

## INTUITION AND ITS ROLE IN IBN SĪNĀ'S EPISTEMOLOGY\*

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This paper reexamines Ibn Sīnā's theory of knowledge and discusses the key role he assigns to intuition in solving the epistemological problems of knowing the first principles, the middle terms, the primary concepts, and the self's existence.<sup>1</sup> To reconstruct and give a coherent restatement of his epistemology by means of textual analysis and hermeneusis is certainly a worthwhile task since Ibn Sīnā's own statement of his views about knowledge has come down to us in a very disjointed form, scattered throughout his large philosophical corpus.

### *I. Terminology and Definition*

The term 'intuition' is used here equivocally. Firstly, we use 'intuition' in reference to that cognitive faculty of the human mind or soul with which a person acquires knowledge. Intuition, in this sense, which we may otherwise call "intuitive intellect," naturally operates in close relation with other mental faculties, viz. the sensitive, the retentive, the cogitative, the imaginative

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\* This is a slightly revised version of the first chapter of my "Ibn Sīnā's Theory of Intuition" (Master's thesis, ISTAC, July 1999). I am particularly grateful to Professors Alparslan Açıkgöç and Paul Lettinck for their comments and suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> By this is meant the problem of the existence of the self (*wujūd al-dhāt*)—"existence" in the sense of "being(ness)" (*mawjūdiyyah*) and "isness" (*huwiyyah* or *inniyyah*). For an extensive discussion of the term and its logico-ontological implications, see Richard M. Frank, "The Origin of the Arabic Philosophical term «anniyya»," *Cahiers de Byrsa* 6 (1956): 81–201; and Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, "Anniyya–Annitas," in *Mélanges offerts à É. Gilson* (Paris and Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1959), 9–81, reprinted in idem, *Avicenne en Occident* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1993).

and the estimative powers. Secondly, intuition refers to the mental act of intuiting and contemplating, which represents not only the activity but also the method and skill the human mind exercises when dealing with a problem. Thirdly, the word is also taken to denote that special kind of knowledge produced by the intuitive faculty of the mind, or the result of its intuitive activity. Intuition in this last sense is thus synonymous with intuitive knowledge (*cognitio* or *scientia intuitiva*).

Ibn Sinā employs various Arabic and Persian words for intuition. The most frequently used among them is the Arabic term *ḥads*, the root verb of which means literally "to throw; to cast; to aim at; to shoot [an arrow]; to lay down; to slaughter; to form an opinion; to surmise; to guess; to come into one's mind; to hasten; to be quick in pace or to walk fast."<sup>2</sup> Muslim philosophers, Ibn Sinā included, have used the word metaphorically to designate a swift movement of the mind from one idea to another, thus denoting a quick grasp and an instantaneous, all-at-once apprehension of the truth of a matter.<sup>3</sup> But this, again we must note, is purely an act of reason or "rational intuition" that has nothing to do with inspiration, revelation, or mystical illumination whatsoever. As a technical term, *ḥads* mostly occurs in the psychology and logic sections of Ibn Sinā's major works. Let us see how this term is defined by Ibn Sinā:<sup>4</sup>

All learning, whether autodidactic or through instruction, may vary in degrees. Some people are more capable of forming concepts [while others are

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), s.v. "ḥ-d-s". Cf. Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), s.v. "ḥ-d-s."

<sup>3</sup> Al-Taḥānawī in *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn* (Cairo: al-Muʾassasah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah, 1963), s.v. "ḥ-d-s," says "hence its well-known definition ('urriḥa fī al-mashhūr)," namely the quick arrival of mind at the *quaesitum* by hitting the middle term right at once (*dafʿatan*).

<sup>4</sup> Almost all these definitions are given in Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 160–6, hereafter cited as *Gutas*. All translations are my mine, unless indicated otherwise.