Avicenna believes that the freedom to be a person is found under the rule of a just legislator.

We have seen how Avicenna justifies the accidental evil of unactualized human potential by appealing to the general good of civil society. However, one may still be curious as to the eternal consequences of being of one temperament as opposed to another. Those who are natural contemplators detach themselves from the affections of their bodily nature (Remarks 89). To the extent that one does this in life, in death one will have more or less access to happiness in his/her afterlife. Because, as has been
established, some are, of necessity, not equipped to perform the requisite activities to attain such happiness, the majority, surely, will be excluded from this fate.

We are not left to ponder the justice of this inequality. For Avicenna, the torments of the afterlife are due to one’s attachment to bodily affections (e.g. desire, anger, lust…etc) that can no longer be fulfilled because the body no longer exists. If a person spends his/her life fulfilling all the cravings of the body these habits will follow him/her into death (Metaphysics 9.7.18, 23-24). Thus, upon the cessation of the last breath, one who is not properly prepared will fall into a state of suffering, i.e. unrequited longing. However, for those of whom this occurs there is some hope. Simply because a person is born with certain dispositions he/she is not doomed to eternal misery:

But this harm and pain [i.e. the torments of attachments in the afterlife] are not due to something necessary, but to an accidental and alien thing. The accidental alien thing neither endures nor remains. It disappears and ceases with the cessation of the acts that, by their repetition, used to confirm this disposition. It follows necessarily, then, that the punishment according to this is not eternal but disappears and is erased little by little until the soul is purified and attains the happiness that is proper to it (Metaphysics 9.7.23).

Just as positive or negative dispositions are acquired through habit in life, the same is true of the afterlife. Without a material body, in the afterlife one can no longer perpetuate the activities associated with this body. Thus, in these circumstances one slowly becomes un-habituated to the material vices. One can infer that the greater the affection one has to these vices in life, the longer it will take to retrain one’s focus on the intelligible world.

Accidental evils are to be accepted as a consequence of the general good. Further, these evils can be overcome. In life, those who are not equipped to contemplate may act on their natural dispositions and follow the laws of the legislator. In doing so, one will perfect him/herself to the extent that he/she can, given his/her temperament.

Avicenna offers an approximation, i.e. a non-exhaustive list, of the intelligibles that one must minimally conceive of in order to attain such happiness: Metaphysics 9.7.19. For an approximation, it is quite extensive and certainly contains truths not easily grasped or accepted universally.
Avicenna recognizes that, in the cosmic order, everyone has a place where his/her talents are needed in relation to the whole. The city could not exist without artisans and guardians; the existence of these dispositions is an accidental consequence of the human fitted relationship. The fact that Avicenna realizes contingencies for this demographic in the afterlife implies that evil, in the form of a lack of perfection, is not essential to the cosmic mirroring that a city ought to partake in, but rather is an accident of the general good.

4.6. The Urban Organism

In his Republic Plato has Socrates suggest that the order of a just city is instructive in understanding the order of a person’s soul (368d). Viewing a city as a whole, in the same way as we view a person, we can appreciate the organic nature of humanity’s fittedness to the urban field of action. Just as a person requires their appetites to sustain his/her life, a city requires artisans, i.e. those who are focused upon material existence and supply the necessities of life. Just as a person requires anger to aid their physical safety, a city requires guardians; i.e. those who ward off enemies who would take what is not theirs. Finally, just as a person requires a faculty of reason to manage his/her activities and contemplate the Truth, a city requires an administration to organize the affairs of the city and a legislator to hand down wise laws. Each of these divisions is required for the well-being of the whole person or city.

It has been noted in previous chapters that Avicenna accepts that nature does nothing in vain. Looking at this matter from a teleological angle, anything that does exist must have some purpose. James Hankinson expresses the logical consequence of this view when he writes that,

if you think that nature does nothing in vain (at the level of organogenesis), and you think also that you have identified a distinctly functioning part (in this case the affective part), your general teleology will prevent you from thinking that it could be entirely useless, indeed positively harmful, for the proper functioning of the organism of which it is a part (Passions and Perceptions 204, n. 65 emphasis added).
Within a teleological system the functioning of a part contributes to the well-being of the whole. Therefore, the end for which a person, as a whole, exists requires the actualization of each of his/her faculties.

In the case of a city, the end, or general good of urban life causes the accidental evil of unactualized human potential. The guardian and artisanal classes are necessary for a city to exist and function properly. However, this fact ensures that some will not have access to the highest order of human well-being: viz. rational contemplation of the Truth. We have discussed the soteriological effects of this reality. Now we shall turn to the individual human to discover what this means in terms of his/her governance of his/her own person.

In the same way as a city requires artisans and guardians as faculties of its proper functioning, but not ultimate end, the individual human requires secondary and even tertiary ends to support his/her ultimate good. The faculties of the vegetative and animal psyches must be utilized for numerous reasons. First of all, they are necessary for our survival, which in turn is necessary for the stripping of material adhesions that weigh down the rational soul. More directly, each lower faculty serves the ultimate end of the whole person. Without our senses we cannot acquire sufficient knowledge to sate the demands of our end, without appetites we cannot desire our own well-being, and without irascibility we would not struggle to know the Truth. Properly focused, each faculty has a role to play in our ultimate end.

Avicenna agrees with Galen about the proper approach to the bodily faculties. Neither admonishes us to eliminate the influence of these faculties on our activities. As James Hankinson writes of Galen, “the well ordered soul will still [have] passions – controlled, channeled, constructive, but passions nonetheless, psychological drives capable of supplying a bloodless disengaged reason with the fire and commitment of motivation” (Passions and Perceptions, 204). Being a practitioner of the Galenic medical tradition, it is not surprising that Avicenna would adopt this approach to the natural, bodily drives. In fact, Avicenna insists in his Canon that it is one and the same bodily drive (the vital drive) that facilitates both passion and thought (141). Passion and thought
are bound together by sharing a source that is fundamental to being human; that is to say, the truly vital human is passionate about being thoughtful.

Just as some members of a city must set aside their own ultimate good for the good of the whole, the ultimate ends of non-rational faculties, as such, must be set aside for the well-being of the person, as such. The passions cannot meet their ultimate ends without disrupting the well-being of the whole. We cannot think rationally when the passions dominate. The same is true of the senses, appetites, and imagination. Each person and each faculty has its place in relation to the well-being of the whole structure that they exist within.

The idea of a superstructure is that existence conforms to its interstices. Nature functions in such a way that each being has a place in that structure. Functions develop to fit the needs of the structure. For Avicenna, in the case of humans, these functions are the psychic faculties. And in the case of a city, these functions are the individual people with their specific temperaments. There is an ideal order of a city and an ideal order of a person. In both cases, when these constituents function according to the proper order of the whole, they are all better off (no matter their class) than they would be outside of this field of action. Recall, for example, what Avicenna said about people being of a genus dissimilar to humans when outside civil governance. Just as a person is barely human outside our proper field of action, our faculties are barely (or perhaps only homonymously) able to be called what they were once dismembered. For example, the faculty of sight no longer belongs to a detached eyeball, though it once did. The parts function in relation to the superstructure, whole or field of action (as you may have it), and find their well-being in this relation.

Nature does nothing in vain. It gives us form and matter. As Avicenna remarks in his Canon, “The formal (suriyah) causes [of health and disease] are three: temperaments (mizajat) (or pattern of constitution as a whole) and the faculties or drives (qawa) which emerge from it and the structure (the quantitative patterns)” (Canon 12). Avicenna describes the most remote material cause of health and disease, the elements, as forming “the basis both for structure and change (or dynamicity)” and as,
Things which thus provide a basis (for health and disease) get so thoroughly altered and integrated that from an initial diversity there emerges a holistic unity with a specific structure (or the quantitative pattern of organization) and a specific type of temperament (the qualitative pattern) (Canon 11-12).

We are, as O. Cameron Gruner writes in his initial remarks, “a single substance endowed with a natural tendency to realize and maintain the conditions of its organization” (Canon lxx). The elements blend to create temperaments (qualities), which, when fit into (qualitative) structures, form our organs and the facilities for which they exist. Nature takes the most simple constituents of dynamicity (the elements) and by making them exist in common (i.e. blended) with in a fecund structure (or form) we emerge whole functioning beings.

Nature does nothing in vain. Nature also gives us a fecund field, a field of action within which our aims of perfection can flourish. We are the material of the functioning city. I see each class as representing a faculty of the city. Just as we saw in the case of an individual, in the case of a city, the constituent parts (i.e. people) act for the sake of the city and the city exists for our well-being. As is the case with other fields of action, there is an organic and symbiotic relationship between people and cities. Just as an acorn grows from soil of an equable quality (or temperament) and composition (or structure) in relation to its needs, humans flourish in cities of just temperament and structure. And, just as an acorn outside of its proper field will decompose into its constituent parts, so too will a person devolve, taking on animalistic and vegetative qualities when improperly situated.

4.7. Conclusion

When well situated, our task is to be the best representatives of humanity that we can be, given the limitations of our natural dispositions. It is to these limitations that we shall turn to in the final chapter of this thesis. Looking ahead to that chapter, I should point to the relevant parallels that I have just sketched with respect to the composition of humans and cities. For in the next chapter we will look at Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine to see how the diversity of human aptitudes is grounded in our materiality. We could not
have the diversity necessary to make up a well-ordered city if it were not for our material composition. We are human because of our form, but each of us is the kind of person that we are because of our unique blend of elemental qualities. In this way, the part/whole fitted relationship that I have been discussing will carry through this chapter as a guiding theme.

The idea that the lower orders of existence are reflective of the higher orders is Avicenna’s core concept in potentiating a naturalistic account of fitted relationships. The faculties of human consciousness are fit to reflect the ideal forms. The diversity of human life fits into a natural, civil structure of which each person is a reflection; a structure, which in turn, is properly ordered when reflective of the cosmic order. Material reality fits with formal reality such that diversity can merge with unity. In each case, the good of the former is found in the latter as its field of action. With this in mind, the next chapter will ask and attempt to answer the question: if these superstructures (forms or orders) exist, making it necessary that some (whether person or faculty) do not actualize their full potential, what is the natural fitted basis for human class differentiation? In answering this question we shall turn to Avicenna’s Canon of Medicine.
Chapter 5. Medical Fittedness

5.1. Introduction

The subject of this chapter is the role that medicine plays within Avicenna’s conception of human well-being. Reading his Canon, we will find that this science offers another level of analysis that can inform our understanding of humanity’s end. By addressing the material aspect of human existence, Avicenna provides insight into how we can achieve perfecting change in our lives.

Before delving into this subject matter, we should review some of Avicenna’s core concepts relating to human well-being. In the second chapter I emphasized the importance that Avicenna places in a well-ordered soul in the establishment of human well-being. It was explained that human flourishing relies on the rational soul ruling the body that it inhabits. Avicenna explains that if the practical intellect renders itself obedient to the theoretical intellect, then the internal senses “will be attracted to the ideas proper to the saintly affairs” (Remarks 85). The suggestion of that chapter was that, Avicenna would say, if one can get his/her psychic house in order, then he/she would live well.

In the third chapter where I argued that Avicenna’s conception of human well-being does not extend past the limits of civil society. Without the order of a society guided by a wise ruler, humans tend toward our more base activities. Without the guidance of such a ruler our rational souls would lose out to the force of our animal desires.

This chapter presents additional perspectives on Avicenna’s account of human well-being. The methods described above are intimately interconnected with the state of the human body. It will be found that the faculty of imagination is at the intersection of
our well-being. I will establish that, within Avicenna’s psychological framework, the imagination plays a central role in acquiring knowledge. In addition, I will argue that these other methods of potentiating flourishing are subject to one further condition: viz. the state of one’s material body. The Canon is the text where Avicenna explicitly treats the human body in all of its intricacies. Therefore, it is to Volume 1 of this text that I shall turn to as I argue that the material body plays a central role in human cognition and thus, well-being.

5.2. The Elements of Avicenna’s Medicine

Avicenna defines medicine as “the science by which we learn the various states of the human body in health and when not in health” (Canon 9). He goes on to tell his reader that our knowledge of this science “cannot be complete without an understanding both of symptoms and of the principles of being” (Canon 11). The physician must learn the causes of our body’s existence (our principle) and how those causes express themselves (symptoms), such that he/she may restore health to those who are sick and maintain health in those who are not. Therefore, the physician is to understand the causes of the human body from its most basic, elements, to the more complex forms into which they are composed, how this occurs and why. This section will offer a summary of these matters.

Avicenna tells us that a body is receptive to life because of the comingling of the four elements (Canon 146). In fact, none of the potencies of life would be possible if all the elements were universally differentiated. The four elements and the compounds that they create (i.e. the humors) form our bodies. As such, they are fundamental to Avicenna’s conception of life and health.

From the elements, and the elemental qualities (i.e. hot, cold, wet, dry), come the humors and their distinct qualities. There are four humors, each one possessing qualities that correspond to one of the elements. Earth, air, fire and water correspond to atrabilious, sanguineous, bilious and serous, humors respectively. Each of the humors builds and nourishes the organs of the body (Canon 32-40).
Avicenna tells us that the humors are responsible for creating more than the physical organs. The humors are also responsible for the formation of the breath. As a fermenting ale creates both sediment and alcohol, so too do the humors brew the organs and breath. That is to say, the organs of the body are created from the coarser, and the breath from the attenuated particles, of the humors (Canon 143). The breath gives life to organs of the body, bringing vitality to otherwise inert material.

In addition to bringing life to each organ, the breath serves other functions. For instance, as it travels through the body, touching each of the members, the breath takes on the temperament of each of the principal organs (viz. the heart, brain and liver). From each these organs the breath acquires a different drive. From the heart, which is its derivative organ, the breath acquires the temperament of vitality. In its circulation, when the breath touches the brain, it takes on the temperament of the brain. In doing so, it “becomes impressed with the temperament of the brain and thereby becomes adapted for the operations of the faculties proceeding from and reposing in it” (Canon 140). The faculties that proceed from the brain are those of sensation and voluntary movement. In other words, by its presence in the brain the breath enables the animal faculties (or what the physicians call natural faculties) to function. Passing through the liver and taking on its temperament, the breath becomes adapted to the operations of the vegetative faculty (or what the physicians refer to as nutritive).

Having taken on the temperaments of the brain and liver, the breath passes its newly imprinted powers throughout the rest of the body, as needed. Just as each organ requires vitality to live, each organ must possess the ability to receive nutrients. Carried by the breath, the power of the liver is delivered to every organ. While every organ requires vitality and powers of nutrition, not every member is suited to movement or sensation. Thus, in a similar yet restricted manner, the powers of movement and sensation are passed on to organs receptive to these powers. The organs of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell each take on their power of sensation in this manner. Movement is distributed throughout the musculature, and whatever is its like, causing a person’s local motion. In short, it is the movement of breath and its uptake of the temperaments of the principal organs that causes the activities Avicenna associates with the vegetative and animal psyches.
As we can see, temperament stands at the center of our psycho-physical activities. Avicenna defines a temperament as “the quality that results from the mutual interaction of the four contrary, primary qualities of elements” (Canon 17). He cites two kinds of temperaments primordial and realized. That is to say, one is born with a temperamental disposition but this can change (Remarks 105). The collections of humors that make up an organ generate what Avicenna refers to as a temperament. A temperament is defined by the elemental qualities that predominate in an organ. Therefore, an organ may have a hot, cold, wet, dry, or (if all the elements are equally balanced) equable temperament. As we will learn, each organ has a temperament that is suited to its functions. The sum of all the temperaments of the organs in a person’s body creates an overall temperament for that person.

Reading Avicenna’s Canon we learn that, “the average measure of the elements in it [i.e. the whole body or a single member of it], as to quantity and quality, is that which standard human nature ought to have” (Canon 18). Avicenna, here and elsewhere\(^\text{13}\), refers to the temperament as the cause of natural activities. Looking back to the second chapter of this thesis, on well-being, we know that one’s nature determines the activities that constitute his/her good. Now we have learned that the diversity of human ends is due to a divergence in our temperamental dispositions.

Our psychological functions are tied to the temperaments of our organs. The organs whose temperaments are best suited to their faculties’ needs will be best equipped to perform their functions. As we go forward, it will be important to remember this fact. For, it is not only our animal and vegetative faculties that are at stake, but also, as we shall find, our cognitive and rational faculties as well.

5.3. Poetry, Imagination and Cognition

Under the guidance of the rational soul, Avicenna terms the faculty of imagination, cognitive. As we shall find, the imagination acts as the material liaison

\(^{13}\text{For example Canon 220}\)
between the rational soul and the rest of the animal faculties. However, as Sarah Stroumsa argues in her article, *Avicenna’s Philosophical Stories: Aristotle’s Poetics Reinterpreted*, the imagination does not simply fall in line with the rational soul. The faculty of imagination has its own ends that it strives for and must be coaxed into bending to the will of reason. This section will begin by detailing and agreeing with Stroumsa’s position, but end with the introduction of a caveat: viz. that the material element of a person must be accounted for in order for the imagination to be prepared to follow the will of the rational soul.

Avicenna points to fine poetry as a catalyst to the cooperation between the faculties of imagination and reason. Avicenna tells us that “didactic words themselves that come from an intelligent speaker in an eloquent phrase, in a soft tune, and that involve some guidance” aid in the establishment of this psychic order (Remarks 85). Stroumsa explains Avicenna’s position with respect to poetry: its purpose, as a genre, is to produce a state of mimesis, or imitation, in its audience (Stroumsa 198-199). In doing so, poetry stimulates the imagination, being the central mimetic part of our psyche. When poetry is written well, Avicenna tells us, it draws the imagination in the direction of reason, as opposed to fancy.

Avicenna has written three stories that Stroumsa believes were intended to fulfill this noble purpose. These works are called recitals and they are titled *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, *The epistle of the Birds*, and *Absal and Salman*. Some, such as Dimitri Gutas, have believed these to be highly metaphorical works. He has argued that they are designed “to impart to the common people… that much of the knowledge as is necessary for their social and eschatological well-being” (Stroumsa 183). Stroumsa, on the other hand, argues that these works are not designed to teach or initiate disciples into the fold of philosophical truth, but rather to put their reader into a philosophical state of mind. Stroumsa’s position is in line with Avicenna’s position in his Remarks. As she argues, “Avicenna offers [poetry as] a complementary way of learning, a way which is valid also for the philosopher (200). Stroumsa adds nuance to the very blunt demands of well-being. It is not purely through the strength of will that we properly order our souls and flourish. Our lower faculties can and should be made desirous of the guidance of the rational soul.
I concur with Stroumsa’s position in this regard, but I would add to this and argue that there are material prerequisites to the success of this method. In Avicenna’s Recitals, Stroumsa finds a philosophical approach to wrangling the often-slippery imagination. In what follows, I will argue that there are material prerequisites to the success of this method. We will find that the health of the organs that ground the animal faculties must be ensured for even the most moving poetry to find utility.

It is indisputable that Avicenna believes that the imagination plays a central role in human cognition and well-being. As Shams Inati puts it:

The rational soul, whose objects are immaterial and universal, cannot transmit its objects to the common sense, the region where they become visible and that accepts only material and particular objects. The rational soul, therefore, employs the imagination to dress these objects with a material and particular cloak that makes possible the transmission of these objects to the common sense (Remarks 53).

The faculty of imagination is vital to the interconnection between the rational soul and the animal faculties. It is clear that the imaginative faculty is able to perform this task because it is materially grounded. The material element of one’s being is active in making actionable the knowledge that one’s rational soul has generated.

What is more, we know that for Avicenna, natural activities do not find their ends outside of their fitted environment. Avicenna sets out an intra-human fitted relationship. This relationship is between, a) one’s body, as the field of action, and b) one’s rational soul, as the perfecting principle of action. Using this method of analysis on Avicenna’s works, the state of the body is highlighted with regards to the ultimate well-being of a person; if material is not suitable to host, as the field of action, the activities of the rational soul, then the rational soul will be stifled in its ambitions.

In this regard, Avicenna’s Canon is philosophically relevant. Being the sole text to treat in detail the rational soul’s field of action, a philosopher who is studying humanity’s particular well-being must consult the volumes of Avicenna’s Canon. It can, I believe, be read as a practical ‘how to’ guide to maximizing one’s rational soul’s effectiveness in the material world. As we will learn, the science of medicine allows a person to effect the reception that his/her rational soul secures, given its corporeal constraints, in its quest
for perfection. In the following section, I shall first argue that the faculty of imagination is central to human knowledge, thus establishing the material world’s significance, not only in secondary matters of well-being, but rather, in the ultimate well-being potential to humanity.

5.4. The Faculty of Imagination

The faculty of imagination is one of the four internal senses possessed by the material, animal soul. We already know that the external senses provide the rational soul with material with which to work. We receive sensible forms in five modalities¹⁴, each finding its seat in a physical organ. However, given the distinct nature of each of these modalities, it was reasoned by Aristotle and his successors that the holistic way we experience material objects cannot be explained by these senses alone. Since we do not experience a brown, a soft, a loud and a stinky individually when looking, touching, hearing and smelling a dog, it is reasoned that there must be an internal sense combining each of the sense modalities, into a dog, i.e. one object or being. This internal sense is called the common sense (Compendium 61-62).

Those sensible forms collected by the common sense are taken up into and imprinted upon the faculty of imagination. For non-human animals the imagination acts as a storehouse for what is collected by the common sense (Compendium 62). The faculty of estimation is able to use these sensible forms in order to assess the danger that a creature or situation exposes its bearer to, and the respective actions that are warranted. Utilizing the faculty of memory, the storehouse for past estimations (Remarks 50), the estimative faculty compares more immanent sensible forms with assessments made in the past. An animal is thus able to establish that, for example, this newly experienced creature with sharp teeth and claws is sufficiently similar to dangerous creatures encountered in the past to warrant flight and/or fight. In this way, the faculties of imagination, estimation and memory work in concert to preserve the life and well-being of animals.

¹⁴ Viz. sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste
As animals, humans possess these same faculties. Utilizing these faculties alone a person may live, but not thrive, as a human. The rational soul gives these internal senses a higher purpose. For instance, under the guidance of the rational soul the faculty of imagination becomes the faculty responsible for cognition (Remarks 48 and Compendium 64). Avicenna tells us that we are able to “imagine things rational” because of the faculties of the human soul (Compendium 69). He later tells us what he intends by this:

It [i.e. the rational soul] lays before itself the forms that are in the conceiving power and in the remembering (preserving) power, by employing the imaginative and conjecturing power and then contemplates them, and finds them to have participated in some forms and to have differed in some other forms; and finds some amongst the forms that are in these powers to be essential, and others to be accidental (Compendium 72).

Here Avicenna tells us of another function of the faculty of imagination. More than simply a storehouse for sensible forms, it is also active in the process of reasoning.

Avicenna explains the property of the faculty of imagination that enables it to meet these responsibilities,

The imaginative power is constituted such that it imitates any neighboring (sic) intellectual or temperamental disposition and moves quickly from one thing to its like or to the opposite… Were this power not so constituted, we would not have what assists us in the movement of thought that seeks a conclusion by grasping the middle terms and what resembles them in some manner… (Remarks 101).

The imagination imitates whatever is nearest, be it an intellectual or temperamental disposition. It is because of this, that this faculty is able to function as the rational soul’s tool when reasoning syllogistically.

The imagination is mimetically capricious in nature; it does not care what it imitates. If one is able to draw the imagination closer to the intellectual dispositions, it will mirror those dispositions rather than the temperamental ones. This is the function that Stroumsa attributes to poetry, and notably to Avicenna’s Recitals. According to her
argument, good poetry draws the imagination close to the rational faculties. In doing so the imagination is made both the facilitator and the messenger of reason.

We have learned of the functions of the imagination, its nature and proper place in the whole of the human psyche. Three points are to be noted about the faculty of imagination as we go forward: 1) it acts as a storehouse for sensible forms, 2) it is active in the process of stripping essences of accidents (i.e. syllogistic reasoning), and 3) it is an animal, and thus, materially grounded faculty. In what follows we shall find that it is not enough to attempt to draw the imagination towards reason; in order for this method to be successful, one must suitably prepare the seat of this faculty, i.e. its material organ.

5.5. The Material Elements of Reason

The rational soul can neither manipulate sensible forms, stripping them of their material components, nor transmit immaterial forms to the common sense without the aid of the faculty of imagination. Every animal faculty finds its seat in a bodily organ and the imagination is no different. We will find that, in his Canon, Avicenna ties the proper functioning of a faculty to the proper functioning of its organ. Medically speaking, an organ only functions properly when it possesses a temperament suited to its ends. This section will thus focus upon the organ of the imagination and its temperament.

We know that Avicenna defines a temperament as “the quality which results from the mutual interaction of the four contrary, primary qualities of the elements” (Canon 17). Every organ has its own unique temperament that suits its functions. For example, Avicenna tells us that,

Of all the various parts of the body, the skin of the hands and from the hands, the skin of the palm and from the palm, the fingers and from the fingers, the index finger and from the index finger, the skin of the terminal phalanx is the most evenly balanced (Canon 21).

Avicenna ties the equability of an organ’s temperament to that organ’s ability to perceive its proper subject matter (i.e. modality). The more equable a sense organ’s temperament, the better it will function. Thus, Avicenna goes on to say, “It is for this
reason that the terminal phalanges of the index and other fingers are the best organs for sensory perception” (Canon 21). The external senses require equably tempered organs to function at their peak.

The internal senses have organs as well, and as we shall learn, these organs too require an equable temperament to achieve their ends. The faculty of imagination, for example, holds its seat in the anterior part of the brain\(^\text{15}\) (Canon 164). Thus, applying the logic of the external senses’ relationship with their organs to that of the internal sense of imagination, if the anterior part of the brain suffers from an inequable temperament, the faculty imagination will not perform its function properly. When this happens, one’s cognition will suffer, as we find in Avicenna’s discussion of the effects of wine on the brain and human cognition. When functioning properly, the brain has a “mild degree of moisture” and is thus, “able to obey the motions of the thought and the exercise of the faculty of understanding” (Canon 150). He goes on to write of the person who has consumed a sufficient amount of wine,

In inebriety, however, there is a very great inclination towards excess of moisture (which is incompatible with obedience to the understanding)... This moisture prevents it from obeying the intellectual faculty and the tendencies of the thought, except in respect of very material and corporeal topics. It cannot serve in respect of very delicate spiritual matters (Canon 150).

When the brain has an inequably moist temperament (wine being one cause of this), the faculty of understanding cannot accomplish the ends that it only achieves through the material body.

We learned in a previous chapter that wetness and dryness are the qualities responsible for the receptivity and retention of forms. To recapitulate the previous analogy, if you step into earth that is very wet, an imprint will be easily made, but fuzzy and last but a moment. Step in earth that is very dry, and, although the effect would be lasting, there may be no imprint at all. In either case, the imprint will be less than optimal.

\(^\text{15}\) There is a slight inconsistency in this matter, as elsewhere Avicenna claims that the imagination is seated in the “middle hollow” of the brain (Compendium 64). However, I take Avicenna’s Canon as decisive in matters such as these. Thus, in what follows I will be referring to the anterior part of the brain as the seat of the faculty of imagination.
For an ideal print, a balance must be struck between wetness and dryness. As will become apparent, a proper balancing of these qualities is vital to the proper functioning of the imagination.

We can understand better why the level of humidity in the brain is important, according to Avicenna, when we remember that the imagination is a storehouse for sensible forms. The imagination must be equably tempered to receive and retain information sent from the common sense. Just as is the case with a footprint in the earth, the imagination and its receptivity to the imprints of forms is dependant upon the balance of wetness and dryness in its organ. A more retentive, vivid imagination requires more dryness in its organ (Canon 152). However, the drier the organ, the less receptive it is to new imprints. If the anterior part of the brain is too wet, it will receive sensible forms more easily, but they will be dull and passing. For the imagination to function effectively, this part of the brain must possess just the right amount of moistness.

The imagination serves as the rational soul’s point of entry and site of activities in the material world. It uses the faculty of imagination as its field of action. If the anterior part of the brain has an inequable temperament, then the faculty of imagination will not work as well. When a field of action (like the faculty of imagination) becomes corrupted (in this case inequably tempered), the logic of the theory of fittedness tells us, that the activities correlated to that field (in this case the rational faculties) will not be actualized. Thus, because the imagination resides in an organ, and the rational soul uses the imagination for its ends, the material cause of failed rational faculties is remote\textsuperscript{16}, but significant.

\subsection*{5.6. The Dominion of Nature}

While an inequable temperament can cause a failure of the senses, the opposite is true of an ideally equable temperament. In this, Avicenna intimates a deep faith in the dominion of nature. In Remarks and Admonitions he makes claims of extra-ordinary

\textsuperscript{16} For Avicenna a remote cause is one that is mediated through another more imminent cause (Physics 1.12.3).
powers possessed by *knowers*. Control over the weather; animals; and the ability to inflict illness or heal the sick with their thoughts are all within the power of the knower (Remarks 104). He assures his reader, that although they may seem super-natural, these powers are in fact naturally derived. There is no potential, whether prophetic or otherwise, outside of the natural order.

The natural origin of these extra-ordinary abilities is simply a further extension of the human soul’s ability to control its particular body. Avicenna is able to explain, what appear to be super-natural powers, using the substantial differences in mind and body. Avicenna proves to his satisfaction, that the rational soul (or mind) is immaterial by introducing various arguments, including his famous *flying man* thought experiment\(^\text{17}\) (McGinnis, *Avicenna* 145-147).

The human body, on the other hand, is material. Avicenna is not troubled by this substance dualism. On the contrary, it is manifest to Avicenna that our rational faculties hold sway over our physical actions. In fact, as we shall find, the fact that the immaterial, rational soul is able to control the material body that is its host, makes for a much shorter leap in acceptance of what may appear arcane abilities, like his belief in the power to control the weather.

In the same way that the rational soul is able to control its own host body, it is able to affect broader change by reaching out into the wider world. Because it is not different in kind, but rather an extension of a commonly held power, this claim seems quite reasonable to Avicenna. He writes,

Thus, do not think it is far-fetched that some souls possess a fixed habit whose influence reaches beyond their bodies and, that due to their power, these souls operate as a kind of soul for the world. As these souls influence their bodies due to a temperamental quality, they also influence other bodies in the world due to principles belonging to all that I have

\(^{17}\) Briefly put, Avicenna asks his readers to imagine that they are suspended in midair with all of their appendages splayed out, so as not to touch each other. We are then asked to imagine that our faculties of sight, hearing, smelling and tasting are not functioning. Even under these conditions, Avicenna believes that we will not be devoid of thought. The analytic truths of the actual intellect do not exist because of sensory information and thus, at least some thought would be present.
enumerated, since the principles of what I have enumerated are these qualities, especially in a body that has become more deserving of what I have enumerated due to the proper relation it has to the bodies of these souls (Remarks 105).

Here Avicenna is realizing the implications of his theory that the rational soul works though its material body due to its temperament. A person’s activities may be fitted to more than one climatic temperament. Avicenna sees no difference between this possibility and the possibility that activities of the rational soul may extend beyond its immediate body. It is the same natural fitted relationship, only extrapolated to the activities of the rational soul.

Avicenna is saying in the above quote that there are two differences between a prophet and myself (or any other average person): the prophet has 1) a psyche which has developed a fixed habit, and 2) a body which has an ideally equable temperament. As I interpret the first point, Avicenna referring to a regimen of mental training that fixes one’s thought on the Truth. Given Stroumsa’s argument, I believe that Avicenna would agree that this training ought to include the appreciation of poetry. Taking into account the second point, we see that Avicenna does place a great deal of importance in the human body in the achievement of our ends. Those who have come closest to humanity’s ultimate end could not have done so if their temperaments were not amenable to the achievement of that end.

In this section I have shown that there are two parallel and equally important routes to humanity’s ultimate well-being. In his Remarks Avicenna admonishes his reader against the practice of asceticism without the accompaniment of proper knowledge (82). One cannot perfect his/her rational soul simply by segregating him/herself from the material world. If we ignore the material conditions that support our excellences, we will never attain what is most coveted. The two aspects of our being must be attended to for a person to flourish.
5.7. Medical Statecraft

Up to this point, I have argued that, according to Avicenna’s theory, one’s temperament is a deciding factor in the ends that a person can achieve. There are, however, broader implications to Avicenna’s medical conception of humanity. In this section, we will find that medical knowledge has socio-political applications in addition to its primary end.

Avicenna tells us, in the story of Hayy, that “The science of physiognomy is among the sciences the profit from which is paid cash down and whose benefit is immediate, for it reveals to thee what every man conceals of his own nature” (Hayy 138). The science of physiognomy allows one to look deep into another person’s psyche and assess where their good lies. As we know from the previous section, Avicenna points to the temperament as the material cause of one’s aptitudes, abilities and potential well-being. As we shall now find, it is precisely the temperament that Hayy points to as the source of his arcane, yet natural, knowledge.

Hayy offers a demonstration of the power of his knowledge. He reports his findings to his interlocutor in this manner, “IN THEE, physiognomy reveals at once the most excellent of creatural types and a mixture of clay and of inanimate natures that receive every impression” (Hayy 138). Hayy here describes his interlocutor’s natural temperament, which appears to be ideally human. His body is able to receive and retain sensible forms; a necessary stage in one’s progression towards human perfection. In this statement Hayy is pointing to the narrator’s natural, healthy temperament. However, as we shall see, the narrator is not healthy at the moment.

Hayy’s report becomes even more specific to the narrator’s condition. Although the narrator’s natural temperament ought to make him receptive to the dictates of his rational soul, there is something hindering his potential excellences. Hayy assesses more than the narrator’s ideal state when analyzing his temperament. Using his knowledge of the science of physiognomy Hayy is able to deduce that his interlocutor is

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18 Physiognomy is the science whereby one reads a person’s nature from their physical appearance.
capricious; he is drawn as easily to evil as to good by whatever is most immanent (*Hayy* 138). Hayy can see that the narrator’s animal faculties are out of control, and that there is a material basis for this condition, i.e. his realized temperament. The narrator has a potential that is not being actualized because of his inequable temperament.

The powers of physiognomy are not limited to Avicenna’s fantastic stories. We have learned that, for Avicenna, it is not absurd to believe that a physician can infer one’s internal, psychological states from one’s temperament. We know, for example, that a humid brain means a faulty faculty of imagination and thus, faulty reasoning. If a physician can assess the qualitative state of a patient’s brain, he/she can determine if their rational faculties are functioning properly. A physician is inadvertently schooled to perform physiognomolical evaluations. In his story of *Hayy*, Avicenna is able to relate the importance of this knowledge and how it is to be used. Medical knowledge can be used to set a patient on the right path to their particular well-being. The implications of this ability, as we shall find presently, has great potential in the realm of statecraft.

A person who is ill due to a moist inequable temperament of the brain will have trouble contemplating and understanding. A physician, having diagnosed a patient with this condition ought to provide medicines or regimens that will balance the temperament of the brain. An ill person’s inequable temperament may find relief, the theory says, in such cures.

Now consider the plight of the person whose particular primordial temperament tends towards an excess of moisture. A person of this temperament would have a chronically unactualized intellectual capacity. His/her imagination would not respond to the activities of the rational soul, due to the excess moisture in the brain. Within a city, such a person would not be apt to rule or even be part of its administration. But this is not to say that they do not have natural ends. Such a person would find his/her good in other ends such as those of crafting or in being a guardian.

Our hypothetical person would not flourish in an administrative setting. His/her natural ends would not be achieved and he/she would live life unfulfilled. Such a misplacement of a citizen is not only detrimental to that person. An excessively hot-tempered administrator, for example, would be more apt to solve problems by killing
than by subtly assessing the nuances of a dilemma. The city requires the proper placement of its citizens in order for its functions to be carried out properly.

The ruler’s job is to maintain the proper order of the city. To do so, he must see, through the outer appearances of his subjects, their potential excellences. As a rational soul denudes essences of their accidents, a ruler strips away whatever veneer may be present to find each person’s good. In so doing, the ruler acts as the physician of both the people and the city. The people will not flourish if they do not find the activities that constitute their ends, and the city will wither, as a diseased body, if its populace is disordered. Without medical knowledge and its physiognomological application, Avicenna’s theory states, a ruler would not be able to achieve the end for his city, i.e. the well-being of his subjects.

We must care for both sides of humanity’s fitted relationship in order to flourish. We tend to our city, for it is our field of action and we tend to our citizens, for they are the agents. Using medicine’s physiognomological potential a ruler can guide his subjects to their highest relative potential, making possible their ends and the perpetuation of the city at the same time. According to Avicenna’s political theory, physiognomy is a vital aspect to the science of statecraft.

5.8. Conclusion

Society functions optimally when each member has achieved his/her highest relative well-being both in health and in their role in their community. Medicine is not, in itself, preoccupied with the evaluation of natural temperaments so as to better structure society. Healing those who are sick and maintaining health in those who are healthy is the purview of the physician. Nonetheless, this chapter has found that there is an undeniable element of Avicenna’s medicine that makes it relevant to more than simply the physical health of an individual.

The importance that Avicenna places in the human body in the achievement of human perfection has been explained. The idea that we simply must sit down and think our way to perfection has been complicated by Avicenna’s medical theory. Medicine
teaches that we must actively participate in all of the elements that make us human, material and immaterial alike.

In chapter two of this thesis, on well-being, I wrote, “To attain the human end, or good, as such, one must choose to have all of his/her faculties to submit to the right guidance of the theoretical intellect.” This chapter has shown that the choice we have, is conditioned on our material composition. That is, one only has the option of acting so as to perfect oneself, if one has successfully prepared his/her body to interact with the rational soul.

We know that, for Avicenna, the ultimate goal of our activities ought to be rational contemplation. But we have found that practical reason is a prerequisite in establishing this goal. We require moral codes so that we may live in common and we live in common so as to elevate some to the ultimate human end. Despite the fact that only some will meet this end, we see these faculties presenting in all people. However, they are more pronounced in some individuals and less so in others. We all can, to a greater or lesser extent, contemplate pure concepts, disrobing them of their accidental content. We also all can, to a greater or lesser extent, think practically about human affairs; establishing moral codes and tending to the material necessities of life. We have learned in this chapter that Avicenna attributes the variance in our abilities to the accidental evil of our material composition, or temperament.

Avicenna makes no reference to any qualitative difference between one rational soul and another. The only thing that differentiates one human from another is our matter. Our rational souls are all equally rational. It is the field of action that they find themselves set within that distinguishes one rational soul from another in terms of their ability to perform their activities. Seen in this light, maintaining the health of our bodies, optimizing them for the reception of rational activities, becomes a central concern when considering human well-being.

Medicine is a science that offers insight into a variety of elements that contribute to Humanity’s well-being. Aside from its most notable effects on health, Avicenna’s medicine has been shown to incorporate into his philosophical conception of humanity’s good. When viewed as the scientific grounding for physiognomy, medical knowledge can
help guide a person towards the activities that make him/her, as an individual, thrive. Using medicine, Avicenna establishes a scientific basis for understanding the complexity of human well-being and a method to guide people to the activities that constitute their particular good.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

This thesis has been concerned with Avicenna’s conception of well-being, specifically as it applies to humanity. A fitted analysis has been used as a method to understand the complexity and dynamics of well-being within the realm of Avicenna’s natural philosophy. It has been shown that Avicenna intended a being’s good to lie in their natural activities and that natural activities are sourced from a being’s essence. The fulfillment of a life is achieved, according to Avicenna, through the expression of one’s essence. This conception of the good life can be summed up by the phrase, “do what you are”.

This essence-centric conception of the good life offers helpful insights into the prescriptive elements within Avicenna’s natural philosophy. We have learned that all beings act for the sake of the good. In Avicenna’s philosophy we are given a scientific method for determining what that good is. One can study the essence of a creature and determine what sort of life it ought to live if it is to be fulfilled. Through Avicenna’s essentialism, we find a method for describing a being, and through that description a prescription can be inferred as to what good their activities ought to be aimed at.

This thesis has also highlighted certain deficiencies in a purely essentialist approach to understanding Avicenna’s normative stance. While essentialism is a useful method in conceiving of a creature’s good, it misses certain undeniable aspects of reality, e.g. the accidents that necessarily accompany material existence. Because these accidents affect a being’s ability to actualize its essential nature, a being’s activities must be contextualized within its material surroundings. I have thus read Avicenna’s natural philosophy with an eye to the imperfections that he acknowledges in corporeality. This thesis has sought to examine how these imperfections are accounted for within his overarching philosophical rationale. The fitted relationship is that principle that makes
sense of the discrepancy between an essence’s ideal activities and how it is actually expressed in nature.

According to the logic of the fitted relationship, in order to find fruition an action must be met with a cooperative field of action. The successful expression of an essence cannot be decontextualized. Once we begin to look at the normative elements of Avicenna’s philosophy of well-being in light of this fact, the dynamic nature of well-being, as he sees it, rises to the surface. If we, as humans, are to flourish, a field of action that cooperates with our essential ends must be found and utilized.

Humanity’s well-being was the focus of this thesis’s fitted analysis. It was found that the field of action that potentiates humanity’s essential activities is an urban habitat. Our theoretical and practical intellects find fertile soil in the well ordered, just city. Living in common provides the opportunity for those best equipped to spend their days contemplating the Truth to do just that. Without the need to produce the basic necessities of life for themselves, these people can concentrate on ascertaining the Truth. Because we must live in common to attain our human end, our practical intellects must also be put to use. Morality forms the basis of communal life. Navigating the inevitable conflicts that come along with civil society is an exercise of the practical intellect. We have seen that, according to Avicenna, the two elements that make us human find fulfillment in the urban setting. However, not simply any urban setting will do, in the fulfillment of the human end. Just as an acorn needs soil to grow, but will not flourish in marshy soil, a person’s intellect will be stunted, even in a city, if that city is not properly prepared. A city must have a just ruler in order to potentiate humanity’s excellences.

The fitted analysis of this thesis has uncovered further matters in consideration of Avicenna’s conception of human well-being. The human body has been shown to be the field of action for the rational soul. A rational soul will reside within any living human body. However, in the same way that an unjust city will not potentiate its citizen’s excellences, a poorly tempered body will fail to promote the rational soul’s ultimate perfection. By understanding the relationship between the human body and the rational
soul as a fitted one, we can see why some rational souls find greater expression than others.

This line of inquiry led to questions about what, according to Avicenna, the optimal field of action for the rational soul is. Because the rational soul connects to the human body through the faculty of imagination, it was important to consider the nature of the imagination and its states of health and illness. It was found that each of the internal senses (of which the imagination is one) has its seat in a bodily organ. The imagination finds its seat in the brain. Because the brain is the seat of the imagination and the imagination is the seat of the rational soul, it stands to reason that the health of the brain affects the functions of the rational soul.

This hypothesis was borne out in Avicenna’s discussion of the effects of alcohol on the brain and rational capacities. It was found that the temperament of the anterior part of the brain affects the imagination’s ability to function. This part of the brain cannot become too hot, too cold, too wet or too dry. If it does, it will become an ineffective tool for the rational soul. It was thus discovered that human cognition, from an Avicennan perspective, has a material grounding that can affect one’s ability to attain the human end.

This was a significant finding, as the life of pure contemplation is often construed as Avicenna’s account of humanity’s highest achievement. Instead, this thesis has argued, through its fitted analysis, that our material composition has meaningful contributions to make in our ultimate well-being. It was found that we must tend to our bodies for our minds to flourish. We cannot achieve our end through isolated contemplation at the expense of our material health.

Knowing this, it became apparent that Avicenna’s medical theory has philosophical significance. Avicenna’s *Canon of Medicine* was consulted in this matter, as it is his work that deals with humanity’s material constitution. Reading this work as a description of the rational soul’s field of action, this thesis found that a person’s body is telling of his/her character, or natural talents. The kind of activities that a person will find fulfillment in is based on their material constitution.
Returning with this knowledge to Avicenna’s conception of the just city as humanity’s proper field of action, we found that our material being held political significance. A wise and just ruler, schooled in the medical sciences could rationally order his city based upon his assessment of his subject’s temperaments. He would do this by giving each person in the city the duties that best suit their aptitudes. The benefit of doing this is two-fold: 1) each person is able to achieve the ends that his/her material constitution makes most desirable, and 2) the city functions at its optimal efficiency. In this ideal situation, everyone’s labour is valued, as it contributes to the functioning of the city, i.e. our field of action. By caring for their field of action, a city’s citizens ensure that their essences will find expression and they will live well.

In this way, this thesis has argued that humanity’s material condition has a great deal of significance in the achievement of our ultimate end. Both of our most important fields of action require an in depth understanding of our material composition. Our bodies affect our ability to reason and our ability to reason determines our proper place in society. Avicenna is confident that humans are essentially rational animals. This thesis has argued that both elements of humanity’s essence must be cared for and expressed for a person to flourish in his/her life.
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