

# From Identity to Representation: Ibn Sīnā on the Identity of Knower and Known in the Human Rational Soul<sup>\*</sup>

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**Abstract:** The question of the human rational soul's relation with its objects of thought over the course of actual intellection is one of the major problems in Ibn Sīnā's epistemology. Concerning this issue, Ibn Sīnā inherited a wide range of interpretations around the theory of the intellect and the intelligible's identity that was introduced in *De Anima* 3.4 by Aristotle. This study seeks to determine Ibn Sīnā's final position on this theory. However, there are certain difficulties in determining his original view and final position on this issue. In his early work *al-Mabda' wa al-ma'ād*, he accepts the position of identity. And yet in his later *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs* and *al-Ishārāt*, he sharply refutes a similar stance that he attributed to Porphyry – his real opponent remains unacknowledged – and holds fast to the opinion of the immaterial representation of the intelligibles. Yet again, he uses a language of identity (*ittihād*) in the works that come after *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*. To solve this apparent inconsistency and determine his real view, this article offers an aporetic reading of relevant passages in his works. Accordingly, Ibn Sīnā held the view of identity in *al-Mabda'*, in which he made no distinction between direct self-awareness and indirect self-intellection. However, after *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, in which he laid the ground for this distinction, he moved on to the theory of representation and adhered to it consistently in his later works. The questions of the place of Ibn Sīnā's theory of representation in the history of this problem and the possible identity of the real opponent(s) to whom he attributed the Porphyrian position form the body of this article.

**Keywords:** *Ibn Sīnā, the theory of intellection, the relation of intellect and intelligibles, the identity of knower and known, the theory of representation, self-awareness.*

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The idea of identity of the intelligible and the intellect in actual thinking, which is defended by Aristotle in *De Anima* 3.4, 429b22-430a7, constitutes the focus of the classical discussions on the nature of intellection. This expression is considered one of the greatest enigmas within the history of epistemology due to the various asserted interpretations as to how it should be understood.<sup>1</sup> In this study, I will try to expound upon Ibn Sinā's original position, which was based on his reinterpretation of Aristotle's theory of intellection by employing a skeptical and critical language toward the identity of the knower and the known. Many reasons make this subject a remarkable issue in Ibn Sinā's philosophy. First of all, it is quite difficult to interpret his theory of knowledge in a consistent manner without determining Ibn Sinā's final position regarding this subject. Notwithstanding the position of identity refuted in most part throughout his vast corpus, it does seem to be defended quite interestingly in some passages. Thus, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Mullā Şadrā,<sup>2</sup> and other later philosophers considered this as an inconsistency. Second, the question of how the doubts concerning the position of the identity of the knower and the known, which represents a strict realism, would affect the Avicennian understanding regarding the possibility of metaphysical knowledge inextricably arises. Taken into consideration critically, this question can allow for some new interpretations concerning the Avicennian intellection theory. Furthermore, Ibn Sinā severely criticizes the Neo-Platonist Porphyry, whom he considered a Peripatetic, when he deals with the identification of the knower and the known. He also states that Porphyry totally misunderstood Aristotle and thus put forth an absurd theory of intellection that has no philosophical value at

- 1 For some current interpretations of the expression, see C. Kahn, "Sensation and Consciousness in Aristotle's Psychology," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 48/1-3 (1966): 43-81; C. Kahn "Aristotle on Thinking," *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum ve Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 359-80; R. Sorabji, "Myths About Non-Propositional Thought," *Time, Creation, and the Continuum* (London: Duckworth: 1983), 137-57; esp. 144-49; T. de Koninck, "Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself," *Review of Metaphysics* 47/3 (1994): 471-515; I. M. Crystal, *Self-Intellection and its Epistemological Origins in Ancient Greek Thought* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 115-55. F. Lewis, "Is There Room for Anaxagoras in an Aristotelian Theory of Mind?" *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 25 (2003): 89-131; V. Caston, "Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal," *Phronesis* 44/3 (1999): 199-227; A. Kosman, "Perceiving That We Perceive: On the Soul III, 2," *Philosophical Review* 84/4 (1975): 499-519; F. D. Miller, "Aristotle on the Separability of Mind," *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. C. Shields (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 306-39.
- 2 For the critiques of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, see Ö. Türker, *Ibn Sinā Felsefesinde Metafizik Bilginin İmkâmı Sorunu* (İstanbul: İsam Yayınları, 2009), 45-66; P. Adamson, "Avicenna and his Commentators on Human and Divine Self-Intellection," ed. D. N. Hasse and A. Bertolacci, *The Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 2012), 97-122. For the critiques of Şadrā, see İbrahim Kalın, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy, Mullā Şadrā on Existence, Intellect and Union*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 46-59.

all. If Ibn Sīnā is serious here, then he must have an answer as to how Aristotle's expressions should be understood. So third, in respect to this answer, determining Ibn Sīnā's place in the history of the positions vis-à-vis the identity of the knower and the known would be of great importance.

I will begin with the last question and try to determine how ancient commentators understood Aristotle's expressions, then clarify Ibn Sīnā's position in relation to this tradition, and, lastly, try expound the solutions he proposed for the problems he inherited from the commentators' tradition. In this respect, I believe we might be able to clarify whether he has a consistent theory of human intellection in view of the first question. This clarification would also provide an insight toward some discussions concerning the second question.

## I. Aristotle: Why should the intelligibles be identified with the intellect?

Aristotle recapitulates his theory of the identity of the knower and the known in various places. The first place in which it was depicted in rather an indistinct fashion is *De Anima* 2.5, 417a18-20, when he deals with the sense-cognition and states that the sense and the sensible are similar during the actual sense-cognition. In the activity of the sense-cognition, which is handled within the terminology of the action and passion even though the sense is unfamiliar with the sensible object when cognition has not yet occurred, it becomes similar to the senses when cognition does occur. According to this interpretation, that which is based on the identity of action, what is acted on and what is acting in actuality, it is said that the sense, sensing, and the sensible will be identical during the sense cognition *in actus*. The second passage, which presents this theory clearly, is found in *De Anima* 2.12, 424a7-21, where Aristotle states that the sense-cognition should not be taken as the reception of the sensible object as it is. In other words, when we perceive the color red, sensible objects cannot be perceived with their matter in such a manner that the sense faculty would acquire color and thereby turn red. The sensibles are perceived abstracted from their matters, just as wax assumes the form of a ring without acquiring its gold or silver substance. Thus, the formal identity here is specified in contrast to the idea of letting the sense faculty change physically.

*De Anima* 3.2, 425b26, and 426a15 clearly say that "The activity of the object of perception and of that which can perceive is one"; however, this statement is accompanied with an exception: "although what it is for them to be such is not the same." For Aristotle, this means that the actual hearing and the actual sound can be identical when the actual hearing takes place, which points to the fact that a bell

that actually sounds is different vis-à-vis existence than the actual hearing, unless there exists an ear hearing *in actus*. What causes the formulation of such an idea is “the actuality is in what is acted on,” as stated in 426a2-4. In this respect, the actuality of the sound that causes our hearing exists in the sense faculty, which was formerly potential, but became actual hearing due to the effect of the actual sound. Therefore, the actual object of hearing becomes identified with the sense of hearing by becoming what is actually heard when our hearing actually perceives it.

So far, Aristotle insisted that the sense faculty is identified with the sense object during the actual sense-cognition based on two principles: the actuality is in what is acted on during the activity and that cognition takes place in an immaterial way. The view that the human rational soul becomes one with its own objects of thought when it cognizes them is expressed in *De Anima* 3 in such a manner that it follows the line of reasoning mentioned above. Aristotle’s first remark in 430a3-5 concerning this issue is as follows: “In the case of those things which have no matter, that which thinks and that which is thought are the same (*to auto estin to nooun kai to noumenon*).” It is then stated in 3.7, 431b17 that the actual intellect is its own object of thought. Finally, Aristotle states in 3.8, 431b20-24 that the soul is “in a way all existing things” by considering sense cognition and rational cognition as identical with the sensibles and the intelligibles. This is another way of stating that the soul can transform into an intellectual universe by identifying with everything that is subject to cognition.

So exactly what does Aristotle mean when he says that the intellect is identical with its object of intellection? For instance, when we cognize a stone by abstracting it from its material accidents, does this mean that our mind would become a stone just by being identified with the stone itself? Aristotle refutes this view and argues in 431b24-432a3 that it is not the stone that is in the soul, but its form. Hence, our intellect did not become one with the material form that actually exists outside the intellect, but with the intelligible form of the stone that exists potentially in the stone and actually in our intellect. Then, what does it mean to say that our intellect is becoming one with the form of the stone but not of the stone itself? If it means that the intellect knows a form abstracted from its matter, as is the case with the senses, then why did Aristotle need to proclaim the existence of an identity between the intellect and the form of the stone by employing such a powerful expression rather than limiting himself to stating only this? He could have contented himself with a simple idea of immaterial representation without defending the theory of identity by stating that it receives the formal meaning

of the objects, not the objects themselves. Given the interpretive efforts by later commentators to elaborate upon the identity of the knower and the known, most of which digress from Aristotle's original intellection theory, perhaps this would be a safer way compared to the further problems and dilemmas that arise as we line up with the position of identity. Despite all these difficulties, however, Aristotle explains his reasons for defending his theory of the identity of the knower and the known in *De Anima* 3.4. 429622-430a8.

*De Anima* 3, which includes the passages quoted below, seeks answers for three basic questions concerning intellection. The first question pertains whether the intellect is far from generation and corruption or does it subject to corruption; the second one is about the intellect's common and different aspects with the senses; and the third one (expressed in 3.4) concerns how the intellect intellects. For the third question, Aristotle brings three further issues into question: 1) The dimensions of rational cognition and the intellect's relation with the sense faculties, 2) whether the intellect changes during the intellection or is affected by the material forms cognized, and 3) how the intellect knows the intelligibles, including itself. Of these three questions, the last two in particular prepared the ground for the identity of the knower and the known. Aristotle, who raises these questions as an *aporia*, discusses whether the intellect's cognition of the material forms and of itself could be justified consistently with some of the characteristics that he attributed to the intellect. *De Anima* 3.4, 429622-430a8, gives the argument's main steps (Its translation by Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq is, in a sense, a summary. The Arabic equivalents pertaining to the arguments' basic elements are given below):

"[PUZZLE 1]

Someone might ask: assuming that *nous* is simple and impassive and, as Anaxagoras says, has nothing in common with anything else,

[QUESTION] how will it think, if to think is to be acted on? For it is in so far as two things have something in common that it seems the one acts and the other is acted upon.

[PUZZLE 2]

Again can *nous* itself too be an object of thought? (= *wa ayḍan in kāna al-'aqlu ma'qūlan*)

[DILEMMA]

For either

[HORN 1] *nous* will belong to everything else, if it is not through something else that is capable of being thought, and if what can be thought is something one in kind (= *fa-lā shakka anna al-'aqla li-sā'ir al-ashyā'i illā an-yakūna ma'qūlan bi-jihatīn ghayra al-jihat allatī minhā tudrik al-ashyā'*)

or else

[HORN 2] *nous* will have something mixed with it which makes it an object of thought like the rest (= *wa immā an-yakūna lahū khilṭun wa huwa ya'qiluhū makhluṭan*)

[ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION]

Or shall we recall our old distinction regarding to be acted upon in virtue of something common, that *nous* is in a way potentially the objects of thought, but is actually none [of them] until it thinks: Potentially in the same way as in a tablet which has nothing actually written upon it? (*wa yajibu an yakūna hāl al-'aqli mithla lawḥin laysa fihi kitābatun bi-al-fi'l*) This is exactly the case with *nous*.

[ANSWER TO THE SECOND QUESTION]

Moreover, *nous* itself is an object of thought in exactly the way the objects of thought [are] (= *wa huwa ayḍan ma'qūlun mithla sā'ir al-ashyā*).

**For in the case of things without matter on the one hand, that which thinks and that which is thought are the same (to auto estin to nooun kai to nooumenon = wa allati lā hayūlā fihā al-'aqlu wa al-ma'qūlu minhā shay'un waḥidun).**

For theoretical knowledge and its object are the same. (We must, however, enquire why we do not think always). On the other hand, in things containing matter each of the objects of thought is potentially.

Consequently, to them *nous* will not belong, for *nous* is the power of such things without matter; whereas to it [*nous*] there will belong being an object of thought. (= *wa az'umu anna al-ma'qūla fi dūn al-hayūlā innamā huwa ma'qūlun bi-hadd al-quwwati faqaṭ wa li-dhālīka lam yakun li al-ashyā' al-hayūlāniyya 'aqlun li-anna al-'aqla min jihat al-quwwati laysa fi hayūlā wa ammā al-ma'qūlu fa-innahū li al-'aqli mansūbun ilayhi*)<sup>3</sup>

Both issues stem from Aristotle's efforts to retain the characteristics he considered as belonging to the intellect such as i) immateriality, ii) simplicity (429b22), iii) impassivity (429b22), iv) the intellect's ability to cognize everything or its cognitive plasticity (429a18), and v) the uniformity of the intelligibles (429b28) within all sorts of intellection activity. Leaving aside if Aristotle's reference to Anaxagoras concerning some features of the intellect and the intelligibles, and also if the expressions here are intended to be answers for Anaxagoras or efforts to be in line with him,<sup>4</sup> let's look at how the problems are raised depending on the mentioned characteristics.

3 Aristotle, *De Anima*, trs. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1907), 429b22-430a8; cf. Aristūṭālis, *Fi al-nafs*, ed. A. Badawī (Kuwait: Wakālat al-maṭbū'āt, 1980), 74, 4-18. For the counterpart of this passage in Ibn Sinā's commentary on *De Anima*, see Ibn Sinā, "Ḥawāshī 'alā Kitāb al-Nafs," ed. A. Badawī, *Aristū 'inda al-'arab* (Kuwait, Wakālat al-maṭbū'āt: 1978), 104.

4 For a discussion on these questions, see Lewis, "Is There Room for Anaxagoras in an Aristotelian Theory of Mind?" 89-131.

The consideration of the intellect as *simple* and *impassive*, in other words, consists of no composition and nothing affecting it and thereby transforming it during its activity refers to the ideal of cognition having the possibility of acquiring any kind of form without being affected by it in any way, as expressed in 429a15. But this ideal, whose Anaxagorasean aspect is prepotent, shows an inconsistency with the opinion that Aristotle seems to have asserted and accepted in 429a14-15, according to which cognition is a kind of a passion. Here, Aristotle argues in the example of sense-cognition that each passage from potentiality to actuality requires the effect of an actual agent and claims that sense-cognition is a passion in respect of the potentiality of the sense faculty under the influence of the object of sense. He then likens the act of thinking to sense-cognition and states that it also becomes the thinking subject through being affected in a certain way by the object of thinking.<sup>5</sup> There is a contradiction between this view and the first assumption, which claims that the intellect cognizes that which is intelligible without being affected in any way. This is the first *aporia* that Aristotle sought to overcome.

Aristotle tries to deal with this issue in two steps. The answer's first sentence begins with a reference to the old discussion according to which affection can occur vis-à-vis a common thing. In this respect, *De Anima* 417a18-20 asserts that there should be a common thing between what is acting and what is acted on.<sup>6</sup> Depending on this principle, which purports that only similar things can affect each other, Aristotle says that the intellect is potentially the object of thought in one respect. This means that the knower is potentially all that is known in terms of its immaterial aspect, which it has in common with the intelligibles. Although one cannot say that it was one of them before thinking them actually, one can say it has a common property with the intelligibles due to its capability to receive them. One could infer from Aristotle's statements so far that he understood the fact of unaffectedness, which causes dilemma, as not being affected by material things. This would amount to saying that the intellect is not affected by the material forms, and that it therefore retains its characteristics of being unaffected in respect to material forms. And so intellection is an affection. But this affection occurs as being affected not by material things, but by the immaterial intelligibles that it resembles due to the nature of the intellect. Given the manner of expressing this affectedness, it could be conferred that the intellect, which is not among the actual intelligibles when it is potential, becomes one with the intelligibles during its actuality. When the intellect is one with what it intellects, can one infer that it undergoes a change in terms of its substance?

5 See also Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, trs. into English by H. H. Joachim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 314b26-7, 324a34-b7.

6 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 417a18-20; 416a29-32, 416b5-9; *On Generation and Corruption*, 323b30-324a24.

This may harm its plasticity of cognition in the sense that the intellect can cognize everything. When the intellect turns into what it intellects and thereby the intellect's substance becomes that thing, then how can it intellect other things?

The question's second part tries to solve this problem. The key example here is comparing the tablet, on which nothing actually written exists, with the intellect's potentiality. Aristotle makes this comparison and says that the same applies to the intellect, without giving any additional statement. What he is trying to explain here is whether the intellect's substance changes during actual intellection. Just as the tablet's essence, defined as its capacity to acquire any kind of letter to be written on the tablet, does not change with the letters written and continues to retain a potentiality that can also receive other letters, the intellect's substance does not change with the intelligible that it intellects and continues to retain its capacity to acquire other intelligibles. Aristotle's solution for the change and affection during intellection can be summarized as follows: He saw the idea of unaffectedness mentioned in *aporia* as not being affected by matter; he considered that it is possible to be affected by immaterial forms on one hand, and propounded this in a manner that would not transform the intellect's substance. The language he used here contains an implication that allows intellection to be understood as the unity of the intellect and the intelligible. Some contemporary interpreters even claimed that the only way to prove that Aristotle held that there is no change or affection during intellection is to sharpen the language of unity here and to say the intellect intellects the intelligibles not in such a manner that it is transformed into another thing, but to become one with it.<sup>7</sup>

The idea that the knower and the known attain such an identity during actual thinking is reflected in the solution to the second *aporia* in a more complete manner. What causes the second *aporia* is the characteristics of *simplicity*, which is supposed to be possessed by the intellect, and *uniformity*, which is supposed to be possessed by the intelligibles. These two characteristics cause the phenomenon of self-intellection to generate a dilemma. Accordingly, if we accept that the intellect thinks itself, we have to say that this thinking takes place either by itself or through another. In the first case, the intellect has to think itself as an intellect. At this point, the principle that all intelligibles are of one kind comes forth and the following question arises: If the intellect's own intelligible is an intellect, all other objects of the intellect should necessarily possess the characteristics of intellection

7 J. Driscoll, "The Anaxagorean Assumption in Aristotle's Account of Mind," ed. A. Preus and J. P. Anton, *Essays in Greek Philosophy V, Aristotle's Ontology* (Albany: State University of New York Press: 1992), 273-92.

in accordance with the principle. The unacceptable result of this is, for instance, its making the intelligible form of a horse in matter an intellect that intellects itself. As a second horn of dilemma, if the intellect thinks itself through another thing apart from its being the intellect and possesses something that exists in itself that transforms it into an intelligible, the unaccepted result of this is that the intellect loses its simplicity and becomes composite. Thus, Aristotle encounters a dilemma: He would either say that the intellect thinks itself by itself and all intelligibles can intellect themselves at the same time; or he would consider it as something composite by sacrificing the intellect's simplicity. Excluding both horns amounts to the absurd conclusion that the intellect cannot intellect itself.

In order to overcome this dilemma, Aristotle prefers working on the first horn. But he faces a difficulty here: the possibility that the horse or stone that contains an intelligible form in itself can also be an intellect. Obviously, the horse or stone does not possess intellect. Thus, if we continue to say that the intellect thinks of itself as an intellect, we need to say that the horse's intelligible form is totally different from its material form. Aristotle goes through the latter and states that with regard to the material form that exists actually outside, the intelligible form exists in matter potentially. In other words, the intelligible form is not an intellect, because it exists in matter potentially. Its becoming an intellect actually would be possible if it existed in an intellect. When it passes into an intellect, this form becomes also an intellect just as it is, and the human intellect and the intelligible become one and the same because they are both intellect. Thus, Aristotle favours the view that all intelligibles need to be an intellect to solve the problem and concludes that during the act of thinking, the intellect and the intelligible are one. This is true not only during the intellect's thinking of itself, but also during its thinking of other intelligibles.

So far, the explanation seems cogent from the formal perspective and the reader finds an explanation for why Aristotle defended the idea of the identity of the knower and the known. However, the theory causes as many new problems as it solved and gives rise to further questions that Aristotle and his followers need to answer. The first one is about what the identity thesis, which we can follow that it is stated through the self-intellection and can understand it formally, really means. How does the identity of the intellect and the intelligible takes place? What does it mean to be one with the essence of something? What are the epistemological consequences of the intellect's unification with the intelligibles? Although the doctrine gives rise to the questions as such, Aristotle's text contains no answer(s) for them. Philosophers such Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus, Proclus, Philoponus, Stephanus, and Simplicius also asked these questions and gave different answers.

It is important to note that these answers included some points that even Aristotle did not imagine, especially in the Neo-Platonist tradition.

Another question mentioned later on by Ibn Sinā as well is whether the intellect would meet the criteria of plasticity, which found its expression in “the intellect intellects all things”,<sup>8</sup> when it unites with its object. If we pay close attention, one way that Aristotle used to devise his theory of the identity of the knower and the known was to take “thing” in “it thinks all things” as the potential intelligible meaning in an object and to accept that the intellect knows this potential meaning, not the actual material form in objects.<sup>9</sup> From this point of view, Aristotle believes that the expression “The intellect knows all that is intelligible,” which describes the intellect’s structure, and the sentence “There is no intelligible that cannot be known by the intellect,” which describes the intelligibles’ structure, become mutually valid. This amounts to saying that the structure of the intellect and that of the intelligibles have an isomorphic character. If this isomorphism has a strong character in that they both have the same formal structure, just as Aristotle stated in *De Anima* 431b21-22, “the soul is in a way all existing things; for, existing things are either objects of perception or object of thought,” we say that the form of the intelligible and that of the intellect is one *numerically*.<sup>10</sup> An isomorphism of this kind moves rational cognition from being the representation of the form and conceptualizes a strong identification.<sup>11</sup> If such an identification between the intellect and the intelligible exists, then the intellect loses its capability of receiving the structure of another intelligible form. In fact, this contradicts the principle of plasticity mentioned in “the intellect knows all that is intelligible.” Moreover, defending this strong principle of identification may lead to some complicated consequences. For

8 Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3.4, 429a18-27.

9 See R. Sorabji, “From Aristotle to Brentano: The Development of the concept of Intentionality,” ed. H. Blumenthal, H. Robinson, *Aristotle and the Later Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, supplement volume (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 227-59; C. Shield, “Intentionality and Isomorphism in Aristotle,” *Proceeding of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 11 (1997): 307-30; R. Sorabji, “Intentionality and Physiological Processes: Aristotle’s Theory of Sense-Perception,” ed. M. C. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty, *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 195-225; V. Caston, “Aristotle’s Argument for why the Understanding is not Compounded with the Body,” *Proceeding of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 16 (2000): 135-75; V. Caston, “Aristotle and the Problem of Intentionality,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58/2 (1998): 249-98; D. L. Black, “Intentionality in Medieval Arabic Philosophy,” *Quaestio* 10/1 (2010): 65-81.

10 Shield, “Intentionality and Isomorphism in Aristotle,” 324.

11 Based on an interpretation by J. Lear, Shield describes the extreme position of identity as “that the form of a frog is not fully actual when that frog is engaging in archetypal froggy behavior, but when it is actualized in a mind contemplating that frog.” See *ibid.*, 325. For the interpretation of Lear, see J. Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 116-41.

instance, the following analogy may become meaningful: i) when Ahmet knows this intelligible table, he becomes identical with it; ii) Ahmet knows this intelligible table and is identical with it; iii) Mehmed also knows the same intelligible table and is identical with it; iv) If something is identical with something else, it is also identical with another thing that is identical with it. v) Therefore, Ahmet is identical with Mehmet.<sup>12</sup> If we leave the theory of identity or strong isomorphism aside and accept the theory of representation or weak isomorphism in order to retain the characteristics of plasticity and avoid from strange consequences resembling the aforementioned analogy, we reduce rational cognition to the simple resemblance of intelligible forms in the intellect.<sup>13</sup> The difficulty of this kind of representationalist theory is the possibility of removing the difference between the representation of an object in the intellect and its representation on a wall. Consequently, although the theory of the identity of the intellect and the intelligible is useful for explaining self-intellection, it causes a new dilemma as regards the intellection of other intelligibles. One horn of this dilemma eliminates the characteristics of plasticity and causes absurd results, and the other horn makes rational cognition meaningless. Thus, how Aristotle solved this problem is among the important issues of modern studies on Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> Our immediate concern here is not how he solved this problem, but how the same problem reached Ibn Sīnā through the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic commentators and how he solved it.

## II. The Solutions That Reached Ibn Sīnā

Alexander of Aphrodisias (d. c. 200 A.D.), the Peripatetic commentator of Aristotle, gave a new impulse to the theory of the identity of the knower and the known. His *De Anima* and the treatise on intellect, which was also translated into Arabic (*Risāla fī al-‘aql – De Intellectu*), brought an impressive interpretation of the meaning and the reasons for this theory. He explains the idea of the unity of actual intellect and intelligible form during intellection in *De Anima* in terms of self-cognition, just as Aristotle did.<sup>15</sup> However, Alexander introduces the notion of self-cognition as an

12 Shield, "Intentionality and Isomorphism in Aristotle," 326. For the possible further consequences of such an idea of identity, see Philip Merlan, *Monopsychism Mysticism Metaconsciousness, Problems of the Soul in the Neoplatonist and Neoplatonic Tradition* (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff/The Hague, 1969), esp. 4-84.

13 Shield, "Intentionality and Isomorphism in Aristotle," 325.

14 See Caston, "Aristotle and the Problem of Intentionality," 249-98; R. Colter, "Thought, Perception, and Isomorphism in Aristotle's *De Anima*," *Polish Journal of Philosophy* 6/1 (2012): 27-39.

15 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima: The De Anima of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Translation and Commentary*, translated into English by Athanasios P. Fotinis (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1979), 14-87,5.

end. Accordingly, the intellect actually intellects itself only when it passes from the level of intellect in habitus to the level of actual intellect. Prior to this, that is to say, when the intellect is on the level of first potentiality and has not intellected any of the external intelligibles yet, it is not in a position to intellect itself as well. Therefore, Alexander thinks that intellection has two levels: the first intellection tending toward the external intelligibles and the high-order intellection toward the fact that it intellects these intelligibles.<sup>16</sup> The latter one refers to an intellection that belongs to the intellect's own activity and thus to its own essence. For Alexander, the identity of the intellect and the intelligible is read as the co-occurrence of these two activities. In this respect, when the intellect actually intellects, for instance, the intelligible horse, it knows this intelligible directly, primarily and essentially, but also knows itself secondarily and accidentally as a requirement of the first knowing. If we construe or translate this into the identity of the intellect and the intelligible theory, it amounts to saying that the intellect's actual cognition of the intelligible and of itself is "one," that's to say, one's actuality is the actuality of the other. As this conclusion indicates, Alexander did not understand the idea that the intellect is one with the intelligibles during the actual intellection as a strong identity in which the intelligibles are one with the intellect numerically. For him, identity here refers to the fact that two actualities become one activity. Meanwhile, the intellect and the intelligible remain different in terms of their substance and being.

That Alexander draws upon Aristotle's idea of identity of the intellect and the intelligible, which seem ambiguous, from the position of strong identity and understands it as the unity of two actualities, must have been prompted by his effort to avoid the problems that would be caused by the strong identity position. We infer from his statements in *Risāla fī al-'aql* 35.10-36.5 that the motivation here is an attempt to retain the criteria of plasticity in the sense that the intellect intellects everything.<sup>17</sup> The first thing that draws our attention in this part of *Risāla fī al-'aql* is an expression stating that the intellect intellects itself not in respect of being intellect, but of being intelligible (= *inna al-'aqla ya'qilu dhātahū lā min jihati mā huwa 'aqlun wa-lākin min jihati mā huwa ma'qūlun*). The second thing is that when the intellect intellects itself *qua* intellect, it would be deprived of the

16 See V. Caston, "High-order Awareness in Alexander of Aphrodisias," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 55/1 (2012): 31-49, esp. 47.

17 Iskandar al-Afrūdīsī, "Risāla fī al-'aql," ed. A. Badawī, *Shurūḥ 'alā Aristū al-mafqūda fī al-yūnāniyye wa rasā'il ukhrā* (Beirut: Dār al-mashriq, 1971), 35.10-36.5; cf. Alexander Aphrodisias, "De Intellectu," transl. into English by F. M. Shroeder and R. B. Todd, *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1990), 109.4.

ability to intellect any other intelligibles. At first glance the first expression seems incompatible with Aristotle, for he did state in *De Anima* 3.4 429b22-430a8 that the intellect knows itself as an intellect and asserted that the intelligibles turned into an intellect and united with the intellect itself. Aristotle adopted this position because he accepted the antecedent of the conditional proposition that exists on the first horn concerning how the intellect would intellect itself [= “If its intellection itself not through another thing (*mê kat allo*) but through itself”]; and through working on the consequence of “then all intelligibles become that which intellects” said “when intelligibles abstracted from their matter come to the intellect, they become that which intellects”; and, finally, inferred from this sentence the following conclusion: “that which intellects and that which is intellected are one and same during the actual intellection.” To sum up, Aristotle developed his answer against the following question: “What will happen if the intellect intellects itself through itself?” So, the answer was based on the intellect’s knowing itself *qua* intellect. Alexander seems to do just the opposite – claiming with the utmost explicitness that the intellect knows itself not as intellect but as intelligible. In the same passage, Alexander avoids the peril of causing a kind of composition in the intellect, which is pointed to by the second horn of the original dilemma, by saying that the intellect’s intelligibility is a concomitant of its substance, which is defined as immateriality.<sup>18</sup> I could not determine this explicit formulation of *Risāla fī al-‘aql* in Alexander’s *De Anima* in the same explicitness. Nevertheless, his stated reason for why the intellect intellects itself as an intelligible is consistent with his *De Anima*. Alexander thinks of reason as follows: Claiming that the intellect intellects itself as an intellect and becomes identified with itself during such an intellection amounts to eliminating cognitive plasticity with respect to its capacity to intellect all things and makes it impossible to know any other intelligible. Identifying the intellect with itself by intellecting itself as an intellect would refer to taking the structure of a “determinate” intelligible that corresponds its substance, and being structured with a determinate intelligible would constitute an impediment to gaining other intelligible structures. This reason is also found in his *De Anima*, which states that the intellect should not be formed with any determinate form, including itself, for this would mean that a faculty, which is essentially structured, would possess a solidity that would not cognize the opposite structures.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Alexander accepts that the intellect intellects itself through other intelligibles and claims that

18 al-Afrūdī, “*Risāla fī al-‘aql*,” 36, 2-4.

19 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima*, 84, 14-84, 24.

its identification with them would mean that when it knows them it would know itself, or that when it cognizes an intelligible it cognizes itself as an intelligible. This final position toward the identity of the intellect and intelligible shows that Alexander preferred the interpretation of weak isomorphism, which retains the dissimilarity of the intellect and its object in terms of existence, as opposed to the interpretation of strong isomorphism, which could be understood as the unity of the intellect and its object numerically.

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The Neo-Platonist tradition not only dealt with the issues emerging from Aristotle's texts on the identity of the knower and the known, but also with some issues caused by Plato's theory of ideas. The most important issue of the second type is how immaterial ideas would be known by beings like us who live in the material realm, which is found in the dialogue of *Parmenides* (133a-134e). Here, Parmenides says that our knowledge pertaining to ideas shows itself as the imitation or shadow of them; and thus, our cognition pertaining to these separate forms, which correspond to the realities, would remain only on the level of imitation and could not attain the character of real knowledge because we do not know the realities themselves, but only their imitations. However, from the Platonist perspective, real knowledge necessitates conceiving the thing's substance; if we cannot conceive the essence itself, what we have becomes an opinion that is content with imitations or shadows, not genuine knowledge.<sup>20</sup> If the Neo-Platonists would claim that knowing is possible and would define it as the unification of the knower with the known, one of the basic challenges they should overcome is this critique by Parmenides.

Plotinus divides the knowledge types into two in *Enneads* V.9.7: knowledge pertaining to sense objects and knowledge pertaining to intelligible objects. The knowledge of sense objects in the senses shows itself as their images and can only be called opinion (*doxa*). However, the knowledge of intelligibles is not an opinion but genuine knowledge that does not stem from any sense object. As regards this intellectual knowledge belonging to us, Plotinus states: "Insofar as they are kinds of knowledge, they are each and all of the active objects which they think (*epistemai eisin auta ekasta a noousi*)."<sup>21</sup> He rejects the idea that the human

20 For a chain of reasoning in which the problem is developed and interpreted in the same direction elaborated by Parmenides, see Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, transl. into English by G. R. Morrow and J. M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 929-65, esp. 949-51.

21 Plotinus, *Enneads*, transl. into English by A. H. Armstrong (London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), V.9.7, 7-8.

soul can possess only the shadows of the ideas in a manner designed to justify this sentence and to provide the basis for the idea that we can know the essence of things in a certain manner,<sup>22</sup> for it is not an intermediate or intermediary being between the intelligible world and the material world conveying only the shadow of the intelligibles. The human soul belongs to the intelligible world and possesses exactly the same kind of being with the soul that belongs to that world. Hence, it cannot be said that it has a corporeality that would prevent the intelligible forms from existing within it.<sup>23</sup> Plotinus explains the souls' being in such an immateriality, with their existence in the sub-lunar world not as shadow and taking over the role of shaping the sensible world by descending here as they are in themselves. As an example, the table in itself comes here as the artisanship of carpentry present in the souls, and this artisanship turns into an efficient cause that transforms the sensible wood into a table. We say that the image of original table form exists in the external table. If the original table form that corresponds to its archetype in the carpenter's soul is an image, then we will have to say that the image brings forth something, which contradicts the argument that the productive efficient principle is merely the original form. Thus our souls, which have real forms, can unite with them and take over the productive cause's role to some extent within the sensible world. According to S. Menn, this opinion makes sense of Plato's theory that the intellect or knowledge is the Demiurge of the sensible world.<sup>24</sup> As a consequence, our souls are not an image or shadow of anything, but rather they are intelligible. For this reason, it knows everything whose real knowledge it has as it is. As to the essence of this knowing, Plotinus asserts the identity of the knowledge and the known. What is obvious so far is that the intelligible and the intellect have the same mode of existence; and thus the ideal mode of knowing is the identity. However, the exact meaning of the identity of the knowledge with the known in the human knowing subject is not yet clear with regard to this statement. Plotinus conveys the identity of the intellect and the intelligible as the perfect and contentless intellection of Aristotle's *Nous* to his own hypothesis of *Nous* and transforms it into a contentful and unified intellection. Here, the Platonist ideas are brought into *Nous* and the intellect knows them in identity; however, this identity does not lead the intelligible objects to remain in intellect indistinctively.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that when

22 See *Enneads*, V.9.13.

23 For the details of this statement, see Stephen Menn, "Plotinus on the Identity of Knowledge with its Object," *Apeiron* 34/3 (2001): 233-46.

24 Menn, "Plotinus," 245-46.

25 For a detailed explanation, see İbrahim Halil Üçer, *Suret, Cevher ve Varlık* (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2017): 264-77.

Plotinus mentions the identity of the intellect and the intelligible for the human soul, he probably thinks of a meaning as such.<sup>26</sup>

The Neo-Platonist tradition contains three prominent commentaries of *De Anima*. One belongs to Philoponus (c. 490-570), the second to Stephanus (d. c. 622; although mistakenly attributed to Philoponus), and the third one whose real author remains unknown and was attributed mistakenly to Simplicius (c. 490-560). Dimitri Gutas states that Ibn Sīnā might have used Stephanus and Philoponus' texts in his commentary on *De Anima* and mentions some proofs related to them.<sup>27</sup> Depending on the proofs stated here, I will attempt to review the opinions of Stephanus and Philoponus as to the identity of the intellect and the intelligible to point the alternative solutions inherited by Ibn Sīnā.<sup>28</sup>

26 The optimistic attitude of Plotinus on the ontological position of the soul and its relation with the intelligibles those share the same ontological position were not shared by all later Neo-Platonists. For example, Proclus takes the problem in the Parmenides dialogue (133a-134e) seriously regarding how the ideas would be known by the human soul and says the transcendent ideas cannot be known by us. For, they do not exist at the cognition of our type. According to him, neither the cognition based on sense or supposition nor our intellectual cognition manners allow our soul to communicate with these forms. Thus, it is impossible to speak of the union of the human thinking soul with these ideas corresponding to the essence of the things. Proclus states that the cognition of the realities at this level would be possible only by an illumination that comes from intellectual gods and makes us possess a capacity to participate into the intelligible forms. He says some people call this divine inspiration and adds: "The nature of those Forms is, then, unknowable to us, as being superior to our intellection and to the partial conception of our souls. And it is for this reason, indeed, that the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* (249d), as we said before, compares the contemplation of them to mystic rites and initiations and visions, conducting our souls up to the vault beneath the heaven, and the heaven itself, and the place above the heaven, calling the visions of those same Forms, perfect and unwavering apparitions and also *simple* and *happy*." His statements here indicate that he does not consider the identity of the knower and known on the level of rational knowledge but they also indicate that the knowledge of the truth provided by the mentioned identity can be attained in another way. See Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 949 (on 134b).

27 D. Gutas, "Avicenna's Marginal Glosses on *De Anima* and the Greek Commentarial Tradition," ed. P. Adamson, H. Baltussen, M. W. F. Stone, *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic, and Latin Commentaries 2* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2004), 79, 83.

28 The broader commentary on *De Anima*, which is not considered to belong to Simplicius although it is attributed to him, is one of the texts on psychology in which the Neo-Platonist perspective is prominent most. Here Simplicius(?) divides the human intellection into two: simple intellection and composite intellection. The simple intellection refers to human soul's intellection of itself and of the reasons whereas the composite intellection refers to its intellection of composite things. According to Simplicius, the forms we abstract from the caused things through composite intellection bring forth only opinions. Their intellection so as to bring forth certainty would be possible only by being tested through presenting the mentioned forms to the real immanent forms in our soul. The real immanent forms in us are those which were brought by the soul when it fell down this world but then forgot. As soon as it becomes inclined to perceive the things, these are also remembered. The essence of the rational cognition is to present the forms acquired externally to the forms immanent in our soul. As a matter of fact, when we know something in certainty, we know also the forms immanent in us. At this level, to intellect our essence becomes identified with intellecting these real intelligibles immanent in

The view, which exists in Stephanus' commentary on the identity of the knower and the known, reflects one of the most authentic interpretations within the Neo-Platonic commentary tradition. Stephanus says that the intellect's intellection of itself as an intellect does not require all intelligibles to be intellect, for the intelligibles are either real intelligibles that are entirely immaterial or unreal intelligibles that exist in matter. The things that are here claimed to be intellect are not intelligible forms in matter, for only immaterial intelligible forms can be intellect. However, according to Stephanus, neither God nor Ideas can be intellect although they are entirely immaterial because the former is beyond intellects and the latter cannot intellect. Then, being an immaterial intelligible does not necessitate being intellect, which is why Stephanus denies that every intelligible is intellect and prefers to restrict the limits of the intelligible that becomes identified with the intellect. According to him, the intelligible here is nothing but the human soul intellecting itself, and the intellect's being identical with its intelligible means that the intellect is identical with its object of intellection during self-cognition. As a consequence, he considered identity as a situation taking place only within human self-cognition. Thus, it is hereby accepted that any intelligible that does not possess the capacity of self-cognition cannot be intellect.<sup>29</sup>

In his original commentary, the Christian Neo-Platonic philosopher Philoponus recapitulates Aristotle's expression on the identity of the intellect and the intelligible and tries to explain this identity as the intellect's reception of forms in a cognitive or immaterial way.<sup>30</sup> As W. Charlton rightly stated, defining identity as the reception of forms cognitively does not convey any real explanation as to its meaning.<sup>31</sup> Philoponus' main explanations are found in 83, 37-48, where he states that the intellect cannot be identical with the intelligibles vis-à-vis its substance. In other words, the intellect does not acquire identity in the sense of becoming one with its intelligible numerically:

our essence. As Simplicius states: "So 'theoretical knowledge and what is known in this way', in so far as it is already being contemplated, and no longer in potency, 'are the same', because the knowing reason turning to itself, having the object of knowledge in itself and being determined in accordance with it in the activity, sets the cognition in accordance with the determinant of the object of cognition." See Simplicius (?), *On Aristotle's On the Soul 3.1-5*, translated into English by H. J. Blumenthal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 234,2 0-240,1, esp. 236,25-29.

29 See Philoponus (?), *On Aristotle's On the Soul 3.1-8*, transl. into English by W. Charlton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 527, 5-528, 25; 532, 20-534, 15.

30 Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect (de Anima 3.4-8)*, transl. into English by W. Charlton, F. Bossier (London: Duckworth, 1991), 9, 11-12.

31 Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect (de Anima 3.4-8)*, p. 17.

It does not, when it understands God, become God, or when it understands heaven or earth, become any of these things. But since the accounts of all things are in the soul, the accounts of the better things which are superior to it in the form of representations (*eikonikôs*), the accounts of less good things which are posterior to it as exemplars (*paradeigmatikos*), when it actually produces the accounts which are in it it actually becomes what they are either, as I said, in a representative or in an exemplary way, as we say that the image of Socrates becomes what Socrates is, or that the accounts in the art of building become what the house is.<sup>32</sup>

Here, Philoponus clearly points out that the intelligibles exist in the intellect through representation. The theory of representation, which likens the mind to a mirror, at first glance seems to be inconsistent with the identity of the intellect and intelligible, and it is impossible to see it as an explanation designed to explain this identity. That Philoponus considers the image of Socrates and its being in the mind as similar also justifies this statement. However, when the self-cognition that exists at the heart of the discussion of identity is mentioned, Philoponus suggests a new consideration of identity. Philoponus takes the first horn of the Aristotle's dilemma as the starting point and accepts that the intellect cognizes itself as intellect and thus each intelligible must be an intellect.<sup>33</sup> In his answer to the question as to why the intelligibles should be intellect, he argues that there are two kinds of them: those that are separate in themselves and those that are separated or abstracted by an intellect. According to Philoponus, the separate intelligibles in themselves (e.g., God and angels) are essentially intellects themselves, for intellection is the only possible actuality of immaterial things.<sup>34</sup> As for the intelligibles abstracted from material substances, he suggests another explanation and hereby returns to the self-cognition context. Following Alexander of Aphrodisias, he says that "as to intellect something means to become that thing, the intellect intellects itself at the same time when it intellects something."<sup>35</sup> For example, a horse or a triangle becomes actually intelligible when the intellect represents them. As these intelligibles abstracted from their matter acquire actuality, the intellect also acquires actuality and intellects itself. The identity of the intellect and the intelligible as the unity of the actuality of intelligibles and that of intellect refers only to the weak identity. When the theory of representation and the Alexandrian weak identity theory in the sense of the unity of actualities are united, the outlines

32 Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect (de Anima 3.4-8)*, 83, 37-48.

33 Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect (de Anima 3.4-8)*, 33, 96-7.

34 Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect (de Anima 3.4-8)*, 35, 19-27.

35 Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect (de Anima 3.4-8)*, 20, 91-21, 93; 21, 8-10.

of Philoponus' intellection theory become apparent. Accordingly, he thinks that although the immaterial representation of things in the intellect exclude the idea of identity, it may also be consistent with the idea of a weak identity.

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The manner in which the theory of identity was reflected on the philosophical literature in the Islamic world prior to Ibn Sīnā is of great importance. Al-Kindī, one of those who wrote on this issue, expounds upon it in his *Risāla fī al-'aql* by proclaiming that he will convey Aristotle's views in a descriptive way.<sup>36</sup> He states that when the potential intellect is united with the intelligible form, the distinction between them would disappear and the intellectual form and the intellect would become the same thing (*lam takun hiya wa al-ṣūra al-'aqliyya mutaghāyira*). The reason why this distinction disappears during the actual intellection is that the soul is a simple and unchangeable substance (*li-annahā laysat bi-munqasimatīn fatataghāyar*)<sup>37</sup> – a reason that parallels that of *De Anima*. As the soul is simple and immaterial, it should not be affected by the things that it knows because it receives intelligible immaterially. Its reception of an intelligible form that conforms to its own immaterial structure eliminates the peril of change by being affected with its matter. During such an immaterial reception, the intellect and its intelligible become one vis-à-vis sharing the same structure (*fa idhā ittaḥadat bi-hā al-ṣūra al-'aqliyya fa-hiya wa al-'aqlu shay'un wāḥidun, fa-hiya 'āqilatun wa ma'qūlatun*).<sup>38</sup> As a matter of fact, al-Kindī introduces an identity of the intellect and intelligible in line with *De Anima*. However, no sentence as to what the unification of the intellect with its intelligible means beyond a plain isomorphism appears in his treatise. Al-Kindī, who mentions such an identity concerning the human rational soul, avoids such an approach when it comes to the relation between the divine agent intellect and the human intellect. In order to avoid the problems that would be caused by the unification of the human rational soul and divine intellect, he says that the knower and the known in this relationship are separate.<sup>39</sup> As a result, he maintains his distance from the identity with the divine intellect and speaks of the human rational soul having some kind of unity with other intelligibles. On the other hand, he leaves any further explanations concerning the essence of the mentioned unity possible, because he considers them as a summary of the relevant section of *De Anima* and does not mention the same topic elsewhere in his works.

36 al-Kindī, "Risāla fī al-'aql," ed. M. A. Abū Rida, *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya* (Cairo: Dār al-fīkr al-Arabī, 1950), 353.

37 al-Kindī, "Risāla fī al-'aql," 356,10-12.

38 al-Kindī, "Risāla fī al-'aql," 356,13-14.

39 al-Kindī, "Risāla fī al-'aql," 356, 14-357, 2.

The next philosopher who elaborates on this issue is al-Fārābī. The obvious distinction he made between the kind of self-intellection that belongs to separated and human intellects largely oriented his approach to this issue. In his *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, al-Fārābī links the property of intellection with immateriality and states that the separated intellects are entirely immaterial, meaning that intellection belongs to them due to their essences. In this respect, the First and the separated intellects intellect themselves in terms of being an intellect or an immaterial substance. The thing whose existence or essence is the intellect does not need to intellect any intelligibles in the external world, for its essence suffices to intellect itself (*li anna alladhī huwiyyatuhū ‘aqlun laysa yaḥtāj fī an-yakūna ma‘qūlan ilā dhātin ukhrā khārijatin ‘anhā ta‘qiluhū, bal huwa bi-nafsihi ya‘qilu dhātahū*).<sup>40</sup> That is why the intellect, that which intellects, and that which is intellected are identical in the separated intellects. However, as far as the human being concerned, al-Fārābī mentions neither such a type of self-intellection nor the identity during self-intellection. For him the essence of the human being is also intelligible; however, its intelligibility takes place with regard to another intellect’s intellection of it. Hence the human is potentially intelligible at first in respect of its essence. But when an intellect intellects it afterwards, it becomes actually intelligible. Thus, as far as the human being is concerned, one cannot say that what is intellected is an intellect identical with the one who intellects it (*fa-laysa idhan al-ma‘qūlu min al-insān huwa alladhī ya‘qilu*), for unlike the separate intellects, we cannot intellect ourselves as regards being an intellect (*wa lā ‘aqlunā naḥnu min jihati mā huwa ‘aqlun huwa ma‘qūlun, wa naḥnu ‘āqilūn lā bi-anna jawharanā ‘aqlun*).<sup>41</sup> In this way, al-Fārābī attributes the quality of being intelligible in itself to the separate intellects and accepts that the human being becomes intelligible either by being intellected by another intellect or intellecting itself by intellecting an external intelligible.

In his *Risāla fī al-‘aql*, al-Fārābī answers what kind of relation the intellect possesses with its own objects of thought during the second type of intellection. Here, he overtly adopts the idea of unification and uses strong expressions to represent this view. At the level of actual intellect, the actuality of the intelligibles and that of the intellect is one and the same thing (*fa-innā ma‘qūlatun bi-l-fi’l wa annā ‘aqlun bi-l-fi’l shay’un wāḥidun bi-‘aynihi*). It appears that there is no separation between the intellect and the intelligible form; on the contrary, the essence of the intellect itself becomes the intelligible forms (*bal hādhihi al-dhāt*

40 al-Fārābī, *Āra’ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, ed. A. N. Nadir (Beirut: Dār al-mashriq), 2002, 46-47.

41 al-Fārābī, *Āra’ ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, 47.

*nafsuḥā taṣīru tilka al-ṣuwar*).<sup>42</sup> Al-Fārābī explains how this unification took place by the example of the wax quoted above from Aristotle's *De Anima*: Just as the wax receives the ring's form without taking the matter of gold or silver in such a manner that there would be no difference between its quiddity and that of the ring, the intellect also takes the intelligible and becomes one with it.<sup>43</sup> Although such expressions reflect the strong identity position in the sense that the intellect and the intelligible are one numerically at first glance, it is inappropriate to infer this outcome from the expressions such as "the intellect and the intelligible are one" or "the intellect is the intelligible itself during the intellection" without further explanation. Instead, al-Fārābī is possibly claiming that the actuality of the intellect and that of the intelligibles take place simultaneously and that the intellect and the actuality obtained by the intelligibles when they come to the intellect is one. According to this view, what is obtained by the intelligible is actual intellectuality, and the intellect becomes actual intellect by its actuality. Thus, we would say that both of their actualities are identical. As al-Fārābī does not allow the intellect to intellect itself independent from the intelligibles or to possess substantial independence that would bestow on them the possibility of becoming intelligible, the notion of intellection is construed as becoming actual by uniting with the intelligibles and thereby obtaining its own substance.

After al-Fārābī, his student Yaḥyā b. 'Adī and the Christian Aristotelians of Baghdad tackled the same issue. Their views will be dealt with below, where we will seek to determine the interlocutors of Ibn Sīnā's critiques of the theory of identity.

### III. Ibn Sīnā

Ibn Sīnā's approach to the identification of the intellect and the intelligibles is formed around a rather sharp refutation at first sight. In his *al-Shifā'*/*al-Nafs* and *al-Ishārāt*, he severely criticizes Porphyry for defending and propagating that the intellect is identical with the intelligibles or with the agent intellect and claims that the human rational soul can never be identical with the intelligibles. However, this claim needs some explanation because it gives rise to certain questions. First of all, what does Ibn Sīnā understand by the identification of the intellect and the intelligible when he rejects it? Throughout this problem's history, Aristotle's statement in *De Anima* 4.3 that "the intellect becomes identical with

42 al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-'aql*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: 1938), 14.

43 al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-'aql*, 14.

its intelligibles during the actual intellection” is considered almost a given, and instead of refusing the unity of the intellect and the intelligible, it was preferred to interpret it in different ways. Furthermore, Ibn Sinā mentions some conditions in which the human rational soul can be identical with its intelligible in such texts as *al-Mabda’ wa al-Ma’ād*.<sup>44</sup> Given those two situations some questions become crucial, such as what kind of unity did Ibn Sinā refute and why did he do so, how he understands identity, and if he is consistent in this refutation after taking the relevant passages into consideration *in toto*. Second, if he refutes the idea of identity, then how does he explain the notion of self-intellection, which is this idea’s most basic constituent, and how he distinguishes himself from previous commentators concerning this explanation need to be explained as well. Third, if one refutes identity, how can the notion of intellection as a kind of representation of the intelligibles overcome being reduced to a simple similarity with the objects of intellection? In this respect, I will examine what sort of identity Ibn Sinā refutes, particularly in his rebuttal on Porphyry, and then attempt to find out the real addressee of this refusal and see how he interprets the idea of unity he inherited from the *De Anima* tradition.

### **I. The Rebuttal of Porphyry: Difficulties of Strong Identity Position**

The first thing to be treated concerning the first issue is to clarify the position refuted by Ibn Sinā. In *al-Shifā’/al-Nafs* V.6, Ibn Sinā says that the soul’s cognition of itself can make it both the intellect and the intelligible; however, during its cognition of other intelligible forms, one cannot speak of the unity of the intellect and the intelligible.<sup>45</sup> The most important fact that led Ibn Sinā to this sharp rejection is the criteria of the plasticity of cognition, which means the intellect possesses the capability of cognizing all intelligibles. In this vein, Ibn Sinā states although the soul is actual in some cases, it is always potential vis-à-vis its essence (*fa innahā fī jawharihā fī al-badan dā’iman bi-l-quwwati ‘aqlun, wa in kharaja fī umūrin mā ilā-l-fīl*).<sup>46</sup> Thus, the most crucial disadvantage brought about by the strong identity position attributed to Porphyry is that the intellect, which is identified with the structure of any intelligible, lost its capacity to receive the formal structure of other intelligibles. Retaining this criteria, Ibn Sinā states that such a sentence

44 Ibn Sinā, *al-Mabda’ wa al-Ma’ād*, ed. Abdullah Nūrānī (Tehran: 1984), 6-10. For an analysis of these passages, see Ö. Türker, *İbn Sinā Felsefesinde Metafizik Bilginin İmkânı*, 51-55.

45 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā’/al-Nafs*, ed. Hasanzāda Āmulī (Qum: Bustān-i kitāb, 2008), 327, 8-9.

46 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā’/al-Nafs*, 327, 9-10.

as “The soul itself becomes the intelligibles themselves” (*wa mā yuqālu min anna dhāt al-nafs taşīru hiya al-ma’qūlāt*) denotes a state of impossibility.<sup>47</sup> He also says that there is no reasonable way to make this expression comprehensible, which he understands as the becoming of what intellects and what is intellected is one numerically. He develops two main arguments to refute this idea: the impossibility of something becoming another thing and another one based on the idea of the plasticity of cognition, along with two sub-arguments.

In the first argument, Ibn Sīnā investigates the meaning of a thing becoming another thing. So, if this expression is used in the sense of a thing losing its form and acquiring a new one, just as water, when boiled, loses its original form, then one could not say that a thing becomes another thing. Here, that thing disappears so as to denote a “generation” and that that thing was replaced by another thing. If we say that the intellect is intelligible in this sense (e.g., when we intellect the intelligible horse), then the intellect should have disappeared leaving behind only the intelligible horse. If this is not the case when one speaks of one thing becoming another thing, there are two possibilities: When a thing becomes another thing, either the previous thing retains its existence or it does not. In the first case, the second thing’s existence becomes a problem. Does it retain its existence or not. If it exists, then there will be two existents instead of one, for the first thing still exists. This indicates that no union took place. If the second thing disappears, we cannot say that the new thing into which the first thing transformed exists. In other words, the first thing remained as it is and, again, no union took place. If the first but not the second thing disappears, then we cannot speak of an existent that united with the second thing. This situation refers to becoming in the sense that a form disappeared and another one took place, as was mentioned at the very beginning. As a matter of fact, if something loses its existence when it becomes another thing, we speak of a thing’s disappearance and another thing’s taking it place, not the union of the two things. If both things continue to exist, we will speak of some kind of composition as opposed to identity. If the second thing disappears, that which is claimed to be one with, we would speak of a thing that has already not existed. As a result, in all cases the unity of the two things becomes void.<sup>48</sup> Taken with this analysis, Ibn Sīnā claims that the statement “The soul becomes the intelligible itself” is totally incomprehensible and adds:

47 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’/al-Nafs*, 327, 11-328, 1.

48 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’/al-Nafs*, p. 329.

The person who has deluded people the most in this matter is the person who has composed the Isagogy for them. He [i.e., Porphyry] was bent on speaking imaginary, poetic and mystical speeches in which he contented himself and others with imagination. For this, the people of discernment point to his books *On Intellect and the Intelligibles* and book *On the Soul*.<sup>49</sup>

Ibn Sinā defines the complication that appears when this “meaningless” view he attributed to Porphyry is accepted as the loss of “the plasticity of cognition.” One of the arguments based on the criteria of plasticity is first established on the idea of the possibility of new knowledge and second on the relation of that knowledge to our previous knowledge. In the context of the first argument, Ibn Sinā states that if the human soul is one of the forms it receives, then it will be identified with the actual nature of this form and bereft of the potentiality of receiving the form of any new knowledge at all since it becomes the actuality itself. For the soul to preserve its absolute potentiality in the sense of always receiving new forms, it needs not to be identified with any of the forms it has received. The second argument continues the first one and investigates the situation of the forms to be received after the first form with which we united. Accordingly, if we say that after we received another form, this new form is not different from the previous form in that it is identical with the intellect, then there will be no difference between receiving or not receiving that new form, because as the new form became one with the previous form, it would contain no newness and add nothing to our cognition. If we say that this received form differs from the previous one and claim that the soul is identified with this form in addition to the previous one, then the soul would lose its previous identity and acquire a new one. But that will lead to an impossibility, such as the soul’s losing its own identity after receiving each new form.<sup>50</sup>

The claim for which Ibn Sinā developed a counter-argument was that the intelligibles turn into what intellects when they come to the intellect and become identified with it. As far as Ibn Sinā explicated, this position interprets the claim that when the intelligibles come to the mind they become one with it – which is presented as solution to the problem of self-cognition in *De Anima* 3.4 – as they become numerically one with the intellect and turn into something that intellects. His final assertion here gives the gist of his own theory of intellection: “No intelligible becomes intellect when it comes to the mind; what intellects is

49 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifāʾ/al-Nafs*, 328, 13-329, 3.

50 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifāʾ/al-Nafs*, p. 330.

the intellect itself.”<sup>51</sup> We will return the details of this sentence in our following investigation of what Ibn Sīnā understood from the unity of the intellect and the intelligible. Now, let’s look at how the critique of Porphyry expresses itself in *al-Ishārāt*, where Ibn Sīnā centers Porphyry again and says:

A group of predecessors (*qawman min al-mutaşaddirîn*) believe that if any intellectual substance knows an intelligible form it becomes the same as this form (*şāra huwa hiya*).<sup>52</sup>

To them belonged a man known as Porphyry. He composed a book on the intellect and the intelligibles. This book is praised by the Peripatetics, yet it is full of bad ideas. They themselves know that they do not understand it, nor does Porphyry himself (understand it either). A man of his time contradicted him, and he contradicted that contradictor with what is more inferior than [the arguments] of the former.

You must know that the statement of him who says “A thing becomes another thing not by of change from one state to another and not by way of composition with another thing so that a third would be produced from these two; rather inasmuch as it was one thing and then became another” is unintelligible poetic statement.”<sup>53</sup>

According to him the Porphyrians’ claims consist not only of unity with the external intelligibles but also, and at the same time, with the Active Intellect. In order to show the impossibility of the first situation, he suggests the following options as to what it means for a thing to become another thing. When the human rational soul knows A, i) either it remains without any difference or ii) its situation before intellecting A and the one that appears after intellection is different. In the first case, as the soul’s intellecting and not intellecting is one, this would not be a valid choice. If a difference occurs in the soul and the previous situation disappears, then what disappears in the present case is i) either a state of the soul ii) or its substance. If what disappears is the soul’s substance, it will be said that the soul disappeared and another thing took its place, akin to water evaporating and becoming another thing. As this transformation, which refers to a thing’s losing its original form and obtaining a new one eliminates the first element, we would speak not of its union with something, as claimed by the Porphyrians, but only of its disappearing. According to Ibn Sīnā, the statement “a thing becomes another thing” denotes either a change of state or a substantial generation in the sense of

51 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’/al-Nafs*, 329,14-17.

52 Ibn Sīnā, *Remarks Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics*, transl. Shams Inati (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 169; cf. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt*, ed. Mujtabā al-Zārī’ī (Qum: Maktabat al-i’lām al-is-lāmī, 1380), VII.7. 324,15.

53 Ibn Sīnā, *Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics*, p. 171; cf. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt*, VII,10-11. 326,7-327,1.

losing one form and receiving another one. To say that a thing becomes another thing refers to a meaning apart from these two meanings amounts to nothing but going beyond the intellect's judgment and uttering something poetical. His second critique is against the theory of unity with the agent intellect. In this respect, the Porphyrians understand the conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with the Active Intellect as becoming the Active Intellect itself and believe that when the rational soul ascends to the degree of the acquired intellect, the Active Intellect unites with it and becomes the acquired intellect. In other words, uniting with the Active Intellect is considered either as a total or a partial unity. He contends that the first option leads to a situation that would make it possible for us to possess the Active Intellect entirely when we intellect any intelligible once and obtain its entire content at one moment - a situation that obviously excludes the notion of intellection as a perfection of the human soul. Moreover, something as such means that an individual who unites with the Active Intellect would make it his/her own, which would cause an impossibility that would prevent other individuals from being identified with it. On the other hand, if individuals are only partially identified with the Active Intellect, this would mean that the Active Intellect is identified with different individuals simultaneously. However, because of its immaterial substance, the Active Intellect cannot accept fragmentation as such.<sup>54</sup>

## 2. Who is the Respondent of the Refutation: Porphyry or the Porphyrians?

Whether the strong identity position actually belongs to Porphyry and whether he wrote a text carrying the title attributed to him is a crucial point at issue. If Porphyry has no such a view, then who are the Peripatetics who supposedly praised and disseminated this view? In an article published in 1956, J. Finnegan states that Porphyry could not have defended the view that Ibn Sinā attributed to him and that this particular version is an extreme view propounded by some Muslim philosophers based on the works written Porphyry, Alexander of Aphrodisias, al-Fārābī, and other philosophers.<sup>55</sup> Finnegan further notes that the "Porphyreans" understood "the intellect and intelligible are identical during intellection" literally and claimed that there is an ontological identity between two things. When Ibn Sinā considers this view as wrong and an extreme interpretation of Aristotle, he

54 Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt*, 325,13-326,5.

55 J. Finnegan, "Avicenna's Refutation of Porphyryus," *Avicenna Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta: 1956, pp. 187-88; 190-96.

addresses to them.<sup>56</sup> In order to explain how the Porphyreans attained such an advanced opinion, Finnegan appeals to his possible sources such as Alexander, Plotinus, and al-Fārābī and how they also used these sources. Finally, he speaks about whether the Porphyreans correspond to the Aristotelian philosophers in Baghdad whom Ibn Sīnā often criticizes.<sup>57</sup> In an article published in 2007, P. Adamson gives a satisfactory answer by the help of Carl Ehring-Eggert's 1990 study.<sup>58</sup> Adamson points out that in his *al-Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm mentions the two works attributed to Porphyry: *On The intellect and the Intelligible* and seven-chapter Syriac-language *The Refutation of Longinus on the Intellect and the Intelligible*.<sup>59</sup> He also states that both works are, in fact, the same, but that the first one corresponds to an older translation.<sup>60</sup> Adamson remarks this reference proves that this work of Porphyry had Arabic and Syriac translations and answers the question about the work's content through Porphyry's own words in his *Vita Plotini*. Here, Porphyry elaborates whether the Platonist ideas are outside the intellect self-subsistently or in the intellect. He seeks to defend the second view, belonging to Plotinus' followers, against that of Longinus, who defends the first view.<sup>61</sup> As a result, Adamson identifies the work that Ibn Sīnā attributed to Porphyry with the treatise mentioned in *Vita Plotini* depending on the name of the work listed in *al-Fihrist*. However, he rightly claims that Porphyry does not adhere to the identity of the intellect and the intelligible view of the same type that Ibn Sīnā attributed to him.<sup>62</sup> Porphyry claims that ideas exist in the divine intellect with his teacher Plotinus, but no idea of his has reached us about the human rational soul's identity with the intelligibles. If Porphyry had no such view, then who are the Peripatetic philosophers defending it and who were refuted by Ibn Sīnā? Adamson elaborated upon Finnegan's "Peripatetics of Baghdad." As quoted by Adamson, according to

56 Finnegan, "Avicenna's Refutation of Porphyryius," 188.

57 Finnegan, "Avicenna's Refutation of Porphyryius," 196.

58 P. Adamson, "Porphyryius Arabus on Nature and Art: 463F Smith in Cotext," ed. G. Karamanolis, A. D. R. Sheppard, *Studies on Porphyry* (London: University of London, Institute of Classical Studies, 2007), 141-63 (Appendix 1: Avicenna, Yahyā ibn 'Adī, and Porphyry's theory of intellect, 155-60); Carl Ehring-Eggert, *Die Abhandlung über den Nachweis der Natur des Möglichen von Yahyā ibn 'Adī (gest. 974 A.D.)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Institut für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften, 1990), 85-86.

59 For these works, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Rizā Tajaddud (Tehran: 1971), 313.

60 P. Adamson, "Porphyryius Arabus on Nature and Art: 463F Smith in Context," 155.

61 Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangements of His Words, translated into English by Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by Their Students* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 35-39. On this subject, see also İ. H. Üçer, "Antik-Helenistik Birikimin İslam dünyasına intikali: Aristotelesçi Felsefenin Üç Büyük Dönüşüm Evresi," ed. M. Cüneyt Kaya, *İslam Felsefesi, Tarih ve Problemler* (İstanbul: İsam Yayınları, 2013), 53-56.

62 P. Adamson, "Porphyryius Arabus on Nature and Art: 463F Smith in Cotext," 156.

Carl Ehrig- Eggret the respondent of Ibn Sinā's critique might be Yahyā b. 'Adī and his school.<sup>63</sup> The passages quoted by the authors belong to Ibn 'Adī's *Risāla fī al-ta'annus*, which seeks to prove the incarnation of God in Jesus. In this work, Yahyā b. 'Adī tries to prove that He may unite with a human being against those who reject His incarnation in the form of a human being via Aristotle's theory on the unity of the intellect and the intelligible. The essence of this work's arguments is to demonstrate the idea that "a thing becomes another thing" is not impossible by reason in general, so as to base the possibility of the "incarnation of God in the form of a human being." In this respect, Yahyā b. 'Adī interprets God's incarnation through the unity of the intellect and the intelligible and states that when we know God we receive His form (*'uqūlunā 'inda 'ilminā bi al-Bāri' jalla ismuhū mutaṣawwaratan bi-ṣūratihī*), considering the fact that when we cognize something we will acquire its form. He explains the interrelation of the formation and identifications as follows: "As Aristotle elucidated... actual intellect and actual intelligible are the same in subject (*li-anna al-'aqla bi-l-fī'l wa al-ma'qūl bi-l-fī'l shay'un wāḥidun fī al-mawḏū'*). In this case, when we intellect God, our intellect should unite with it"<sup>64</sup> And so the intellection of God occurs by human intellect's receiving its form and becoming that form itself.<sup>65</sup> Thus the human being's unification with God by means of intellect is beyond being impossible, but is necessary in terms of the nature of intellection (*fa-wājibun idhan an yakūna al-insānu idhā 'aqala bāri'ahū jalla thanāuhū muttaḥidan bi-bāri'ihā 'azza wa jalla bi-tawaṣṣuṭi 'aqlihī*).<sup>66</sup> Consequently, Yahyā b. 'Adī adopts an idea of identity in the sense that to receive a form of something refers to the realization of that form's definition as well as the qualities required by this definition within us. According to him, God's form is realized on the body of Jesus based on this very principle. Thus, Yahyā b. 'Adī includes two things becoming one thing among the meanings of a thing becoming another thing (*al-ittihādu innamā huwa an yaṣīra al-muttaḥidāni shay'an wāḥidan*).

This conception of unity is among those that Ibn Sinā refuted and claimed that it is beyond the intellect's judgment. However, no textual proof indicates Ibn

63 Adamson, "Porphyrius Arabus on Nature and Art: 463F Smith in Cotext," 159; C. Ehrig-Eggert, *Die Abhandlung über den Nachweis der Natur des Möglichen von Yahyā ibn 'Adī (gest. 974 A.D.)*, 85-6.

64 Yahyā b. 'Adī, "Risāla fī al-ta'annus," ed. A. Périer, *Petits traités apologetiques de Yahyā ben 'Adī* (Paris: 1920), 74, 2-75, 4.

65 Yahyā b. 'Adī, "Risāla fī al-ta'annus," 81, 5-82.5.

66 Yahyā b. 'Adī, "Risāla fī al-ta'annus," 83, 5-7. In response to the question "If the union with God takes place depending on intellecting Him, why is this unity made peculiar to Jesus, not for everyone who intellect Him actually?" Yahyā b. 'Adī states that the complete union took place on him due to the miraculous characteristics peculiar to him. See p. 84-85.

Sīnā's direct interlocutor in this treatise. Furthermore, it makes no reference to Porphyry concerning the unity of the intellect and the intelligible. It cannot be said to be beyond doubt that Yaḥyā b. 'Adī was Ibn Sīnā's actual Porphyrean target. However, the conception of unity mentioned in *al-Shifā'*/*al-Nafs* and in *al-Ishārāt*, as well as the meaning criticized concerning a thing becoming another thing, can be found in Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's text. Moreover, although Porphyry has no such view, the Christian Aristotelians around Yaḥyā b. 'Adī might possibly have summarized and interpreted Porphyry's treatise on the unity of the intellect and the intelligible – just as Ibn 'Adī did for Aristotle – to make it the basis for their own views. If this strong probability is combined with the passages of *al-Shifā'*/*al-Nafs* and *al-Ishārāt* as well as with Porphyry's original view, one could say that Ibn Sīnā did not depend directly on the Porphyry's treatise, but on a form of it that had been reproduced within the circles around Ibn 'Adī or on some independent treatises written by Baghdad's Christian Aristotelians to use Porphyry's views as sources for their own attitudes, as in the case of *al-Risāla fī al-ta'annus*.<sup>67</sup>

### 3. How did Ibn Sīnā Understand Aristotle? Toward the Idea of Representation

The language Ibn Sīnā used to explain the counter-claim concerning the identity of the intellect and the intelligible implies that his position excludes all kinds of interpretation concerning the identity at first glance. For example, the expressions criticized in *al-Shifā'*/*al-Nafs* (i.e., “the essence of the soul becomes the intelligible itself”) and *al-Ishārāt* (i.e., “when an intellectual substance intellects an intelligible form becomes one with it”) can be viewed as reflections of Aristotle's expressions in *De Anima* 431b17 (i.e., “the intellect in activity is its objects”), 431b20 (“the soul is in a way all existing things”), and in 430a4 (i.e., “in the case of those things which have no matter, that which thinks and that which is thought are the same”). When considered as such, one can accept that Ibn Sīnā criticizes Aristotle's position of identity in the person of Porphyry. Therefore, how Ibn Sīnā actually understood Aristotle is of great importance. In the part of *Ḥawāshī 'alā Kitāb al-Nafs* where he comments on *De Anima* 429b22-430a8, Ibn Sīnā interprets the problem of self-cognition and theory of identity, which are developed as a solution for this problem, in such a fashion to present the basis of his own theory of representation:

67 Adamson prefers the first possibility. See P. Adamson, “Porphyryius Arabus on Nature and Art: 463F Smith in Context,” 160.

The second question is as follows: is the intellect an intelligible? The intellect becomes intelligible either for its being (*li-huwiyyatihi*), which is impossible. For, in this case, everything which have a being should be intelligible thereof (*li-annahū yalzamu anyakūna kullu shay'in ma'qūlan li-anna lahū huwiyyatun*). If it is intelligible [not for this but] for another thing, then what is this thing? The answer is as follows: there is difference between the intelligible in matter and the simple being without matter. **The cognition of the simple intelligible [i.e. intellect] and what is intellected is one and the same thing (*fa taṣawwur al-ma'qūl al-basiṭ wa al-ma'qūl shay'un wāḥidun*).** Thus, the intellect does not need anything for cognizing its being other than its own being; for, its cognition of its being and its being is one. That's why it always intellects its own self. However, the thing that exists in matter intellects it potentially. As to Aristotle's statement "In this case, the intellect does not belong to it [ie. the matter]," this is because the intellect belongs only to the immaterial things and its being intelligible is as such.<sup>68</sup>

Their statements such as the intellect, that which intellects and that which is intellected are one is true only for the [separate] intellect. For the things other than this; the intellect, that which intellects, that which is intellected and the intellect's intellection of the intelligible are all different. Aristotle's statement "the knowledge and what is known are one" here and elsewhere means the form of the known impressed on the knower is like the impression (*intibā'*) of the sensible form on the sense.<sup>69</sup>

The first passage begins by summarizing the dilemma that stems from the problem of self-cognition. This short summary also includes a sort of reinterpretation. Ibn Sinā has this to say about the old dilemma: If we say the intellect is intelligible due to its being, then we will have to accept that everything that has being is intelligible for its own being. If we say the intellect becomes intelligible not for its own being but by means of another thing, then a question arises as to what this thing is if it is other than the intellect. If the answer to this question is other than the intellect, then the intellect would lose its simplicity. Expounding the dilemma as such, Ibn Sinā affirms the impossibility of the second horn and begins working on the first horn. His goal is to remove the impossibility that will cause "everything that has being is intelligible" and to show how the intellect becomes intelligible as a requirement of its being. In this context, he distinguishes between two kinds of intelligibles: the intelligibles existing in matter such as horse, stone, apple, and so on, and the intelligibles that are independent of matter. As far as the intelligibles of the second kind – including the human rational soul – are concerned, that which intellects and that which is intellected

68 Ibn Sinā, "Ḥawāshī 'alā Kitāb al-Nafs," 104, 10-16.

69 Ibn Sinā, "Ḥawāshī 'alā Kitāb al-Nafs," 105, 15-20.

are the same. In other words, what intellects in this case is an intelligible. Hence, the rational soul's cognition of itself takes place through its own essential being (*huwiyyah*) instead of some other thing. However, one cannot infer from here that everything that has an essential being is intelligible in terms of its own essence, because Ibn Sīnā accepts that the identity of the intellect and the intelligible is a quality valid only for immaterial intelligibles.

There are a few remarkable points in this exposition and solution of the dilemma. One is the emphasis that the intellect does not need any other thing for its self-cognition. Along with this emphasis, Ibn Sīnā distances himself from the Alexandrian contention that self-cognition is mediated by the intellect's cognition of other intelligibles. Excluding this option enables one to infer that the intellect attains a kind of identification of the intellect and the intelligible only during its cognition of itself. In fact, this conclusion and the reasoning that generates it lead to further questions: If the identity of the intellect and the intelligible is applicable to immaterial intelligibles, can one also attribute this quality to the intelligibles that become immaterial in the intellect by being abstracted from matter? What is the essential characteristic of self-cognition, the one to which the identity of the intellect and the intelligible is uniquely devoted? Does not the primary self-cognition, which takes place without the intermediacy of any other intelligible and which identifies the intellect with the intelligible corresponding to its own essence, impair the criteria of the plasticity of cognition that will enable the intellect to cognize all intelligibles? We will discuss these questions below, but only after continuing to have look at how Ibn Sīnā understood Aristotle's text.

The second passage quoted above from *Hawāshī* points to the fact that all sorts of expressions concerning the identity of the intellect and the intelligible are valid principally for the intellection of the separate intellects. Ibn Sīnā adds to this category the human rational soul's primary self-cognition as a weaker example of the same state that exists in the sub-lunar world. Apart from this, during all sorts of human cognition the intellect, that which intellects, that which is intellected, and the intellect's cognition of the intelligible are different things. Therefore, Ibn Sīnā argues that what Aristotle stated in *De Anima* 3.4 and elsewhere concerning the identity of knower and the known refers to a situation similar to the relation of the senses with the forms they received from the material sensible objects, and not the numerical identification of the intellect with the intelligibles. The essential character of sense-cognition is the cognition of the sense objects as abstracted from their matters, not as being with their matters. For example, when we perceive the color red our eyes do not turn into red; rather, we cognize redness as abstracted

from its material accidents. Ibn Sina's definition of the sense-cognition clarifies this situation explicitly: "The sense-cognition is the reception of the form of the thing abstracted from its matter so that to cognize the sensible by it (*al-iḥsāsu huwa qabūlu ṣūrat al-shay'i mujarradatan 'an māddatihi fe-yataṣawwara bi-hā al-maḥsūs*)."<sup>70</sup> This point, which he emphasizes to explain the relation between the intellect and the intelligible, is the immaterial way that impressed the sensible form on the sense. In this regard, one can say that Ibn Sina understands Aristotle's statements on the unity of the intellect and the intelligible as the immaterial reception that allows room for the position of weak identity. Immediately after the above definition of the sense-cognition, Ibn Sina explain this sensation with a representationalist theory that excludes the position of strong identity:

"To say I sensed an external thing means I sensed it in the soul. In this case, to say I sensed an external thing means that its form is represented in my sense. Again, to say I sensed in the soul, means form itself is represented (*tamaththul*) in the sense."<sup>71</sup>

This means that the impression (*intibā'*) of the sensible form on the sense is understood as the presence of an immaterial similar of the material sensible form in the sense. Ibn Sina restates the same aspect when he tries to explain what kind of passion (*infī'āl*) is the sense-cognition: During the actual sensing, by turning into a similar of the perceived thing a similar of the sensible form takes place in the sense (*li-annahū qabūlun minhā li-ṣūrat al-maḥsūs wa istiḥālatun ilā mushākalat al-maḥsūs bi-l-fi'l fa-yakūnu al-ḥāssu bi-l-fi'l mithla al-maḥsūs bi-l-fi'l*).<sup>72</sup> The terms "turning into the similar" (*mushākala*) and "having an immaterial similar of the external thing (*mithl/tamaththul*)" used here to reflect the terminology of representation are applied by Ibn Sina to rational cognition as well – a situation that would take the "representation" (*tamaththul*) to a level that reveals the essence of the Avicennian theory rational-cognition.

As a result, Ibn Sina states in *Ḥawāshī* that all statements concerning the identity of the intellect and the intelligible during the actual intellection of external intelligibles must be understood as an immaterial reception and as the representation of what is cognized, just as in the case of sense-cognition. Once explained as such, one can deduce that Ibn Sina accepts that the term identity (*ittiḥād*) should be understood as "the representation that takes place through immaterial reception" everywhere he uses it when speaking of the relation

70 Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, II/2, 85, 3.

71 Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, 85, 6-9.

72 Ibn Sina, *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, II/2, 91, 5-7.

of human soul with the external intelligibles. In the context of his critique of Porphyry, the passage in *Ḥawāshī* and the lines quoted from *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs* to clarify the relations mentioned in *Ḥawāshī* point to this: Ibn Sīnā distinguishes between the idea that “the intellect becomes intelligible itself during intellection,” which is attributed to Porphyry, and Aristotle’s view in *De Anima* that “the intellect and what is intellected are one during the intellection.” Hence, he legitimizes the second view by narrowing it down to direct and primary self-cognition of the human rational soul or self-awareness. On the other hand, he labelled the first view (i.e., the intellect identifies with itself and with the intelligibles it abstracted externally) as irrational. In short, Ibn Sīnā upholds both the position of strong identity in the direct and primary self-cognition and the position of weak identity in the sense of having an immaterial representation in the intellection of external intelligibles. But how did he reach this position and did he pursue it consistently throughout his works?

#### **4. Narrowing the Strong Identity Position by Self-Awareness**

We have said that the conception of unity mentioned in the passages quoted from *Ḥawāshī* brought about some further questions. First, if the identity of the intellect with the intelligible during self-cognition is to be attributed to immaterial intelligibles, then can one not attribute the same quality to the intelligibles that became immaterial in the intellect by being abstracted from matter? For example, can we say that a form of a horse taken into the intellect by being abstracted from its matter has the quality of self-cognition now that it has received an immateriality? The second question, in fact, was about a subject to which both Ibn Sīnā and Alexander of Aphrodisias were sensitive: the intellect’s plasticity of cognition. If Ibn Sīnā says the intellect becomes identified with its intelligible, which corresponds to its essence not through its cognition of other abstracted intelligibles but through its cognition of itself directly, then does not the intellect lose its capacity to cognize other intelligibles by being identified with the structure of its essence actually? If so, Ibn Sīnā would make the same mistake that he attributed to Porphyry.

An answer for the first question can be found in *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, one that is advanced within the same problematic context with *De Anima* 3.4. Having given critiques of Porphyry, Ibn Sīnā specifies the essence of the approach intended for these critiques as “when the intelligibles those which exist potentially in the external world come to the intellect, they are identified with the intellect and become an actual intelligent” and continues as follows:

In contrast to them, what intellects is the soul itself. For, by the intellect either the faculty through which the soul intellects or the forms of the intelligibles in itself is meant. As the intelligibles [are not intelligible in itself] but become intelligible in the soul, what intellects and what is intellectured cannot be a single thing in our soul. Yes, even if this is possible for another thing as we pointed out in the relevant place...<sup>73</sup>

The passage's first sentence can be read as 'when intelligibles are abstracted, they do not become an intelligent by being identified with the intellect; it's the soul itself that intellects.' The following sentences are meant to justify this idea. Ibn Sīnā suggests an option against the claim that being intelligible and being an intelligent is always identical: Is the intellect a faculty by means of which we acquire the capacity of cognition or the forms of the intelligible in itself? According to him, the second option is unacceptable because the material intelligibles are not actually intelligible in themselves but become intelligible when an intelligent soul intellects them. Since the rational faculty transforms these intelligibles into actual intelligibles, only this faculty deserves to be named "the intelligent." Thus, any intelligible cannot be transformed into an intelligent by being identified with our intellect. In this passage, Ibn Sīnā's strategy is to suggest an additional condition to the immateriality necessary for self-cognition. In this respect, he says that the intelligibles are not actual in themselves and that because what makes them actual is the rational soul, they cannot be called "intelligent" at all. This also includes a view that states if something realizes its essence by means of any other thing, then it cannot possess that very essence. In other words, if something is intelligible itself it is intelligence at the same time; however, we cannot say that it is intelligent at the same time if it is intellectured through another. Therefore, Ibn Sīnā adds the condition of self-subsistence to immateriality for the realization of self-cognition.

The relevant passages for this condition and problem are detailed in *al-Ishārāt*. In the third topic (*namaṭ*) of *al-Ishārāt*, Ibn Sīnā deals with the essence of being intelligence and states the following principle accordingly: "Each intelligent is its [own] intelligible at the same time (=fa-kullu mā ya'qilu shay'an fa-lahū an ya'qila dhatahū)."<sup>74</sup> If each intelligent is intelligible at the same time, then it can be inferred that each intelligible's being intelligence is possible. He identifies the first condition that would restrict this outcome: immateriality.<sup>75</sup> The objection brought about by the condition of immateriality and Ibn Sīnā's answer for it is presented below:

73 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, 329, 14-17.

74 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt*, III/19, p. 250, 3.

75 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt*, 8-9.

Perhaps you will say that in constitution the material form is free from an obstructing concept when abstracted in the intellect. Why then is intellection not attributed to it?

The answer to your [question] is that it is because it is not independent in its constitution and receptive to the intelligible concepts that reside in it. Rather, what resembles it is joined only to intelligible concepts that are imprinted not [in intelligible concepts] but in that which is receptive to both of them. Neither of them is more deserving of being imprinted in the other than the other. Their conjunction is other than the conjunction of the form with that which apprehends the form.

As for its external existence, it is material. But, according to our supposition, the concept under consideration is a substance independent in its constitution. If this substance is joined to an intelligible concept, it has the possibility of applying conception to it.<sup>76</sup>

Here Ibn Sīnā adds the condition of self-subsistence to immateriality. The former's importance stems from the fact that such a substance possesses the possibility of receiving other things. As intellection means the reception of intelligibles and receiving something is the quality of self-subsistent substances, the intelligibles that subsist with matter externally and with the intellect internally cannot accept other intelligibles, that is to say, the quality of intellection. As a result, they cannot be an intelligence by being identified with the intellect when they come to the intellect.

The answer to the second question, whether the identity of the intellect and the intelligible during self-awareness would harm the criteria of the plasticity of cognition, is found in the most authentic steps that Ibn Sīnā takes with regards to the history of classical psychology: the notion of the intellect's self-cognition without a need for any bodily means in such a manner that precedes any other kind of cognition and that is best defined in Ibn Sīnā's "flying man" argument.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Sīnā divides the prevalent one dimensional self-cognition theory into 1) the primary self-awareness (*al-shu'ūr bi al-dhāt*)<sup>78</sup> that does not take place by the intermediacy of any intelligible and 2) the secondary and accidental cognition in the sense that when we intellect the external intelligibles, we also intellect that we are an intelligent at the same time (*al-shu'ūr bi al-shu'ūr*). This division was systematized in *al-Ta'liqāt*, although its source is found in the "flying man argument" presented in *al-Shifā'*/*al-Nafs* and *al-Ishārāt*.<sup>79</sup> What is new in this distinction is that it distinguishes

76 Ibn Sīnā, *Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics*, p. 109; cf. *al-Ishārāt*, III/20, pp. 25-51.

77 See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, I/1 26-27, V/7 348-9; *al-Ishārāt*, III/1-7, p. 233-36.

78 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, ed. Ḥasan Majid al-Ubaydī, Baghdad: Bayt al-Ḥikmah, 2002, #71, #72, p. 125.

79 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, #36, 112,7. Concerning the two dimensions of this self-intellection according to Ibn Sīnā, see M. Marmura, "Avicenna's Flying Man in Context," *Monist* 69 (1986): 383-95; Deborah L. Black,

between self-awareness and self-intellection. The first kind of self-cognition refers to the human being's direct self-cognition or, to be more precise, claims that one could be aware of oneself without the mediation of an external intelligible. Ibn Sinā states that when this first kind of cognition exists, there is an identity (*huwiyya*) between the subject and the object (*al-shā'ir wa al-mash'ūr*) of this cognition.<sup>80</sup> Here, the self that cognizes its self and the self that is cognized are one and the same thing and thus possess an exact identity (= *wa ammā al-shu'ūr bi al-dhāt fa-inna al-shā'ir bi-hā huwa nafs al-dhāt, fa-hunāka huwiyyatun wa lā ghayriyyatun bi-wujūhin min al-wujūh*).<sup>81</sup> The direct self-awareness of a soul without establishing a relation with any other intelligible corresponds, in fact, to the soul's essential actuality. Its existence means that it has awareness, and its having awareness means that it exists. No distinction is made between these two situations. In this sense, direct self-cognition implies a state of self-awareness and realization rather than a contentful cognition. Here we can see the primary, essential, and numerical unity in the sense of the subject's and the object's complete and strong identity. Unlike this direct self-awareness, the second and indirect kind occurs through intellection of other intelligibles. According to Ibn Sinā:

“You know that everything that intellects something intellects what it intellects [it] by a power proximate to actuality. This is its intellection of itself. Thus it belongs to anything which intellects something else that it intellects its own self (*fā-kullu mā ya'qilu shay'an fa-lahū an ya'qila dhātahū*).<sup>82</sup>

As stated in this passage, when the intellect intellects any intelligible, it intellects that it intellects it as well. This is another expression of the reflexivity

“Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing That One Knows,” ed. S. Rahman, T. Street, and H. Tahiri, *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 63-87; J. Kaukua, *Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Ahmed Alwishah, “Avicenna on self-cognition and self-awareness,” ed. A. Alwishah and J. Hayes, *Aristotle and The Arabic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 143-63. It is worth noting the relation of Ibn Sinā's self-awareness, which does not take place in view of any external intelligible, with the position of especially some Mutazilite theologians that includes our knowledge concerning our own self into the category of “necessary knowledge.” M. Marmura formerly emphasised this relation and stated that Ibn Sinā was in agreement with some theologians such as Mu'ammār (d. 835) ve al-Nazzām (d. 845) and his disagreement with them was related to the quiddity of the cognition faculty in us. See Marmura, “Avicenna's Flying Man in Context,” 383-84.

80 Ibn Sinā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, 121.

81 Ibn Sinā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, 121, 7-8. For a passage in which the same matter is explained within the context of the knowledge-known, see Ibn Sinā, *al-Risāla al-'arshiyya, fi tawḥīdihī ta'ālā wa ṣifātihī*, ed. S. Z. Abidin el-Mūsāwī (Hayderabad: Dār al-ma'ārif al-'Uthmaniyya, 1353), 8.

82 Ibn Sinā, *Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics*, 108; cf. *al-Ishārāt*, III/19, 250, 2-3.

of consciousness concomitant to the human rational soul's act of intellection. This second cognition toward one's own self is not primary, direct, and essential, but secondary, indirect, and accidental in the sense that it occurs depending upon our cognition of other intelligibles.

When we look at the problem of self-cognition and the identity of the intellect and the intelligible in the context of this distinction, we can possibly say that Ibn Sīnā attributed the identity of the knower and the known to the first type of self-cognition in the strict sense. In other words, when he refutes the identity position between the intellect and the intelligibles abstracted from outside and stated that the identity belonging to the type he refuted might take place only when the intellect turned toward its own essence indirectly, he is referring to the primary self-awareness. Furthermore, Ibn Sīnā's words in *Ḥawashī* that such an identity can be valid primarily for the separate intellects' cognition of themselves proves that such an identity is not of the identity type that takes place by means of a cognition that takes place on an intelligible received from outside, for the separate intellects do not intellect themselves through an intelligible distinct from their essences. What corresponds to such cognition *vis-à-vis* the human rational soul is our primary self-awareness, which does not take place due to the mediation of any intelligible. In fact, investigating the details of this meaning reveals that our human essence shows itself in this inner awareness or consciousness state and that the most basic situation in which we draw closer to the divine beings is this inner awareness that needs no physical organ and is independent of external objects of any kind. Another indication that this mentioned identity is valid for this primary awareness is again the *Ḥawashī*'s emphasis that such an awareness is "constant" (*dā'iman*). As Ibn Sīnā states, our intellect does not constantly intellect itself during the indirect self-intellection case; however, our soul is constantly aware of its existence in the case of self-awareness (= *wa laysa 'aqlunā ya'qilu dhātahū dā'iman bal nafsunā dā'imat al-shu'uri bi-wujūdhā*).<sup>83</sup> As the distinction is not seen in Aristotle as obviously as it is Ibn Sīnā, Aristotle feels the need to ask in *De Anima* 430a5 that if the intellect is identical with itself, then why does it not constantly think of itself? Later commentators gave different answers to this question, whose answer remains obscure in *De Anima* itself.<sup>84</sup> Some of the answers include that the soul has a deficiency that emerges from its falling into the physical

83 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāhathāt*, ed. Muḥsin Bidārfar (Qum: Intishārāt-i Bidār, 1423), #550, 185,17.

84 Aristotle, *De Anima Books II-III*, transl. into English and annotated by D. W. Hamlyn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002, p. 139.

universe<sup>85</sup> and thus not thinking of itself continuously.<sup>86</sup> As Ibn Sinā argues, the state of cognition that he attributed to the identity of the subject and the object is not a kind of cognition that makes our self an intelligible, like cognizing a tree, but is rather a constant awareness of our existence. Thus he sees such an awareness as something retained *constantly* because this awareness is identical with our human essence.<sup>87</sup> The fact that it is being interrupted refers to our human essence being interrupted.

What solution does this distinction suggest concerning the plasticity of cognition? In fact, the solution it suggests is hidden in the heart of self-awareness. This awareness does not mean an identification with the formal structure of a certain intelligible, but implies an awareness pertaining to our own existence and is far from being identified with the structure of an intelligible. Moreover, it refers to being as what it is for the intellect. As the intellect is a faculty through which the soul acquires the capacity to cognize the intelligibles, its being itself through such an awareness means that it preserves this faculty. Thus, what such an identity gives to intellect is not the loss of its plasticity to cognize other intelligibles, but the preservation of the faculty through which the intellect intellects all intelligibles.

## **5. Weak Identity Position or the Rational Cognition as the Immaterial Representation of the Intelligibles**

After attributing the strong identity position to self-awareness, Ibn Sinā explains the intellect's relation with the intelligibles that it abstracted by the idea of immaterial representation, which can be called the weak identity position. In response to a student who could not understand that rational cognition refers to the presence (*ḥuṣūl*) of intelligible forms in the intellect in *al-Mubāḥathāt*, Ibn Sinā says that rational cognition refers to the presence of an immaterial representation of something in our mind:

85 Simplicius (?), *On Aristotle's On the Soul* 3.1-5, 238, 1-239, 1.

86 Philoponus (?), *On Aristotle's On the Soul* 3.1-8, 528, 11-25.

87 Ibn Sinā says for the creatures other than the human beings, there is no self-awareness as such. For, their perceptual faculties are part of their object of perceptions. In other words, since there is not any immaterial soul in them, the faculty of perception is a part of their self. This prevents them having a reflexivity which would allow them perceive themselves apart from their perception of the external things. See *al-Mubāḥathāt*, #504 - #508, s. 186-7.

[Question] I cannot understand the fact that cognition is the presence of the form of what is cognized in the cognizer (*ḥuṣūlu sūrat al-mudrak fī al-mudrik*). Due to my lack of understanding, I cannot imagine this axiomatically. (...)

[Answer] I cannot cognize anything whose reality is not represented in me as a meaning (*kullu mā lam yatamaththal lī ma'nān ḥaqīqatuhū fa-lastu udrikuhū*). That which is represented exists either in itself or in me (*al-mumaththilu immā fī al-wujūd immā fiyya ana*). If it is in existence itself, all existents become representable for me (*la-kāna kullu mawjūdin qad tamaththaltuhū*) and I cannot cognize or imagine those that do not exist any way. Both consequences of this (conditional) proposition are impossible. Hence, both the thing whose meaning is represented and the thing whose reality is represented are in me.<sup>88</sup>

Ibn Sīnā informs this student that we cannot cognize something unless its reality is represented in our mind in an immaterial way. Likewise, another passage in *al-Mubāḥathāt* indicates that this fact is the condition *sine qua non* of rational cognition: “The reality of the thing you cognize is represented necessarily in the mind *vis-à-vis* your cognition of them in the mind (= *kullu mā tudrikuhū fa-innahū ḥaythu tudrikuhā fī al-dhihni fa-ḥaqīqatuhū mutamaththilatun fī dhihnika ḍarūratan*).”<sup>89</sup> Then, what is the exact place of this representation or immaterial example? To be more precise, does this immaterial exemplar present immediately in existence and our intellect content itself only with acquiring (*yalḥiẓuhā*) it, or does this exemplar take place in our mind?<sup>90</sup> Ibn Sīnā regards the latter as true, for when this meaning belongs to existence we face two impossible consequences: all existents become representable for us and all non-existents move away from being representable. But unlike both consequences, we do not possess the representation of something although it exists, even though we may possess something although it does not exist. This shows that the representation of the realities and meanings we cognized belongs to our mind. On the one hand, this passage points out that rational cognition is an immaterial representation and, on the other hand, emphasizes that this representation that takes place only by mental abstraction and thus should not be thought to have an external existence.

The *locus classicus* that identifies rational cognition as a representation is found in *al-Ishārāt*:

88 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, #545, s. 184.

89 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, #743, pp. 246-7.

90 For the explanation of the issue in this manner, see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, #743, s. 246-7.

To apprehend a thing is to have its reality represented to him who apprehends (*mutamaththilatan 'inda al-mudrik*) such that it is observed by that with which he apprehends. It is either that this reality is the same as the reality of the thing that is external to that which apprehends, when it apprehends—[in which case], it is the reality of that which does not have an actual existence in external, concrete things. This is exemplified in many geometrical figures or by many of the supposed things that are not possible—if supposed in geometry—and that are basically unrealizable. Or the image of the reality of that thing is inscribed in that which apprehends and is not separate from it (*aw takūnu mithālu ḥaqīqatīhī murtasiman fī dhāt al-mudrik ḡhayra mubā'inin laḥū*). This is the remaining [truth].<sup>91</sup>

The term “inscription” (*al-irtisām*) used to explain the representation at the end of the passage is also used independently to define the rational cognition:

The First's realization of things by his essence and his essence is the best manner in which a thing can realize and in which a thing can be realized. This is followed by the necessary intellectual substances' realization of the First owing to his illumination and of what is posterior to him and produced by his essence. After this two come the realizations of the souls—these [realizations] being impressions and sketches from intellectual natures with different principles and relations (*al-idrākāt al-nafsāniyyā allati hiya naqshun wa rasmun 'an ṭābi'in 'aqliyyin mutabaddid al-mabādi wa al-manāsib*).<sup>92</sup>

The exemplar or sketch of the intelligible that comes about in the intelligent would, in fact, only be possible by our intellect's conjunction (*iqtirān*) with this intelligible:

Further, it belongs to the quiddity of anything that is intellected to be joined to another intellegible. That is why such a thing is also intellected simultaneously with another [intelligible]. No doubt, the rational power intellects this thing only in conjunction [with another intelligible] (*wa innamā ta'qiluhū al-quwwat al-'āqilatu bi al-muqāranati lā maḥāla*).<sup>93</sup>

As a matter of fact, this passage in *al-Ishārāt* seeks to prove the basic principle that each intelligent is intelligible at the same time. The important thing for us here is that Ibn Sinā uses *iqtirān* (conjunction) to explain the essential feature of intellection. In this respect, he says that something intellected would be *conjoined* to another intelligible, meaning an intelligible's conjoining to another intelligible and cognizing it. In other words, when something is intellected it can intellect

91 Ibn Sinā, *Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics*, 98; cf. *al-Ishārāt*, III/7, 237,8-14.

92 Ibn Sinā, *Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics*, 173; cf. *al-Ishārāt*, VII/16, 328,13-329,2.

93 Ibn Sinā, *Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics*, 108; cf. *al-Ishārāt*, III/XIX, 250,4-5.

another intelligible. Ibn Sīnā places much emphasis on the fact that the intellectual faculty can intellect something only through conjunction (*muqārana*).

As can be seen by the examples presented here, Ibn Sīnā uses such terms as *iqtirān*, *tamaththul*, *irtisām*, and *ḥuṣūl* almost synonymously to describe rational cognition. These terms denote that when the external intelligibles are cognized, the external material forms are abstracted (*tajrīd*) from their matters and received (*qabūl*) by the intellect. This reception enables a conjunction (*iqtirān*) of our intellect with the mentioned intelligibles, as well as an immaterial example or sketch of the external forms (*mithāl*, *rasm*) to come about (*ḥuṣūl*) in our intellect. Thus, these terms are only different names given in accordance with various stages of the same fact. In *Ḥawashī*, Ibn Sīnā identified the unity (*ittiḥād*) in respect to the external intelligibles with the immaterial reception that he described in *al-Ishārāt*. Hence, we can understand the occurrence of the intelligible's immaterial representation in the intellect as a kind of unity, as explained in *Ḥawashī*. If we are to understand this as unity or "becoming one," then what is the essence of the intellect's unity with its intelligible and the unity between the immaterial exemplar and the external thing? The first question asks how the intelligible gained unity in relation to the intellect, and the second asks how it did so in relation to its external source.

Ibn Sīnā juxtaposed the meanings that might be understood by "thing's becoming another thing" in *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs* and in *al-Ishārāt* and stated that the soul's unity with the intelligibles resembles neither becoming in the sense that a form unites with matter and brings about a third thing, nor the fact that neither of them loses its essence during this unity and thus becomes the other. On the contrary, the soul retains its substance and undergoes a change in its state by means of the thing with which it united.<sup>94</sup> A wider explanation of this is found in *al-Shifā'/Ilahiyāt* V.7, where Ibn Sīnā lists and discusses the kinds of unity (*ittiḥād*). The first kind of unity is the coming-to-be of a substance in the sense that one thing unites with another thing and brings about a third thing that does not resemble to the other two. The second one is that two things, neither of which needs another thing to exist, unite and bring about a single thing either through composition or a change of state. Physical mixtures that occur with the mixture of qualities are an example of this kind of unity. The third one is the unity of accidents with their actual subjects, in which they present and gain their actuality with this presence,

94 Ibn Sīnā's explanations in *al-Ḥikmah al-Mashriqiyyah* concerning the matter in question are in the same direction. See Ibn Sīnā, *el-Hikmetü'l-maşrkiyye*, ed. Ahmet Özcan, *İbn Sīnā'nın el-Hikmetü'l-Maşrkiyye Adli Eseri ve Tabiat Felsefesi*, (MA Dissertation, Marmara University, Institute of Social Sciences, 1993, 200-01).

like the unity of the color white with any body.<sup>95</sup> The relation of the intellect with the intelligibles does not resemble the first and the second types of unity. This unity most resembles the third type of unity. The elements that enable the resemblance here are as follows: The rational soul, thanks to its direct and constant self-awareness, exists in its own actuality and is independent of any external intelligibles. The intelligibles come to it externally and gain their actuality by uniting with it; however, they do not lead to any change in the intellect's substance. This type of unity exemplifies accidental unity as it is. And so Ibn Sinā contends that the intelligibles exist in the intellect accidentally and concludes that knowledge is an accident.<sup>96</sup> Although this unity exemplifies accidental unity with respect to the accident-substratum relation, the dimension of the intellect's relation with the thing in which it is present is not a change in the sense of gaining and losing a quality, but rather a perfection (*istikmāl*), in the sense of gaining a new one without losing any quality.<sup>97</sup> As a result, Ibn Sinā holds that an accidental unity results in a perfection between the intellect and intelligible. While this is interpreted as unity, this fact reflects a weak identity or isomorphism in respect to a numerical and strong identity that the intellect acquired during its self-awareness.

What kind of unity does the intelligible, which acquired an accidental and weak unity in relation to the intellect, have in relation to its external source? We obtain a representation from the external world, but to what extent does this representation represent the external thing? These questions can be answered at three levels. First, Ibn Sinā says the thing in our mind is the same essential reality (*ḥaqīqah*) that exists in the external world, as he clearly stated in the passages quoted from *al-Mubāḥathāt* and *al-Ishārāt*. The only difference between them is the one in their mode of being. The main idea behind this essential isomorphism is Ibn Sinā's theory of absolute essence, which depends on his distinction between essence and existence. Despite the difference that an essence has in respect to its external and mental existence, which is the result of its indifference to any kind of existence, it nevertheless has an essential unity in both of them. This indicates that Ibn Sinā does not have an exact idea of intentional cognition concerning the cognition of external intelligibles. According to him, we do not cognize an essence that exists in the external world potentially but is made actual by our intellect; rather, what we do cognize is the essence that actually exists in the external world directly. In the

95 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā'/'Ilahīyyāt*, ed. G. Qanawāti and S. Zāyed (Cairo: 1960), 238-39.

96 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā'/'Ilahīyyāt*, 140-45.

97 Ibn Sinā, "Ḥawāshī 'alā Kitāb al-Nafs," 104,7-9; for Ibn Sinā's definition of perfection as such, see *al-Shifā'/al-Samā' al-tabī'i*, ed. S. Zāyed, Cairo: 1983, 17,4-12.

first case, the actual material form in the external world and the actual intelligible form in our mind are separated. What becomes the subject for our cognition is not the external material form that exists actually, but the external immaterial form that exists potentially but becomes actual in our mind, for the intellect cognizes the abstracted meaning and not the external form itself. On the contrary, according to Ibn Sīnā, what we cognize is not something other than the actual form realized in matter. Thus, rational cognition is not intentional in relation to the material beings in the external world, but is based directly on the representation of the same reality, just in a different way of existence. Second, this reality represented in us is “inscribed in that which apprehends it as not being different from it (*ghayra mubā'inin lahū*),” as rational cognition was defined in *al-Ishārāt*.<sup>98</sup> In this case, it is the external reality itself whose immaterial exemplar takes place in our mind. If this example exists in the external world, it becomes its very external reality itself. In other words, there is an exact epistemological unity between the mental representations and their equivalents outside.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, the representations have an accidental relation with the intellect but an essential relation with their external equivalents. However, one cannot say that every intelligible that exists in our mind possesses such a relation with the thing to which it is attributed; because the existents to which the intelligibles correspond are not exactly of the same type and the things that we know are not only existents. In accordance with this principle, Ibn Sīnā divides intelligibles into those that become intelligible after being abstracted by the intellect (i.e., the material intelligibles) and those that become intelligible through and in themselves (i.e., the separate intelligibles). The intellect abstracts the material intelligibles from their matters and possesses an immaterial representation of them, which protects us from an impossibility in the sense of receiving the essence of the external object as it is. However, the separate intellects do not have a matter from which they can be abstracted. Thus, if we say that their reality is represented in us and that this representation is identified with their reality, we will have to accept that these already abstract beings exist in our intellect as they are. According to Ibn Sīnā, this is impossible:

If, however, we said that that which is intellectually apprehended of them is in every respect identical or similar to them, or that what is intellectually apprehended of them requires only that their essence exist in [the human] soul, we would [have uttered] impossible. For the essence [of such celestial entities] is separate, and it itself does not become a form for the soul of a human. If it were to become a form, then the form of all

98 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt*, III/7, 237,8-14.

99 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā' / Ilahiyāt*, 239,2-240,17.

things would have been realized for that soul, and it would know all things in act. This, then, would become the case for only one soul, the other souls remaining without that thing which they intellectually apprehend, since some one soul would have taken sole possession of [the celestial essence]. (...) <sup>100</sup>

Hence [in the case of] these things, it is only the *intentions* of their quiddities, not [these things] themselves. (*fā-idhan tilka al-ashyā' innamā taḥṣulu fī al-'uqūl al-bashariyya ma'āni māhiyyātihā lā dhawātihā*). <sup>101</sup>

Clearly, Ibn Sinā argues that there exists a representation not of the realities but of the meanings of the separate intellects in our mind. In this respect, he divides representation into two, as he emphasized at the end of the passage quoted from *al-Mubāḥathāt* above: the representation of the realities and meanings or, in other words, of that which is intentional and non-intentional. When the realities of the separate intellects are represented in us, as is the case with the material intelligibles, some impossibilities of the same sort caused by the strong identity with the intelligibles will arise. For this reason, an immaterial effect exists in our intellect by their influence, and this effect enables us to cognize them representationally (*tamaththul*). <sup>102</sup>

## 6. Is Ibn Sinā Consistent in His Theory of Representation?

Ibn Sinā defended his view of representation, which he substituted for the view of identity that he criticized, in a largely consistent manner throughout his works. However, his early works such as *Maqāla fī al-Nafs 'alā Sunnat al-ikhtiṣār* and *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād* are considered exceptions. <sup>103</sup> In *Maqāla fī al-Nafs*, viewed as his first work, he states that the actual intellect is nothing other than the forms of intelligibles (= *al-'aqlu bi-l-fi'l laysa illā ṣuwar al-ma'qūlāt*) <sup>104</sup> and argues in *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād* that the actuality of the intellect is the unity of the potential intellect and the intelligible in such a way that no separation exists between them. <sup>105</sup> As

100 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, trs. Michael E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 109,23-33; cf. Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā'/Ilahiyyāt*, 142,12-17

101 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 110,4-6 (with some revisions); cf. *al-Shifā'/Ilahiyyāt*, 143,5.

102 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā'/Ilahiyyāt*, 143,9-144,6.

103 For the place of these works, one of which belongs to an early period until 399/999 and the other belongs to a transition period until 418/1027, within chronology of Ibn Sinā's corpus, see D. Gutas, *Avicenna and Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 165.

104 Ibn Sinā, *Maqāla fī al-Nafs 'alā Sunnat al-ikhtiṣār* (*mabḥath 'an al-quwā al-naḥsāniyya*), ed. A. Fuād al-Ahwānī, *Ahwāl al-naḥs*, (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā Kutub al-Arabiyya, 1953), 170.

105 Ibn Sinā, *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*, 6-8.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī remarks<sup>106</sup> and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī accepts,<sup>107</sup> the identity approach suggested in *al-Mabda'* is absent found in Ibn Sīnā's later works. Here, in *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*, Ibn Sīnā examines the relation of the intellect and the intelligible within the context of the hylomorphic theory of substance and suggests such an *aporia*:

i. The matter is separate (*munfaṣil*) from the substantial form *vis-à-vis* its essence (*dhāt*); when the form combines with it, it generates a new and third thing different from the previous matter and form.

ii. If the potential intellect remains separate from the intelligible form *vis-à-vis* its essence, then a new third thing occurs due to the conjunction of the intelligible form with it, as is the case with the matter.

iii. However, the intelligible making the intellect actual by conjuncting with it does not take place in such a manner that the bodies' matters are separated from its forms and then make it actual by combining with it (*lā bi-anna al-'aqla bi-l-quwwa yakūnu munfaṣilan 'anhā inḥiṣāla māddat al-ajsām 'an ṣūratihā*).

iv. If the potential intellect and the intelligible form become separated *vis-à-vis* essence, as is the case with the relation between matter and form, and if a new intelligible form occurs out of this relation (= *fa-in kāna munfaṣilan bi al-dhāt 'anhā wa ya'qiluhā kāna yanālu minhā ṣūratan ukhrā ma'qūlatan*), when we ask what relation does this new form have with the essence of the potential intellect, we will have to say that when it conjunct with the potential intellect as the first form, it constitutes a new form other than itself. This will be asked for each form that occurs, and the new forms will cause an infinite regressions in a manner that will prevent us from explaining the relation of the first form and the matter.<sup>108</sup>

Ibn Sīnā suggests three alternatives to avoid this infinite regression: the actual intellect is the intelligible form itself, the occurrence of a new form for the potential intellect, or the sum of the potential intellect and the form. He rejects all of these options and suggests a fourth option, which specifies the real nature of the relation of the intellect and the intelligible:

106 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* 2, ed. Ali Riza Najafzāda, Tehran: 1383, 530.

107 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt* 3, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1960), 268.

108 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*, 7,15-19.

The relation of the intellectual form with the potential intellect is not like the relation of the natural form to the *hyle*. On the contrary, when the intellectual form is present in the potential intellect, both of their essences unite and they become a single thing. At that time, there does not exist a receiver and a received separate from each other *vis-à-vis* essence, and thus in reality the actual intellect becomes the abstract intelligible form itself (= *bal hiya idhā ḥallat al-'aqla bi-l-quwwa ittahādā dhātāhumā shay'an wāḥidan, fa-lam yakun qābilun wa maqbūlun mutamayyizay al-dhāti fa-yakūnu al-'aqlu bi-l-fi'l bi al-ḥaqīqati hiya al-šūra al-mujarrada al-ma'qūla*).<sup>109</sup>

His own option is that the intellect and the intelligible become one thing in such a way there is “no separation *vis-à-vis* essence” between the two. Now, let’s examine why he provides this *aporia* and reaches such a conclusion.

Ibn Sīnā seeks to avoid the following difficulty: The relation between the intellect and the intelligible should not be like the relation between the matter and the form, for being as such transforms the relation between the two into a substantial composition and leads to the constitution of a third thing out of their unity. This not only violates the fact, but also causes a kind of infinite regression when it comes to explaining the intellect and the intelligible relation. Then, what is the nature of the matter-form relation that constitutes a third thing in a way that we cannot accept with regard to the intellect-intelligible relation? In the passage, Ibn Sīnā determines the situation that brings forth this unacceptable situation: The two things that enter into relation are separate *vis-à-vis* their essence. Thus, when we say that two things are separate *vis-à-vis* their essence and the received form turns the subject into actuality, the paradigmatic example of this fact appears as the substantial composition of the matter and form. If two things are separate *vis-à-vis* their essence and a received form does not make the subject actual, this relation is an accidental unity.<sup>110</sup> Given that there is a relation between the intellect and the intelligible in which the intelligible transforms the potential intellect into the actual one, the second situation is inapplicable to this relation. Hence, this relation resembles the substantial composition, not the accidental one, with respect to “the subject’s becoming actual by the form it received.” On the other hand, if we accept that the relation of the intellect and the intelligible is akin to the first dimension of substantial composition, in which “the subject and the form are separate *vis-à-vis* their essence” as well, then we encounter the unacceptable result found in *al-Mabda’*. In this case, we can ask what essential separation (*al-infiṣāl bi*

109 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabda’ wa al-Ma’ād*, 9, 21-10, 1.

110 For the substantial and accidental dimensions of the relation between the subject and the form according to Ibn Sīnā, see Üçer, *Suret, Cevher ve Varlık*, 162-82.

*al-dhāt*) between the matter and the form would let one transform the other into the actual and constitute a third thing? Ibn Sīnā argues that the real problem arises when the intellect has such an essential separation as regards the intelligible.

First, we must clarify that the essential separation Ibn Sīnā attributes to the matter-form relationship does not mean that the matter would have an independent existence that we could point to as “this” independent from the form. If it had such a determined existence or “thisness,” everything predicated upon it would become an accident and it would be impossible to say that it became actual by something joined to it. For this reason, the separation of the matter from the form means that “the form comes to it externally and turns it into the actual without becoming a part of it,” rather than its having existence independent of it. As the matter possesses a separation that would allow the form to come from outside, it cannot take over the role of a neutral element during the substantial composition, in which matter plays an important role – it is not only transformed by the substantial form, but also transforms it. Thus the matter-form relationship is not a unity in which the matter becomes the form itself. On the contrary, it is a composition in which a third thing that is different from both the matter and the form comes into existence: the composite substance.<sup>111</sup> The separation of the matter in this sense has a vital importance with regard to this theory of substantial composition, and thus Ibn Sīnā counts the matter that precedes the composition as an external cause.<sup>112</sup> He accepts that in the case of the intellect’s having a substantial separation and its participation in rational cognition with such a quality, the relation of the intellect and the intelligible could possibly turn into a substantial relation. Within this framework, the essential feature of intellection is constituted by the intellect’s acquiring its substance only by uniting with the intelligible that comes to it. During this unity, the separation between the receiver and the received disappears, for the intellect becomes the intelligible itself and unites with it. As a result, the essential feature of a substantial composition is constituted by the fact that a natural form comes from outside and unites with a subject that has the capacity to *transform* into everything and constitutes a third thing due to those two’s transformation, and that the essential feature of the intellect’s actuality is constituted by the fact that an intelligible form unites with something that has the capacity to *become* everything.

This analysis shows that Ibn Sīnā can avoid the danger of substantial composition only by accepting that the intellect has no essential separation (*al-infiṣāl bi al-dhāt*)

111 Üçer, *Suret, Cevher ve Varlık*, 174-82, 420-27.

112 Üçer, *Suret, Cevher ve Varlık*, 310-16.

from the intelligible. If we read him systematically and see him as a philosopher who recapitulates its solution throughout all his works, we will tend to see any other kind of solution as a contradiction. But reading him in an *aporetic* way would enable us to follow his corpus through all of these questions and answers and cause him to appear to be a philosopher who seeks and improves solutions for a certain question in his mind through his texts. For instance, approaching *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād* through an *aporetic* reading and comparing its solutions with those in his other works, we may see that another solution is given for the same problem through the new distinctions developed in his other texts. Ibn Sinā devised the position of identity in *al-Mabda'* because the potential intellect cannot have a separate identity that is independent from the intelligible form. In fact, this kind of separation was the main feature of the substantial composition that he was trying to avoid. Ibn Sinā does not return to this subject in *al-Hidāya* (written after *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*), but reexamines the same issue in his later *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*. This work, however, possesses a distinction that does not exist in *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*: “the self-awareness (*al-shu'ūr bi al-nafs*)” that the soul possesses before its intellection of any intelligible, and its “self-intellection” that appears when it intellects itself through intelligibles. The first part of this distinction (discussed above) is very important in terms of maintaining the soul’s essential unity and independence. This direct and primary self-awareness, which was pointed out by the “flying man” example in *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs* and then in *al-Ishārāt*,<sup>113</sup> was systematized in a way designed to constitute a basis for all kinds of cognitive acts in *al-Ta'liqāt* and *al-Mubāḥḥathāt*.<sup>114</sup> Ibn Sinā uses this primary and essential self-awareness to prove that the potential intellect possesses an essential independence before receiving any intelligible, and thereby preserves this independency along with all the processes of cognition. Once the potential intellect is expounded as a subject that has an essential independency, intelligibles became meanings coming from the outside and were present in it accidentally. And so Ibn Sinā conceptualizes the relation of intellect and intelligible not as “coming from outside and uniting with something that has the capacity of becoming potentially everything and became one with it,” but as “coming from outside and conjoining with something that has the capacity of representing potentially everything and present in it.” The natural consequence of this conceptualization is the transformation of knowledge into accident with regard to the independent subject, where knowledge is present. Ibn Sinā embarks on this idea consistently after *al-Shifā'* and never returns to the view found in *al-Mabda'*. One of

113 Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, 26-27; *al-Ishārāt*, III/1-7, 233-36.

114 See D. Black, “Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Self-Knowledge,” 65.

the most obvious indications of this is that the idea of identity in regard to human intellect, which is used as a proof of the identity of the intellect, that which intellects, and that which is intellected in the Necessary Being in *al-Mabda'*, is abandoned in the section bearing the same title in *al-Shifā'/Ilāhiyyāt*, where the idea of perfection (*istikmāl*) is adopted.<sup>115</sup> Even more important, in the works written after *al-Mabda'* (e.g., *al-Risāla al-'Arshiyya* and *al-Najāt*), he replaces his former example with that of the human's identity not with the intelligibles it abstracted externally, but being identified with its own essence during self-cognition.<sup>116</sup> However, at first glance some passages seem to impair this consistency in the post-*al-Mabda'* texts. The expressions concerning the human soul's final perfection in the section on eschatology (*ma'ād*) in *al-Shifā'/Ilāhiyyāt* IX/7, which is reiterated in *Aḥwāl al-Nafs* later on, can be referred to within this framework.<sup>117</sup> Here, Ibn Sīnā uses the following expressions to describe the human rational soul's perfection: i) its becoming an intellectual world in which there is inscribed the form of the whole, the order in the whole that is intellectually apprehended, and the good that emanates from the whole (*an taṣīra 'ālamān 'aqliyyan murtasaman fī-hā ṣūrat al-kull...*), ii) the structure of existence being completed in its entirety within the soul (*ḥattā tastawfiya fī nafsihā hay'at al-wujūd kullihī*), iii) its transforming into an intelligible world that parallels the existing world in its entirety (*fa-tanqaliba 'ālamān ma'qūlan muwāziyan li al-'ālam kullihī*), iv) its becoming united with it (*muttaḥidatan bi-hī*), v) its becoming imprinted with its example and structure (*muntaqishatan bi-mithālihī ve hay'atihī*), and vi) its affiliation with it and becoming of its substance (*wa munkharītan fī silkihī wa sā'iratan min jawharihī*).<sup>118</sup> The expressions with regard to the soul's becoming an intellectual world or its transforming into an intelligible world, which is equal to the intelligible world, imply that rational cognition can perceive all intelligibles and that when this cognition is completed, the intelligibles that emerge in our intellect will bring about a world of intelligible forms that is equal to the external material forms. This way of expression is similar to Aristotle's statements in *De Anima* 3.8, 431b20-24, that the soul is all things that exist due to the fact that both sensible and rational cognition are parallel with sensible and intelligible things. According to Ibn Sīnā, this takes place because the world's form is inscribed (*irtasama*) in the intellect, and thus emphasizing the inscription excludes the identity position right from the outset. The later term unity (*ittiḥād*) is explained by emphasizing the inscription of an intelligible example of the realities in a way that

115 See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'/Ilāhiyyāt*, 356, 16-357, 2.

116 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, ed. M. Fahri, Beirut: 1982, s. 280-81; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Risāla al-'arshiyya*, 8.

117 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'/Ilāhiyyāt*, 425,15-426,10; cf. *Aḥwāl al-nafs*, 130,9-131,3.

118 Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 350,15-28; cf. *al-Shifā'/Ilāhiyyāt*,425,15-426,10.

accentuates that this refers to the weak identity. The intellect's participation with the intelligible forms and being formed with their substance implies that the intellect, which is intelligible, has the same ontological structure as do the intelligibles *vis-à-vis* existence, and that its increasing cognitions concerning the intelligibles brings forth the ever-increasing actuality of its own intelligible existence. This causes Ibn Sīnā to state that during the actuality of the same sort above, the intellect, that which intellects, and that which is intellected are one or become almost one (*aw qarībun min al-wāḥid*) and thereby seeks to accentuate that the conjoining (*al-wuṣūl*) of the immaterial intellect with the intelligibles that became immaterial means that it would acquire the same mode of existence in a way that cannot be compared to the conjoining of material surfaces. However, to eliminate the implication that they may become numerically one, he adds "almost one," the same attitude that can be found in the seventh section of *al-Shifā'/Ilahiyāt*'s eighth chapter. Here, Ibn Sīnā compares the sense and rational cognition in respect to their power of abstraction and, following the traditional emphasis that rational cognition is so strong that cannot be compared with sense cognition, states that the intellect conjuncts with the intelligibles "and becomes identical with it **in a way** and comprehends its essence, not its temporal aspect."<sup>119</sup> Throughout the course from *De Anima* and its interpretations to Ibn Sīnā, the comparison seeks to emphasize the fact that although sense cognition, for example, can perceive an apple by abstracting it from its material accidents, it still cognizes the apple as an individual apple in a way that continues its relation with the external apple, whereas the intelligible apple in the intellect is abstracted from this individuality and attains universality. Contrary to the senses' cognition of the temporal aspects, the intellect has the capacity to cognize that thing's permanent essence. To prevent anyone from confusing this emphasis of strong abstraction with the idea of numerical identity, Ibn Sīnā adds "in a way" (*alā wajhin mā*). Apart from this, the passage's most important point is that although rational cognition has a higher pleasure of abstraction in comparison with sense cognition, it will not attain the pleasure of absolute abstraction to the extent that it would become one with the intelligibles as long as it remains in the sensible world. Ibn Sīnā claims that the only way to attain this level of absolute abstraction only when our soul separates from the body and thereby gains independence (*law infaradnā 'an al-badan*). Only this enables us to attain such a higher level of identity. As a result, let alone the fact that they contradict the theory of representation, both passages contain an aspect that confirms this view. In this respect, the post-*al-Shifā'* texts continue to defend the theory of

119 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'/Ilahiyāt*, 269,11-270,4.

representation clearly and refute the opposite view just as clearly. Within this framework, those expressions that emphasize identity in the post-*al-Shifā'* Avicennian corpus should be interpreted with the weak identity and the intelligibles' immaterial representation.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of the article, we asked some questions concerning Ibn Sinā's position on the identity of the intellect and the intelligible. The first question, whether the position in which the intelligibles may exist in the human intellect only through representation, was presented consistently in Ibn Sinā's corpus. This problem of consistency brought about by his statements in *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād* could be solved through an *aporetic* reading of his texts. Accordingly, we see that because Ibn Sinā does not have the view that the intellect has its own essential independence apart from its intellection of any other intelligible in *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*, here he accepts that the intellect is identical with the intelligibles during its actual intellection of them, just as his predecessors al-Fārābī and Alexander did. However, beginning with *al-Shifā'/al-Nafs*, he defends his view of the immaterial representation of intelligibles consistently. His interpretations in *Hawāshī* suggests that the term unity (*ittihād*) should be understood as the representation that takes place through immaterial reception when he is talking about the human soul's relation with the external intelligibles. This attitude also shows that there is a difference between the identity position he targeted during his critique of Porphyry and the identity position he seems to accept when interpreting Aristotle. In this case, Ibn Sinā criticized the Porphyrian approach's "strong identity" position, according to which the intellect and the intelligible are numerically identical. This position, which did not belong to Porphyry but was developed by Christian philosophers in Baghdad who used it as a basis for their own theological approach, was attributed to Porphyry by Ibn Sinā due to the relevant texts' usage of him. Ibn Sinā argues that this position jeopardizes the plasticity of cognition and violates some self-evident rational principles. And so he narrows down the identity of the intellect and the intelligible via the intellection of divine intellects and the direct self-awareness of the human intellect. As for the relation of the intellect with the external intelligibles, he considers this to be due to the presence (*ḥuṣūl*) of an immaterial exemplar (*mithāl*) in the mind, which exemplifies the "weak-identity" position. Ibn Sinā's attainment of such a position was made possible by the idea of a potential intellect that gained a quality of being a separate and independent substratum for the mentioned exemplars. Here is the point that gives his approach

on an authentic place throughout the history of Peripatetic and Neo-Platonic theories of intellect. Bearing in mind Alexander's interpretation of identity as the unity of the actualities of intellect and intelligibles, Ibn Sinā considers it to be reasonable in respect to the indirect and secondary self-cognition that comes after direct self-awareness. But unlike Alexander, he posits a level of cognition in which the intellect realizes itself as an intellect without the mediation of any external intelligibles. For this reason, he prefers to interpret all kinds of secondary intellection as immaterial representation (*tamaththul*) instead of unity (*ittiḥād*). Although Ibn Sinā's narrowing the identity of the knower and the known with self-awareness was a step in the same direction with that of Stephanus, he argues, unlike Stephanus, that God and the separate intellects also cognize themselves and become identified with their intelligibles during this intellection. On the other hand, Stephanus seems to ignore the problem of cognition's plasticity, which is mentioned by Alexander and which Ibn Sinā tries to solve by the notion of primary self-awareness. Although it seems doubtful if Ibn Sinā saw it or not, the commentary of *De Anima* contains a distinction made by Philoponus that finds an echo in the Avicennian theory: the presence of an immaterial trace or image (*eikonikōs*) of the divine intellects and an immaterial exemplar (*paradeigmatikos*) of material intelligibles in our mind. Ibn Sinā's distinction concerning the manner in which the intelligibles in themselves and the intelligibles through another become present in our intellect is parallel with this distinction. However, he must have found Philoponus' Alexandrian position, which links the self-intellection to intellecting other intelligibles, insufficient due to its lack of direct self-awareness, which would be the basis of the idea of representation.

Ibn Sinā's description of intellection as the presence of an immaterial example or a similar of the intelligibles in the intellect raises the question of what is the difference between the exemplar of a horse on a wall or on a mirror and the one in our intellect. All kinds of weak identity positions would encounter this question. Ibn Sinā's answer lies in the formulation of "intellection as perfection." Whether this answer is consistent in itself and whether it separates the intellect from a mirror will be the subject of further studies and is beyond the scope of this article. Furthermore, the relation of the knower and the known that we discussed at a *static* level by focusing on the relation in which the intelligible form exists, should be discussed and tested on a *dynamic* level in a broader context *vis-à-vis* the process that these forms take in the intellect. Despite the static point of view that focuses on the existence of intelligible forms, the dynamic perspective would focus on the process of abstraction. On the other hand, we stated at the beginning

that to determine Ibn Sīnā's position concerning the identity of the knower and the known plays an important role in determining his final approach concerning the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. This is because replacing the identity of the knower and the known, which denotes a strong realism that seeks to eliminate all kinds of skeptical critique tending toward the possibility of knowledge with the theory of representation that corresponds to a weak identity, may lead Ibn Sīnā to encounter a question as to whose representation we possess or what we know in reality. The answer of this question may include remarkable results concerning to what extent the epistemological truism of Avicennan epistemology would be pursued or would pursue.

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