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## AVICENNA AND THE PROBLEM OF INDIVIDUATION VALORIZING THE INDIVIDUALS

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**Abstract.** This study tries to shed further light on Avicenna's (d. 1037) philosophical and linguistic innovations as suggested in his various accounts of the problem of individuation. To better contextualize his discussions, a background is given from both Porphyry's (d. 305) *Isagoge* and Fārābī's (d. 950) remarks in his *Isāgūgī*. I have also enumerated all the candidates for the principle of individuation in Avicenna's œuvre. It is argued in this paper that the pre-Avicennian Peripatetic tradition hardly engaged, both epistemologically and ontologically, with individual *per se* as having its own unique identity. Instead, individual was ontologically treated as instantiation of universals and epistemologically it was inquired about to the extent that it could be only told apart. Introducing the notion of individuation as *tašahḥuṣ*, instead of the traditional individuation as *tamayyuz*, Avicenna offers a new way of looking at intra-species differences for a more complex understanding of the individual *per se*. According to this view, individual with its unique *šaḥsiyya* must be understood on its own through sense perception. This approach appears to propose that the individual should not be deemed as subordinate to Aristotelian universals whose assemblage, in Peripatetic thought, was vainly expected to lead to the knowledge and definition of the individual.

**Résumé.** Cette étude tente de mettre plus en lumière les innovations philosophiques et linguistiques d'Avicenne (m. 1037) à travers ses diverses explications du problème de l'individuation. Pour mieux comprendre son discours, je le replace dans un contexte historique en partant de l'*Isagoge* de Porphyre (m. 305) et des remarques de Fārābī (m. 950) dans son *Isāgūgī*. J'ai également énuméré les candidats au principe d'individuation dans l'œuvre d'Avicenne. Cet article soutient que, dans la tradition péripatéticienne pré-avicennienne, l'individu en tant que porteur d'une identité unique n'était guère considéré, ni épistémologiquement ni ontologiquement. Au lieu de cela, l'individu a été traité ontologiquement comme une instantiation d'universaux et, épistémologiquement, on ne l'interrogeait que dans la mesure où il pouvait être distingué. En introduisant la notion d'individuation comme *tašahḥuṣ*, au lieu de l'individuation traditionnelle comme *tamayyuz*, Avicenne propose une nouvelle façon d'examiner les différences intra-espèces pour une compréhension plus complexe de l'individu en soi. Dans cette perspective, l'individu avec sa *šaḥsiyya* unique doit être compris par lui-même à travers la perception sensorielle. Cette approche tend à proposer que l'individu ne soit pas considéré comme subordonné aux universaux aristotéliens dont l'assemblage, dans la pensée péripatéticienne, était vainement supposé conduire à la connaissance et à la définition de l'individu.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Avicenna (d. 1037) contributed considerably to the study of individuation in the Arabic / Islamic philosophy. His innovations are reflected in both his philosophy and terminology. He does not offer an ultimate and systematic solution to the problem of individuation but what makes his treatment of this problem significant, this paper argues, is the variety of his solutions and the efforts that he makes in order to blaze a trail outside the Aristotelian-Porphyrian approach toward the particulars.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Avicenna's individuating principles, as discussed in his oeuvre, have not been yet enumerated comprehensively.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will study the background to Avicennian understanding of individuation from Porphyry's (d. 305) *Isagoge*, as a classical standard introduction to Aristotle's (d. 322 BC) logical works, and some of the remarks by Fārābī (d. 950) on his reading of the *Isagoge*. As for the Avicennian discussions of individuation, it will be shown that, interestingly, Avicenna resorts to almost all well-known individuating candidates in addressing this problem. In the end, I will try to dissect Avicenna's philosophical and terminological innovations: he appears to be valorizing and giving more epistemo-metaphysical weight to the individuals which had been previously downplayed in the mainly epistemic approach of Peripatetic philosophy and were hardly more than mere instantiations of the superior universals which were themselves the building blocks of knowledge. Therefore, it is argued that although Avicenna does not appear as coherent in his treatment of individuation, he shows significant insights in his inquiry into this question. Some of his innovations were clearly picked up by subsequent thinkers.<sup>3</sup> These insights mostly surface in his

<sup>1</sup> Black also argues that in Avicenna there is no ultimate individuating cause. See Deborah L. Black, "Avicenna on Individuation, Self-Awareness, and God's Knowledge of Particulars," in *The Judeo-Christian-Islamic Heritage: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. by R. Taylor and I. Omar (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 2012), p. 255–281, 277. However, as noted by Benevich, her analysis is restricted to a few passages and hence not as comprehensive. See Fedor Benevich, "Individuation and identity in Islamic philosophy after Avicenna: Bahmanyār and Suhrawardī," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 28 (2020), p. 1–2.

<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that there is no Arabic equivalent for "the principle of individuation" in the classical philosophical literature.

<sup>3</sup> The reception of his thoughts on individuation are partly discussed in a recent work. See Peter Adamson and Fedor Benevich, *The Heirs of Avicenna: Philosophy in the Islamic East, 12–13th Centuries: Metaphysics and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2023), p. 293–298. Bahmanyār (d. 1066), Suhrawardī (d. 1191), Rāzī (d. 1210), Abhari (d. 1265), and Ṭūsī (d. 1274) are discussed in this recent book.

breaking away from the dominant universal-oriented view that disregards viewing individual *as individual* and that hardly considers individual in and of itself as worthy of philosophical investigation. Accordingly, the present study will also help find a significant source for what is called a “rebellion against” the Aristotelian-Porphyrian thesis according to which “we grasp the essences of extramental things by providing their scientific definitions in terms of genus and species.”<sup>4</sup> Avicenna had already critiqued such tenet and, however unsystematically, paved some alternative way.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. PORPHYRY'S ISAGOGUE

Some scholars have tried to elaborate Porphyry's solution to the problem of individuation drawing mainly on his *Introduction*.<sup>6</sup> There are passages in the *Isagoge* that can be taken as referring to the individuality or discernibility of particulars. The bundle theory of individuation, which holds a cluster of accidental characteristics as what individuates each individual, is argued to have been favored by Porphyry in the *Introduction*.<sup>7</sup> In an oft-cited passage we read:

And that which is described as being an individual is [taken] as being Socrates, and *that* white, and *that* approaching one, as if you said the son of Sophroniscus provided that he has no children other than Socrates; such things are called individuals since each one of them is constituted of properties the very same assemblage of which cannot be found at some time in

<sup>4</sup> Fedor Benevich, “Meaning and Definition: Scepticism and Semantics in Twelfth-Century Arabic Philosophy,” *Theoria*, 88 (2022), p. 72–108, 73. Benevich argues that Abū l-Barakāt al-Baġdādī (d. 1165) was a common source for both Suhrawardī and Rāzī in their criticism of or “rebellion against” this approach.

<sup>5</sup> Benevich calls this stance as “Aristotelian-Avicennian” which the present study tries to challenge. See Benevich, “Meaning,” p. 73. It must be noted that Avicenna was an inheritor of this authoritative Aristotelian conceptual framework. As an inventive thinker, he hence had to both relay / expound the tradition and modify / synthesize. If he appears to be “a good Aristotelian” on some occasions, it could partly be explained by the former dimension of his work, as it is the case when he suggests, quite Peripatetically, matter or bundle of accidents as a principle of individuation.

<sup>6</sup> Jorge J. E. Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages* (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1984), p. 12–13 and 67–70; Richard Sorabji, “Porphyry on Self-Awareness, True Self, and Individual,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies: Supplement*, 98 (2007), p. 61–69. As the present study is confined to the Arabic / Islamic tradition, it mainly relies on the medieval Arabic translation of Porphyry's *Isagoge*.

<sup>7</sup> Gracia, *Introduction*, p. 67–70; Sorabji, “Porphyry on Self-Awareness,” p. 69.

anything else among the particular things. So, the properties of Socrates cannot be found in any of the particulars other than him.<sup>8</sup>

Although there is apparently no concern over the individuating or differentiating cause of the individual, Porphyry is explicitly discriminating Socrates from any other individual in virtue of his cluster of accidental features.<sup>9</sup>

The individuating cause often attributed to Aristotle is matter.<sup>10</sup> However, there has been a debate whether matter or form is the ultimate principle of individuation on Aristotle's view.<sup>11</sup> The reason bundle theory came to dominate the individuation discourse might have been the *Isagoge* in which Porphyry expressly formulates the five universals that have filled the world and no entity escapes their all-inclusiveness.<sup>12</sup> For our present study of Avicenna's stance, what matters more is the impact of, rather than the cause behind, such an approach toward individuation because the *Isagoge* became a standard gateway to logic in the Islamic philosophical tradition.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Translated from the Arabic. Abd al-Rahman Badawi (ed.), *Mantiq Aristū*, 3 vol. (Cairo: Maṭba'at dār al-kutub al-miṣriyyah, 1952), vol. 3, p. 1035; Ahmad Fuad al-Ahwani (ed.), *Isāgūgī li-Furfuriyūs al-Ṣūrī naql Abī 'Utmān al-Dimašqī* (Cairo: Dār ihyā' al-kutub al-ʿarabīyyah, 1952), p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> Sorabji believes that this argument in the *Isagoge* about the discernibility or distinction of the individuals cannot be traced in Aristotle's oeuvre. Instead, he contends that it was Plato who had inspired Porphyry and then he cites a short section from *Theaetetus* (See *Theaetetus* 209 c). Sorabji cites a single passage from the end of *Theaetetus* which is very interesting in this respect (Sorabji, "Porphyry on Self-Awareness," p. 67) since, later in that very dialogue (209 d), Socrates himself states critically that such a view, which Sorabji believes could have inspired Porphyry, on understanding an individual through differentness and a distinctive description is εὐήθης, simple-minded or silly.

<sup>10</sup> See David Ross, *Aristotle*, 6th ed. (London: Routledge, 1995); Gertrude Anscombe, "Symposium: The Principle of Individuation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volumes*, 27 (1953), p. 83–96; A. C. Lloyd, "Aristotle's Principle of Individuation," *Mind*, 79 (1970), p. 519–529; Marc Cohen, "Aristotle and Individuation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy: Supplementary Volumes*, 10 (1984), p. 41–65.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see William Charlton "Aristotle and the Principle of Individuation," *Phronesis*, 17 (1972), p. 239–249; Jennifer E. Whiting, "Form and Individuation in Aristotle," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 3 (1986), p. 359–377.

<sup>12</sup> Sorabji suggests that the reason Porphyry is not referring to matter is that he is composing his treatise as an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*, which has no reference to the notions of matter and form, and he opts not to enter such complexities – the *Isagoge* was also supposed to be a guide for the beginners. It is also argued that it was Porphyry who paved the way for his successors such as Simplicius (d. circa 540) and Proclus (d. 485) to rely on a unique bundle of characteristics to explain individuation (Sorabji, "Porphyry on Self-Awareness," p. 68).

It must be noted that, when equipped with the conceptual apparatus offered by the *Isagoge*, namely the five universals, particulars cannot be but a bundle of universals.<sup>14</sup> The Aristotelian hylomorphic universe as adopted by Porphyry starts from the top by *summum genus*, then the intermediate genera and *infima species*. The differentiating factors inhering in an individual and rendering it distinct in one way or another occur in three manners: *‘āmm* (κοινῶς, commonly), *ḥāṣṣ* (ἰδίως, properly), *ḥāṣṣ al-ḥāṣṣ* (ἰδιαιτάτα, the most properly). Of these three, the latter, namely *ḥāṣṣ al-ḥāṣṣ*, is the well-known *al-faṣl* that only causes inter-species differences. The other two which are supposed to produce numerical difference are both accidental. Although the first one, that is the common differentia, is not very clear in Porphyry’s work,<sup>15</sup> Fārābī believes that for Porphyry this is nothing but *separable* accidents such as sitting or standing.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the proper difference, which is defined by Porphyry as a kind difference resulted from *inseparable accidents*, is expressly indicated as *accidental*.<sup>17</sup> In general, with the Porphyrian

<sup>13</sup> What is of more importance to our current inquiry is mostly Porphyry’s addressing the question of individuation or particularity in his *Isagoge* which had a lasting and comprehensive impact on the commentary tradition in general, and the Islamic philosophical tradition in particular.

<sup>14</sup> In the very beginning of the *Isagoge*, Porphyry declares that his work is going to be restricted to abstract and conceptual discussions and he is not going to inquire about the extramental sources of concepts. See Badawi, *Mantiq*, vol. 3, p. 1021–2; al-Ahwani, *Isāgūḡī*, p. 67. His inquiry is to be only “from a logical point of view.” See Jonathan Barnes, *Porphyry: Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 3. Also, as the Arabic text goes, it is to be “a mental discourse” (*qawl ‘aqli*). See Badawi, *Mantiq*, vol. 3, p. 1022 (this cannot be found in al-Ahwani’s edition). It can partly attest to Porphyry’s epistemological preoccupation in composing his authoritative introduction to Aristotle.

<sup>15</sup> He refers to “an otherness” (*ḡayriyya*, ἑτερότης) by which an individual becomes different from another individual or even from itself, as in Socrates as an infant versus Socrates as a man, without further discussing what exactly it means. Contemporary and medieval scholars have found this short passage unilluminating and in need of more explanation. See Barnes, *Introduction*, p. 157–8.

<sup>16</sup> Fārābī, *Al-mantiqiyyāt*, ed. by Mohammad Daneshpazhuh, 3 vol. (Qom: Maktabat Mar‘aṣī, 1988), vol. 1, p. 37. Porphyry does not seem to limit this type of difference to *separable* accidents and the commentators of late antiquity are not known to have interpreted it like Fārābī. Barnes writes that according to the possible interpretations of this “common” difference, it is mainly just difference in general and there has not been any reference to its being the result of separable or inseparable accidents (Barnes, *Introduction*, p. 157–158). Avicenna also considers the common difference as accidental. See Avicenna, *Al-ṣifā’<sup>2</sup>: Al-madhḥal*, ed. by Madkour et al. (Qom: Maktabat Mar‘aṣī, 1985), p. 73. The edition of *Al-ṣifā’<sup>2</sup>* cited here is an exact reprint of the Cairo edition.

<sup>17</sup> Badawi, *Mantiq*, p. 1036; al-Ahwani, *Isāgūḡī*, p. 77. Avicenna also clearly states that

apparatus, there is nothing essential to Socrates as a human individual which is not also essential to and shared by Plato as a human individual.<sup>18</sup> As a result, they are reduced to their *shared* human specific form conjoined with *accidental* additions.

Since in Porphyry's *Isagoge* the intra-species difference corresponds to accidental distinctness, it can be thus concluded that there is no need to attest to short, often controversial, fragments of the *Isagoge* to show Porphyry's inevitable, if not voluntary, espousal of the bundle theory for the principle of individuation. The bundle theory is the fruit of the overall structure of the *Isagoge*. It is necessary to take into account the fact that the subsequent thinkers were mainly dominated by Aristotelian-Porphyrian conceptual framework whereby the question of individuation had to be addressed.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore hardly possible to be able to climb down the Porphyrian tree to reach, for example, Socrates unless we are satisfied with deeming him as a cluster of general, shareable concepts. When it comes to individuals or individual instances in his treatise, Porphyry confines them to some comparative remarks such as *how different* X is from Y. Interestingly and more importantly, these analyses are focused on an epistemic level centered around the question of *distinction*, i. e. it is all about how a knowing subject distinguishes the individual objects, and objects *per se* are simply overlooked.<sup>20</sup> It seems justifiable to suggest that Porphyry's effort to present the objects of the world through the lenses of five universals was received as an orthodox Aristotelian theory.<sup>21</sup>

As a closing remark for this section, I contend that the stable and imperishable knowledge of the universals, in contrast to unstable and perishable knowledge of the particulars,<sup>22</sup> has drawn the lion's share of attention at the cost of the identity of the particulars.<sup>23</sup> As a result,

"it is a necessary predicate from the accidents" (Avicenna, *Al-šifāʿ: Al-madḥal*, p. 73).

<sup>18</sup> See Barnes, *Introduction*, p. 201–3.

<sup>19</sup> See Adamson and Benevise, *The Heirs*, p. 293.

<sup>20</sup> Porphyry appears on an occasion as viewing differentiation from another angle. It is in his discussion of two types of inseparable differentiae: one renders a thing as *āḥar* ("other," ἄλλος), whereas the other makes it *gayr* (distinct or "otherlike," ἄλλοίος). See Badawi, *Manṭiq*, p. 1038; al-Ahwani, *Isāgūḡī*, p. 77–8. But again, the question here is one of differentiation.

<sup>21</sup> See Sorabji, "Porphyry on Self-Awareness," p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> On Aristotle's emphasis that perishability of the particulars prevents their inclusion in definition and demonstration, see *Metaphysics*, book Z, chap. 15, 1039 b 20–1040 b 4.

<sup>23</sup> The Porphyrian emphasis put on the universals can be also seen in the Aristotelian notion of *epistēmē* as universal knowledge. There must be a systematic relation be-



although it requires further investigation, it is probably in the face of such absence of the individual that in a certain tradition of the *Isagoge* in the Islamic world, individual (*ṣaḥṣ*) was stated as one of the six (rather than five) predicables which were to be studied in the *Isagoge*, as *the Introduction* to logic. This could be seen as an effort to take account of the traditionally overshadowed individuals.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. FĀRĀBĪ AND THE QUESTION OF INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION

In the Arabic Aristotelian tradition as well, the weight of the universals and neglect of the particulars can be seen, for example, in Fārābī as Avicenna's notable forerunner. In his view, between two types of questions about any individual – “What is it?” and “Which is it?” – the former asks about the quiddity, and it is independent of anything else in the world, whereas the latter looks for distinctive features that can pick out a given individual in relation to other individuals adjacent to it. He further explains:

If we say “the essence of the thing” or “the essence of this thing” or “the essence of a certain thing,” we are then seeking its quiddity which is more particular than what denotes “the thing” (*al-ṣay*). And if we say “the essence of Zayd,” we are then seeking his quiddity which is *more general* than what denotes “Zayd” or which is his true quiddity [i. e. human], since the name “Zayd” might happen to fall on the referred thing because it possesses a sign (*al-ʿalāma*) which is not the result of his being *human* [but the result of some non-essential addition to his true essence which is human].<sup>25</sup>

tween the understanding of universals as the proper object of knowledge (*epistēmē*) – especially with respect to God's knowledge – and the insignificance of the essences of the individuals. “A more Platonizing interpretation would be to insist that there can be demonstration or knowledge only of imperishable objects. This is clearly not what Aristotle intends, but thanks to the influence of Greek Neoplatonism it became a dominant way of understanding Aristotelian epistemology in the early Arabic tradition.” Peter Adamson, “On Knowledge of Particulars,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 105 (2005), 261.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, 4 vol. (Beirut: al-Dār al-Islāmiyya, 1992), vol. 1, p. 395; Ḥwārizmī, *Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm*, ed. by ʿAbd al-Amir Aʿṣam (Beirut: Dār al-Manāhil, 2008), p. 137; Siġistānī, *Kaṣf al-maḥḡūb*, ed. by H. Corbin (Tehran: Institut franco-iranien, 1949), p. 16; Tawḥīdī, *Al-imtāʿ wa al-muʿānasa* (Beirut: Maktabat ʿUnsuriyya, 2003), p. 98. The importance of the individual is intriguingly highlighted by Avicenna in his *Al-taʿliqāt* where he mentions God as an “individual” (*ṣaḥṣ*) who has neither genus nor species. See Avicenna, *Al-taʿliqāt*, ed. by Badawi (Beirut: Maktabat al-ʿlām al-Islāmī, 1984), p. 80. Furthermore, in the *ḥadīṭ* literature, God is sometimes referred to as *ṣaḥṣ*. For example, “No *ṣaḥṣ* is more jealous (*ġayūr*) than God.” See Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī: Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, § 20.

<sup>25</sup> Fārābī, *Kitāb al-ḥurūf*, ed. by Mohsen Mahdi (Beirut: Dār al-Maṣriq, 1986), p. 106.

In an interesting manner, Fārābī is explicitly reducing the essence of Zayd to his shared quiddity as human and all the rest are nothing but accidents and additions.<sup>26</sup> He maintains that the *true quiddity* is the specific form which, in this case, is human form. Fārābī implies that there can be something like “the essence of Zayd” versus “Zayd” himself; however, this “essence of Zayd” is his specific humanness and “Zayd” is that human species plus some external additions which are no intrinsic essential characteristics to Zayd. Therefore, he shows clear signs that Zayd’s individuality, which is particular, is of less significance compared to his common human essence, which is universal.

On Fārābī’s view, human form or quiddity in its universal sense is so solid and unalterable that no human individual can ever have some more particular human form or essence which might be slightly different from this paradigmatic human form. Individuals all have the same quiddity but with different accidental, secondary additions which do not make any substantial differences in the true nature of any human individual. Consequently, Fārābī would give the same answer to these two different questions: “What is Socrates?” and “What is Plato?” He is expected to reply: “They are humans.” They only show some of their peculiarities when the question becomes: “Which is Socrates?” and “Which is Plato?” It is here that they are described as possessing their own accidents and properties that merely tell them apart. So, Socrates and Plato are reduced to their distinct images in the eyes of the knowing subject. On this account, the question “What is Socrates?” is simply replied as “Human” and any details beyond that becomes the question how the knowing subject can distinguish Socrates. The question of differentiation is addressed in virtue of the attachments which are outside the substance. In this context, the possibility of exclusive identity which is not relative and might be envisaged regardless of any other individual fades away. All in all, in this framework, from an ontological point of view, there is barely any question of the unique identity or individuality of the individual, and epistemologically, how it is to be perceived or defined in and of itself is no matter of concern, but merely its differentiation from others.

It is thus important to consider this Aristotelian-Porphyrian background in which particulars are heavily outclassed and obscured by the

<sup>26</sup> He uses the term *al-‘alāma* which is broader than *‘arad* (accident) in the context of his discussion and is a non-essential attribute. For other instances of using this term as denoting the non-essential attributes or features of things, see Fārābī, *Kitāb al-hurūf*, p. 116, 173, 180.



universals, as is clearly seen in Fārābī, for our study of Avicenna's treatment of individuation. I will show that on some occasions Avicenna, in addressing the metaphysical significance of individuals, appears to be arguing against the functionality of this dominant view.

#### 4. PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUATION IN AVICENNA

The principles of individuation which are often cited as the most common in medieval philosophy can be also found in Avicenna's œuvre:<sup>27</sup> 1. Bundle of accidents; 2. Matter; 3. Some of the accidents; 4. Form; 5. Form and Matter; 6. Existence – there can also be a 7th one as *primitive individuation* which is mentioned in passing in the conclusion section. What follows will try to bring to light Avicenna's efforts in explaining individuation. It will be suggested that some of his most remarkable terminological and philosophical innovations surface when he tries to discuss individuation in relation to existence or extramentality.

##### 4.1. *Bundle of accidents*

This view of individuation, which is also called “the standard theory of individuation”<sup>28</sup> due to its dominance in the Middle Ages, recognizes a cluster of accidents as what individuates substances. Matter and form, in their Aristotelian sense, are equally shared by individuals of the same kind. Matter in itself has no distinctive features which might lead to different bulks of matter. And the specific form is also similarly shared by all its individuals. Therefore, considering that the individuals of the same kind cannot differ in terms of their essential features, namely matter and form, the difference then must be sought among the non-essentials, namely the accidental features. Avicenna too, along the same lines as Porphyry and Fārābī, resorts to a collection of accidents to explicate the process of individuation:

Individual becomes individual through the addition of accidental features, whether necessary or not, to the species.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See Peter King, “The problem of individuation in the middle ages,” *Theoria*, 66 (2000), p. 159–184. That Avicenna sets forth a variety of answers to the problem of individuation could partly be due to the fact that he is aware of the different possible solutions that each Aristotelian notion – such as matter, form, spatio-temporal position, etc. – could offer, and he happens to try them out in different contexts.

<sup>28</sup> Gracia, *Introduction*, p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Al-madḥal*, p. 70.

Accidents and external states are affixed to the existence [of the universal nature] whereby it individuates.<sup>30</sup>

Having in mind the distinction between “what is it?” and “which is it,” Avicenna writes that the reality of the existence of each human individual is through its shared humanness, whereas its “individual whichness” (*al-ayyiyya al-šaḥṣiyya*) is realized in virtue of its accidents.<sup>31</sup> Again, in the *Ilāhiyyāt*, he writes that for a given nature to become determined and realized there must occur to it the necessary concomitants, consisting of properties and accidents.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, he believes that the human soul comes to be individuated in virtue of its non-necessary accidents:

These souls become individuated as single [distinct] souls of their species through the attachment of the states which are not necessary to it qua soul, otherwise all [souls] would share in them.<sup>33</sup>

In these passages he never refers to any specific accident but mentions them in general. Therefore, from the standard Porphyrian point of view, considering the designative nature of accidents, on the one hand, and the universality of the genus and species, on the other, it is understandable that Avicenna on some occasions holds a bundle of accidents as what causes the instantiation of a species.

#### 4.2. Matter

In the Avicennian corpus it is sometimes discussed that the individuation is acquired through matter. Although there are questions about the exact nature of this matter – for example, to what extent, if at all, it should be designated by accidental features – Avicenna clearly refers to it as what causes particularization or individuality. From this Aristotelian viewpoint, form, which is equally shared by all its individual

<sup>30</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. by Madkour et al. (Qom: Maktabat Marʿašī, 1985; reprint of Cairo ed.), p. 208.

<sup>31</sup> Avicenna, *The Healing, Logic: Isagoge: A New Edition, English Translation and Commentary of the Kitāb al-madḥal of Avicenna’s Kitāb al-šifāʾ*, ed. by Silvia Di Vincenzo (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), p. 60. In the Cairo edition, instead of “*al-ayyiyya al-šaḥṣiyya*,” we read “*al-anniyya al-šaḥṣiyya*” which does not seem to be accurate. The term *ayyiyya* is also found in *Al-taḥṣīl*. See Bahmanyār, *Al-taḥṣīl*, ed. by Morteza Motahhari (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1997), p. 514.

<sup>32</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 228.

<sup>33</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Al-tabīʿiyyāt*, 3 vol. (Qom: Maktabat Marʿašī, 1985; reprint of Cairo ed.), vol. 2, *Kitāb al-nafs*, p. 199.

instantiations, can bring about no intra-species differentiation or particularization. And it is upon the union of form and matter that form is instantiated in the particulars. In his *Al-ta'liqāt*, he writes:

The particularization (*taḥaṣṣuṣ*) of the individuals of the species is only through matter, and it is not through [anything] intelligible.<sup>34</sup>

As for the immaterial entities (*al-mufāriqāt*), there is only one individual of their kind and they cannot be instantiated into more than one, for there is no matter that can cause particularization:

And since each species is ought to be found merely as individual, and the individuality of the separate [immaterial] entities is in their essence and the individuality of the mixed ones is through matter, it is necessary that nothing material be possible unless in matter. Hence the matter seems to be a cause for a concomitant of the form, namely individuality.<sup>35</sup>

There is also another question regarding the differentiating nature of matter when it is coupled with form. Is it matter by itself which is causing this particularization or the accidents emerging right upon this coupling? If the latter is correct, then taking matter as the principle of individuation goes back to taking accidents as the principle of individuation since matter in this respect is no more than a seat for the accidents which act as distinguishing characteristics.<sup>36</sup>

In general, drawing on the Aristotelian-Porphyrian concepts, although Avicenna happens at times to cite matter as the individuating part of the things, the individuating function of matter cannot be but the individuating or distinguishing function of the accidents: matter in itself is a substance common among all the individuals of a given species, as is the specific form equally shared.<sup>37</sup> Human form, for instance, cannot have any of its essential or essentially inseparable parts as what causes individuality. Therefore, the cause for distinction among

<sup>34</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, p. 138.

<sup>35</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, p. 58–9.

<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, there is an interesting reference in his *Al-mubāḥaṭāt* in which he mentions accidents and form together as dependent upon matter for their individuality. See Avicenna, *Al-mubāḥaṭāt*, ed. by Mohsen Bidarfar (Qom: Bidār, 1992), p. 132.

<sup>37</sup> If matter is argued to have its own personal history, and hence identity, the question would be then how the prime matter which was essentially indifferent came to be distinct in the world. Therefore, some individuating or distinctive addition to matter is required. The interconnectedness of matter and accidents is suggested by Druart's conclusion: "Individuation [of the soul] ... is caused by its connection to a particular body which locates it in space and time." See Thérèse-Anne Druart, "The Human Soul's Individuation and its Survival After the Body's Death: Avicenna on the Causal Relation Between Body and Soul," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 10 (2000), p. 259–273, 272.

individuals or their exclusive identity must be sought somewhere outside the domain of the shared human form. Matter *per se* is also a shared substance and possesses no distinctive features, so it fails to account for the intra-species differences. Accordingly, if matter is declared as the principle of individuation, it is because the accidents have come into function in virtue of matter and have converted the prime matter – i. e. matter *per se* – into some kind of designated matter or matter with some distinctive features. This may explain why in Avicennian corpus, in addressing the question of individuation, reference to accidents is much more frequent than matter. In whatever way interpreted, matter is sometimes overtly suggested as the principle of individuation, and it shows that Avicenna is occasionally inclined toward it for explaining the complicated question of individuation.

### 4.3. *Some of the accidents*

A number of accidents are sometimes held to be responsible for individuation, and among them are often position (*wadʿ*), time, and place. When it comes to invoking place, time, and position to account for individuation, notwithstanding the lack of a consistent formula throughout his works, it could be argued that Avicenna holds spatio-temporal position as the principle of individuation. On different occasions he provides somewhat different answers, namely: 1. Position;<sup>38</sup> 2. Position and place;<sup>39</sup> 3. Position and time.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4.3.1. *Position*

Sometimes *position* alone is held as the ultimate principle of individuation:

Matter alone is not enough in its individuation as long as the position does not attach to it, and whatever is designated by a certain position, either through its essence or through a relation to its essence, it is then individuated and participation in it is prevented at the same moment, and it is impossible to be there another one similar to it sharing in that very same position and its states, and sharing its quiddity while being other than it.<sup>41</sup>

Avicenna here is evidently suggesting position (*wadʿ*) as what confers upon matter its individuating function. Even when he takes matter

<sup>38</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 180.

<sup>39</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 106.

<sup>40</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 86, 107, 145.

<sup>41</sup> Avicenna, *Al-mubāḥaṭāt*, p. 180.

as the principle of individuation, he stresses the individuating role of position which is itself embedded within matter:

The thing is particularized by position, and position is in the material bodies. The particularization (*taḥaṣṣuṣ*) of the individuals of the species is only by matter, and it is not through [anything] intellectual.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, position is taken to be the only thing which is individual *per se*:

A place qua place is not different from another place, but it differs from it through another meaning attached to the place, and that meaning is position; and position is different from another position by itself and not through another meaning. Position is thus *the* essentially individual (*huwa al-mutaṣaḥḥiṣ bi-dātihi*).<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.3.2. Position and Place

In his reference to the individuality of Zayd and ʿAmr, he suggests that *place* is another principle of individuation besides *position*:

ʿAmr cannot be individuated by that in virtue of which Zayd is individuated, and that is his position and place.<sup>44</sup>

This same view is repeated elsewhere:

The mental [image of the] individual, as far as it is possible to be predicated of this and other individuals of the species, is universal – unless it is attributed to it that it is the mental image of this referred-to sensible individual or that it is that very [individual]. And that is through taking all its attributes and states universal and nothing is found with it whereby it individuates, namely the position and the place.<sup>45</sup>

Position and place are hence proposed as the only essentially individual ones:

The individuators (*muṣaḥḥiṣāt*) lead to what is individuated *per se*, namely place and position and they are essentially individuated... Hence position individuates *per se*, and place is individuated *per se*.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 138.

<sup>43</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 86.

<sup>44</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 107.

<sup>45</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 106.

### 4.3.3. *Position and Time*

Finding a consistent line of thought behind Avicenna's references to spatio-temporal views of individuation is not an easy task. He sometimes conditions the unity of time if position is to be the individuating cause: "A single position is possible to be predicated of many; therefore, individuation [by position] is complete if time does not differ."<sup>47</sup> There is also a passage on time and position in which quite opposing views are suggested:

The individual *per se* is position; time is also individuated through position, and so is every general thing (*amr ʿāmm*). And position is also non-individual as far as the unity of time (*waḥda al-zamān*) is not conditioned in it. And any individual thing has a unique position, i. e. a unique time. And whatever is not temporal and corporeal, its individuals cannot be multiple (*lā tatakattaru*).<sup>48</sup>

He first mentions that position is essentially and independently individual and then immediately time is cited as a necessary condition for the individuation of position. And whereas in most of the passages in *Al-taʿlīqāt* he resorts to position to explicate the problem of individuality, here temporality and corporeality are put forth as the channels for the multiplicity of individuals. In the following passage, he mentions explicitly time and position together:

Individuation amounts to the individual's having meanings which are not shared by others, and these meanings are position and time. And as for other attributes and concomitants, there is participation in them such as whiteness and blackness. In all attributes there occurs participation except for the position and time. And individuation is only through them.<sup>49</sup>

He also writes not quite unambiguously that "position individuates by its very nature and by time, and time individuates by position."<sup>50</sup> Considering the frequent references to time – and how even time is proposed as individual *per se* along with position<sup>51</sup> – we cannot simply say that "Avicenna often *omits* mentioning time"<sup>52</sup> among the principles of individuation because time is already included in his understanding of position.

<sup>47</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 145.

<sup>50</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 106.

<sup>52</sup> See Benevise, "Individuation," p. 10.



#### 4.3.4. Spatio-Temporal Position

The notions of position, place and time are somehow overlapping in these Avicennian inquiries and they are not three totally distinct and fixed categories. That could explain the variations in his reference to these three apparently interchangeable individuating causes. This threefold inextricability with the centrality of position is mostly restricted to *Al-ta'liqāt*. References to position in his other works could as well be illuminating for our understanding of his conception of *wad<sup>c</sup>* as the principle of individuation. In *Al-ta'liqāt*, when *wad<sup>c</sup>* is mentioned in discussions of individuation, it mainly appears to be the relation of a given thing to the sphere.<sup>53</sup> In his discussion of the meaning of *wad<sup>c</sup>* in one of the notes, Avicenna writes:

The position of the place (*wad<sup>c</sup> al-makān*) is its relation to the body of the sphere (*ġirm al-falak*).<sup>54</sup>

However, *wad<sup>c</sup>* remains open to multiple interpretations as there are a number of meanings attributed to it. Beyond *Al-ta'liqāt* in other Avicennian works, for example *Al-šifā'*, there is no reference to such a meaning for *wad<sup>c</sup>*. Discussing prime matter which is detached from corporeal form, Avicenna juxtaposes *wad<sup>c</sup>* and *ḥayyiz* (locus, place) as if they are denoting almost the same concept:

If it were to separate from the corporeal form, either it would have a *wad<sup>c</sup>* or *ḥayyiz* (locus) in the existence that it would then have, or it would not.<sup>55</sup>

Here having *wad<sup>c</sup>* is very much the same as being in place and being visible. Later in this very same discussion of prime matter, Avicenna continues his argument:

But if for this substance there is no position (*wad<sup>c</sup>*) and no [spatial] reference (*išāra*) – rather, it is akin to intellectual substances...<sup>56</sup>

As it is clear, having position is considered along with physical or spatial reference. And al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), in his commentary on *Al-išārāt*

<sup>53</sup> It is most probably the sphere of the spheres (*falak al-aflāk*), the outermost sphere. The Aristotelian definition is also found in *Al-ta'liqāt*. See Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, p. 174–5. For a detailed study of place and position in Avicenna against their Aristotelian background, see Jon McGinnis, “Positioning Heaven: The Infidelity of a Faithful Aristotelian,” *Phronesis*, 51 (2006), p. 140–161.

<sup>54</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifā': Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 72.

<sup>56</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifā': Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 72. This mention of *išāra* and *wad<sup>c</sup>* together is significant, as it will be explained in this paper.

in quite the same context, writes about the exact sense of *wadʿ*<sup>c</sup> in this argument:

*Al-wadʿ*<sup>c</sup> denotes several meanings, one of which is the thing being in a way that it can be referred to sensually... And the intended sense here is [this].<sup>57</sup>

Avicenna's own definition of *al-wadʿ*<sup>c</sup> in his *Al-taʿlīqāt* can shed light toward a better understanding of his notion of position:

Position is the relation to each other of the parts from the totality of the thing along with their relation to the thing's external directions; whether these directions be of encompassing [ninth sphere] or the encompassed [spheres below].<sup>58</sup>

This definition further leads us to an image of position which is closely interwoven with time and place. What is more, in his tripartite division of existence, in asserting that the second one, namely *al-dahr*, contains time, he states:

And time is in that plane of existence, since it originates from the movement of the sphere... The sphere is the bearer of time (*hāmil al-zamān*), and the moving power within it is the cause of time (*fāʿil al-zamān*).<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, the *position* in question is the relation that a given thing has with respect to the outermost sphere which is itself the originator of time. This celestial touchstone functions both temporally and spatially to locate and mark out things down below. By the same token, if *place* and *time* are in fact individuated only in relation to the sphere, then they are all three inter-dependent. Consequently, Avicenna's flexibility, or apparent ambivalence, toward the ultimate spatio-temporal principle of individuation could appear as justifiable.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, the principle of individuation with the present approach is suggested to be either of these: 1. Position (in its Avicennian sense as

<sup>57</sup> Tūsī, *Šarḥ Al-išārāt*, 3 vol. (Qom: Našr al-balāga, 1997), vol. 2, p. 90.

<sup>58</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 43. This passage, which is titled "On the Meaning of Position," should be read in relation to the previous one.

<sup>59</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 142.

<sup>60</sup> Holding *wadʿ*<sup>c</sup> as the principle of individuation is abundantly discussed in *Al-taʿlīqāt* and it is also found in *Al-mubāḥaṭāt* (Avicenna, *Al-mubāḥaṭāt*, p. 180). Therefore, stating that "the strategy of combining more than one individuating factor, like time or place as well as matter, goes back all the way to Avicenna's immediate follower, Bahmanyār" (Adamson and Benevich, *The Heirs*, p. 296–7) is not tenable yet unless there is sufficient evidence in support of Bahmanyār's authorship of these two Avicennian works.

proposed in *Al-ta'liqāt*);<sup>61</sup> 2. Position and time; 3. Position and place. Although more emphasis is put on *wad<sup>c</sup>*, his overall discussions lead to the well-known concept of spatio-temporal individuation if we also take into account the meaning of *wad<sup>c</sup>*: the particular spatio-temporal relation that a thing has to the sphere which is itself the touchstone of time and place.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the best reconstruction of his principle of individuation here, as proposed by Benevich, could be called spatio-temporal position. However, albeit based on significant textual evidence, holding it as his “ultimate principle of individuation”<sup>63</sup> can face difficulties, especially with regard to Avicenna’s account of individuation in his *Isagoge* of *Al-šifā’*.<sup>64</sup> And as for the other meaning of *wad<sup>c</sup>* in *Al-šifā’* which assumes a spatial connotation, it occurs in adjacency to *išāra*, and it is also expounded by al-Ṭūsī as a thing’s being in a way that it can be referred to physically.

These semantic alterations of *wad<sup>c</sup>* will be quite remarkable in light of our discussions in the last section. *Wad<sup>c</sup>* in both these two senses is not the well-known Aristotelian κείσθαι. In virtue of its modification, Avicenna thus tried to bring in, in expounding individuation, some concrete extramental attribute corresponding to the non-shareable identity or individuation of things. It seems that of the nine universal, accidental categories, *wad<sup>c</sup>* in this sense, which is of course closely intertwined with *zamān* and *makān*, is the best candidate to link the individual to and locate it in the extramental domain of *išāra* where individuation is to be sought, not the mental conceptual domain.<sup>65</sup>

As a final remark of this section, Avicennian *wad<sup>c</sup>* as the principle of individuation, which should be translated as “spatio-temporal position” instead of “position,”<sup>66</sup> becomes even more striking when it is seen

<sup>61</sup> Undoubtedly, *wad<sup>c</sup>* in this context is semantically broader than the *position* of the Aristotelian categories.

<sup>62</sup> See Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, p. 107; 98–9.

<sup>63</sup> Benevich, “Individuation,” p. 12–13. Benevich himself emphasizes that declaring it as the ultimate principle is not without shortcomings. Also, Druart, in her argument that soul’s individuation according to Avicenna is caused through its connection to matter, explains this individuating matter as a particular body with its own particular “space and time” (Druart, “The Human,” p. 272), or in other words, spatio-temporally positioned body.

<sup>64</sup> Avicenna’s discussion in his *Isagoge* will be discussed in the present paper.

<sup>65</sup> This will be further discussed when the notion of *išāra* (physical reference) is elucidated.

<sup>66</sup> For Boethius’s argument of the individuating function of place, see Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae; Opuscula theologica*, ed. by Moreschini C. Saur (Munich and Leipzig: Saur, 2005), book 1, chap. 1, p. 56–63.

against the medieval Latin backdrop to the study of individuation. Gracia, having Boethius (d. 524) and Porphyry in mind, puts this type of individuation as follows:

Spatio-temporal theories have in common that they identify spatial, temporal, or spatio-temporal coordinates as individuators. Socrates is said to be individual because he occupies a particular space or because he lives at a particular time, or because he is both here and now. Clearly, the strongest version of these theories is the one that combines space and time, and indeed many of the views that seem to be concerned exclusively with space frequently assume time as well.<sup>67</sup>

Avicenna's discussion of such individuation has a close resemblance to Gracia's description of spatio-temporal theories.<sup>68</sup>

#### 4.4. *Form*

It is also suggested that Avicenna held form as the principle of individuation.<sup>69</sup> In the context of the Aristotelian dichotomy of form and matter, the question whether it is matter or form that causes individuality has been a subject of many discussions throughout the history. In general, the individuality of any individual was often sought among these two constituents, even though both in themselves have no designating features and are equally shared by the individuals from the same kind.

Among all the candidates for the principle of individuation in Avicennian oeuvre, form is the one which is advanced only on few occasions.<sup>70</sup> So far, we have observed that in general, in his *Al-ta'liqāt*, position dominates the discussions of individuation, whereas in *Al-šifā'* it is the accidents and attributes that are mainly mentioned in order to explain individuation. In some cases, it is further discussed that the individuating function of accidents goes back to the materiality of things and it consequently offers matter as the primary cause of individuation.<sup>71</sup> Besides these, in *Al-šifā'*, Avicenna argues that each bodily entity has its

<sup>67</sup> Jorge J. E. Gracia, "Introduction: The Problem of Individuation," in Jorge Gracia (ed.), *Individuation in Scholasticism: the Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation, 1150–1650* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> These similarities between the two traditions, namely the Arabic and Latin, could attest to the same problems and their possible solutions that had been present in the Aristotelian-Porphyrian problem of individuation.

<sup>69</sup> For example, Madkour, "Muqaddima," *Al-šifā': Ilāhiyyāt*, xiv.

<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, it does appear as the direct cause of individuation in these few passages.

<sup>71</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifā': Al-ṭabī'īyyāt*, vol. 2, p. 199.

own unique locus and this possession of a locus is not the result of its bodiliness – otherwise all bodily entities would have the same locus – but the result of its having some form (*ṣūra mā*):

Each body is necessarily specified with a locus (*ḥayyiz*). And it does not have this specific locus inasmuch as it is body; otherwise, each body would be the same [i. e. having the same locus]. It is thus specific to it in virtue of *some form* that it has in itself, and this is evident... Therefore, bodily matter is not found separate from form. Matter is thus constituted in act (*bi-l-fi'l*) through form.<sup>72</sup>

Spatial location is held to be unique for each bodily entity and it is clearly the principle of individuation or distinction here. But this locus is itself a derivative of the very form that the bodily entity possesses and is definitely different from any other form. This form is thus unique and solely belongs to one entity and can well render a thing distinct from any other. Hence, in this passage, Avicenna is resorting to formal differences as the cause of spatial differences which ultimately lead to individuation.<sup>73</sup>

There arises a question regarding the true nature of this form which causes individual differentiations – whether reflected through locus or any other accident. This cannot be the universal form of species since it does not lead to individual as individual or any intra-species particularizations. Throughout the chapter in which Avicenna is offering this argument, there is no reference to specific form, but he mainly discusses the relation between prime matter and form. He argues that as prime matter is indifferent in itself toward any spatial location, it cannot be in any location without a cause. This cause cannot hence be anything other than the form which is paired with the matter. Accordingly, it is not tenable to identify this form with the specific form. Infima species, even as the nearest form to the level of its individuals in the universal-oriented discourse of the *Isagoge*, cannot cause such spatial particularity.

Moreover, it must be noted that Avicenna is referring to it as “*ṣūra mā*” (some form). If this “some form” is the specific form, then Avicenna decidedly fails to account for the distinction of the individuals since, as discussed earlier, the marriage between prime matter and infima species cannot lead to individuation. However, what this “some form” is in Avicenna’s view is open to further investigation: if here Avicenna is having in mind some kind of form more particular than the specific form,

<sup>72</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ṣifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 78–9.

<sup>73</sup> It is interesting that in *Al-taʿlīqāt*, with almost the same terminology, Avicenna holds the contrary, i. e. matter is the cause of *taḥayyuz* (Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 91).

this can be a significant step toward breaking away with the universal-oriented Aristotelian-Porphyrrian framework to account for individuality without having to move from the top, namely the universals, downward to the realm of individuals. Instead, if there is thought to be something like *individual form*, then individuals can be considered in themselves and not in the shadow of universals. In his *Al-iṣārāt* he writes about the distinguishing role of form:

Matter is not free from corporeal form. Matter may also not be free from other forms. How could it be so while matter is to be either with a form necessitating the reception of disjunction, conjunction, and figuration with ease or difficulty, or a form which necessitates the prevention of this reception; and all these are not required by corporeality, and likewise, it necessarily merits a determined particular place or a determined particular position. And all these are not required by the general corporeality shared by all.<sup>74</sup>

Commentators such as al-Ṭūsī and al-Rāzī (d. 1210) have both indicated that since the corporeal form (*al-ṣūra al-jismiyya*) is a constituent inasmuch as a bodily entity is concerned and it is thus shared by all such entities, this other form which is not shared equally by all bodily entities and is a cause of differentiation is nothing but the form of species (*ṣūra naw<sup>c</sup>iyya*).<sup>75</sup> If the intended form is what the commentators propose, this will not definitely suffice in explaining why, according to Avicenna in this passage, a thing composed of matter and form – whether corporeal form or specific – should merit a *particular* place or position, because the matter and specific form alone do not lead to a given individual residing in a particular place or position. It is not completely clear why these commentators do not ask the question about the possibility of Avicenna's proposing a type of form more particular than the specific form – even if we do not hold it as particular as some kind of exclusive individual form. He does not expound on this type of form enough and unfortunately the commentators made no effort to discern some ingenuity in Avicenna's text or maybe they could not imagine taking a step out of the popular rigid Peripatetic notions. I thus contend that Avicenna's reference to *some form* here could be seen as an effort, however faint, to bridge the gap between the specific form and the particulars,<sup>76</sup> and this may be seen

<sup>74</sup> Avicenna in al-Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ*, vol. 1, p. 43–44.

<sup>75</sup> Al-Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ*, vol. 2, p. 100–101; Al-Rāzī, *Šarḥ Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī ʿala Al-iṣārāt*, 2 vol. (Qom: Maktabat Marʿašī, 1984), vol. 2, p. 43–44.

<sup>76</sup> This effort to come up with “some form” more particular than *infima species* may be better understood in keeping with Avicenna's notions of *individual intention* and *šahṣiyya*, as will be discussed in the present paper.



as part of the Avicennian general initiative to take more account of the individuals.

#### 4.5. *Form and matter*

A two-fold principle of individuation which functions through both matter and form is traditionally attributed to Bonaventure (d. 1274) who writes that “in the case of creature, individuation arises from a double principle.”<sup>77</sup>

Bonaventure rejects the suggestion that either principle might be prior to the other; each provides a necessary component of individuality: matter locates the form in space and time, form actualizes the potencies latent in matter.<sup>78</sup>

Avicenna has a similar discussion in his *Al-išārāt* where he highlights the interdependence between form and matter:

If the two [namely form and matter] come together, matter is realized and through it the form individuates and [matter] also individuates through form.<sup>79</sup>

This reciprocity can attest to the complexities we have discussed so far regarding the relation between form and matter when it comes to individuation. As it is not clear whether prime matter, which is shared equally by all, is the cause of individuation or specific form, which is also indifferently shared by its individuals, Avicenna is noting their interplay without going further into the details that were later discussed by al-Rāzī and al-Ṭūsī.<sup>80</sup> This can show the inherent complexity of the relation between form and matter in individual creatures and how – quite incomprehensibly – dependent they are upon each other in producing individuation.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> King, “The Problem of Individuation,” p. 173.

<sup>78</sup> King, “The Problem of Individuation,” p. 173.

<sup>79</sup> Avicenna in Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ*, vol. 2, p. 147–150. He uses the verb *tašahḥaṣa* in this passage.

<sup>80</sup> Both al-Rāzī and al-Ṭūsī noticed the complexity of this relationship as advanced by Avicenna. Al-Rāzī believes one may see circular argument because mutually inter-dependent causes both await the annexation of the other to be individuated. Whereas al-Ṭūsī, emphasizing that this relationship is among “the ambiguities of this science,” writes that prime matter can be particularized by “some form” (*šūra mā*) and form can be individuated through particular matter (*hayūlā mu‘ayyana*). See Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ*, vol. 2, p. 147–152.

<sup>81</sup> The other important occasion on which this double principle shows up is the generation of human soul and body and how they are joined. These two are both shared among all human individuals, and they cannot produce different human individuals,

Avicenna's struggle to pave some way below infima species, as echoed in this passage – which is elaborated in more detail in al-Ṭūsī's commentary that form here is “some form” not form *per se*<sup>82</sup> – might be seen along the same line of efforts, as shown through the previous candidate, to break away with the prevailing apparatus passed onto him so that he may come up with a somewhat more particular image of form than the specific form.

#### 4.6. *Existence*

During the Latin middle ages the principle of individuation associated with Avicenna was existence, which is non-categorical.<sup>83</sup> This view is derived from his *Al-šifā'*<sup>84</sup> which was the only philosophical source of Avicenna Latinus.<sup>84</sup> It is certainly difficult to advocate existence or any of the other candidates – such as position, matter, etc. – as the *ultimate* Avicennian cause of individuation. Nonetheless, Avicenna's bringing in existence in his discussion of the individuals led to considerable insights in dissecting the problem of individuation. Drawing significantly from the Latin readings of Avicenna, Bäck maintains that Avicenna's major view regarding individuation is that it occurs through material existence:

Ibn Sina's main position is this: individual substances of the same species differ from one another not in virtue of having the quiddity in itself proper to that species, e. g., humanity for Socrates and Plato, but in virtue of that quiddity's having a material existence.<sup>85</sup>

The only place throughout *Al-šifā'*<sup>85</sup> where Avicenna expressly proposes existence as what produces individuality is his *Isagoge*. He resorts

and the accidents and properties also emerge after the attachment of soul and body together; therefore, these do not cause individuality. Avicenna discusses that there is an inclination in soul toward a given body and a preparation or merit within a body for that soul. These two are both on the same causal level in relation to each other and as a result, together they produce their own individual human. See: *Al-šifā'*: *Al-ṭabī'īyyāt*, vol. 2, p. 198–9, 207. For a detailed study of the relation of body and soul and the subsequent individuation of soul, see Druart, “The Human,” p. 259–273.

<sup>82</sup> See Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ*, vol. 2, p. 147–152.

<sup>83</sup> Peter King, “The problem of individuation,” p. 176.

<sup>84</sup> Allan Bäck, “The Islamic Background: Avicenna (b. 980; d. 1037) and Averroes (b. 1126; d. 1198),” in Gracia (ed.), *Individuation in Scholasticism*, p. 39–67.

<sup>85</sup> Allan Bäck, “Ibn Sina on the individuation of perceptible substances,” *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval, and Renaissance Conference*, 14 (1989), p. 29. It may be justifiable to equate “material existence” here with “extramental realization.”

to existence after arguing against the functionality of accidents in determining the individuality of an individual:

If you say: Zayd is tall, writer, handsome, and so on, as many attributes as you want, the individuality (*šaḥṣiyya*) of Zayd will not be determined for you in the intellect, still, it is possible that the intention assembled from the totality of these to belong to more than one; rather, existence (*wujūd*) and reference to an individual intention (*iṣāra ilā maʿnā ṣaḥṣī*) determines [Zayd], as when you say that he is the son of a certain person, the existent at a certain time, the tall, the philosopher.<sup>86</sup> Then it could have occurred that at that time there is nothing that might be sharing with him in these attributes, and you would have already known this occurrence, and this is [possible] through the *apprehension which is similar to what is referred to through the senses*, such as that which is referred to by a specific person and a specific time; it is then that the individuality of Zayd is established, and this statement would be indicative of his individuality.<sup>87</sup>

This passage is of significance for the study of individuation in Avicenna.<sup>88</sup> This is an uncommon approach to the problem by completely disregarding categorical candidates in accounting for the problem of individuation – there is also a quite similar discussion, though mainly overlooked, in the fifth book of the *Ilāhiyyāt* in which Avicenna suggests “sensation,” “observation,” and “reference” as the means of approach to individuals.<sup>89</sup> Despite Black’s assertion, and disappointment, that Avicenna does not elaborate on the relation between existence and individual intention,<sup>90</sup> this move on his part should be read within a broader context of his critical stance against reducing the individual to its species and accidental concomitants. Therefore, he maintains that Zayd’s individuation is realized through his existence and his capability to be physically referred to.<sup>91</sup> He thus places Zayd, as a given individ-

<sup>86</sup> We can see somehow the same personalization of attributes as we saw in Porphyry’s description of Socrates, with the addition of the Arabic *al-* before all adjectives.

<sup>87</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ṣifāʾ: Al-madḥal*, p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> One of the best analyses of this passage is offered by Black. See Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 255–281.

<sup>89</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ṣifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 246. This “reference” bears resemblance to Porphyry’s reference to Socrates as “that (*hādā*) white” and “that approaching.” Both could go back to Aristotle’s notion of τὸδε τι (*Metaphysics*, 1070 a9–11) which was translated to Arabic as *hādā*. See Averroes, *Tafsīr mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa*, ed. by Maurice Bouyges, 4 vol. (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1938–48), vol. 4, p. 1466. Avicenna, however, accentuates its epistemic signification through its juxtaposition with existence and sense-perception; it becomes our conduit to the sublunary individuals that are subject to sense perception.

<sup>90</sup> Deborah Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 259, 277.

<sup>91</sup> “Physical” reference is not mentioned in this passage, but right before it, Avicenna

ual, out of the scope of conceptual recognition which can be obtained only through the Porphyrian universals. As a result, in order for Zayd to be known, he must be encountered extramentally by the knowing subject in the domain of material existence (*wujūd*) and physical reference (*išāra*).<sup>92</sup>

The extent to which this passage from *Al-madḥal* may appear as innovative and even un-Avicennian among his successors is reflected in al-Ṭūsī's, probably unintended, criticism of Avicenna. This very passage is quoted verbatim in Aṭīr al-Dīn Abharī's (d. 1265) *Tanzīl al-afkār*, and al-Ṭūsī, who has commented on Abharī's work, thought it was composed by Abharī himself.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, al-Ṭūsī who is almost always a vigorous defender of Avicenna's thought, without realizing that Abharī is quoting Avicenna – Abharī does not mention that he has copied Avicenna word for word – rejects both "existence" and "reference" as causes of individuation.<sup>94</sup> It may attest to the fact that al-Ṭūsī, against the backdrop of his Avicennian training, finds such a solution for the problem of individuation difficult to justify and grasp, and he does not hesitate to reject it because he fails to locate it in his "orthodox" Avicennian thought.<sup>95</sup> It seems that for al-Ṭūsī the problem of individuation is to be addressed with the aid of the Aristotelian-Porphyrian apparatus – concepts such as matter / form or five universals or the categories. Al-Ṭūsī's critical

writes that for an individual to exist there must attach to species some accidental concomitants, and consequently a matter which can be referred to is determined for it. A matter is evidently referred to in a sensory or physical way (Avicenna, *Al-šifā'*: *Al-madḥal*, p. 70).

<sup>92</sup> This is an explicit harbinger for the innovations that Suhrawardī was about to propose. For Suhrawardī's innovative notions of individuation, see for example Suhrawardī, *Muṣannafāt*, ed. by Henry Corbin and Hossein Nasr, 4 vol. (Tehran: IHIS Press, 2010), vol. 1, p. 162; Benevich, "Individuation," p. 13–22.

<sup>93</sup> He also quotes this same passage, again without indicating that it is Avicenna's, in another work. See Abharī, *Ḥulāṣa al-afkār*, ed. by Mahdi Azimi (Tehran: IRIP Press, 2019), p. 142–3.

<sup>94</sup> Ṭūsī, "Ta'dīl al-mi'yar fi tanzīl al-afkār" in *Mantiq va mabāhit-i alfāz*, ed. by Mahdi Mohaqqiq and Toshihiko Izutsu (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1992), p. 152.

<sup>95</sup> Even Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640), who draws on any discussions in previous philosophers who had resorted to existence in their works, never mentioned this Avicennian passage which should be very appealing to his philosophy. I have not found in his corpus any occasion on which Avicenna is cited as an advocate of existence as the principle of individuation. Based on Mullā Ṣadrā's several references to Fārābī in this regard, it also became quite well-known in the Sadrian school that the first and oft-cited philosopher to recognize existence and individuation as concomitants (*musāwiq*) was Fārābī. See Mullā Ṣadrā, *Al-ḥikma*, vol. 2, p. 10, 297, vol. 5, p. 101; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Al-šawāhid al-rubūbiyya*, ed. by J. Ashtiani (Mashhad: al-Markaz al-jāmi'i, 1982), p. 113.

approach to this Avicennian uncommon solution could show the singularity of such a view in the overall context of Avicenna's philosophy.<sup>96</sup>

Additionally, Avicenna proposes another noteworthy analysis of individuation in *Al-ta'liqāt*:

The identity (*huwiyya*) of the thing and its essence (*ʿayn*) and its unity (*waḥda*) and its individuation (*taṣaḥḥuṣ*) and the particularity of its unique existence (*wujūdihū al-munfarid*) are all one. And our statement "That is that" implies its identity and the particularity of its existence in which there occurs no participation (*širka*).<sup>97</sup>

He is clearly taking individuation, existence, and identity as counterparts or, according to Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640) in his reference to this passage, as concomitants (*musāwiq*).<sup>98</sup> Further, there is an inherent though implicit existence within the individual; this existence or the capability of being referred to is what personalizes in act (*bi-l-fiʿl*) all the potentially shareable accidents or attributes.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, individuation (*taṣaḥḥuṣ*) is not acquired in virtue of the accidents and attributes, how many they might be, or its belonging to an infima species, but it co-occurs with or is equivalent to the very identity (*ṣaḥṣiyya*) and the very being of a given thing just out there in the world. In this new vista, individuation is less about being a particular member of a species but rather *existing* and being an *ʿayn*.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> However, al-Ṭūsī holds almost the same position elsewhere. See Ṭūsī, *Asās al-iqtibās*, ed. by Modarres Razavi (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1982), p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, p. 145; Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, ed. by Hossein Mousavian (Tehran: IRIP Press, 2012), p. 431. I have translated from *Al-ta'liqāt* edited by Mousavian. Badawi's edition has ambiguities here. This passage, along a few others, discussing *taṣaḥḥuṣ* can be also found in Fārābī's *Al-ta'liqāt*. But they seem to be out of context with Fārābī's both philosophical discussions and terminology. For the reasons they could not have been originally by Fārābī, see Amir Pournamdar and Mahdi Azimi, "Fārābī and the Co-occurrence of Individuation and Existence: a Reappraisal of Mullā Ṣadrā's Attribution," *Contemporary Wisdom*, 3 (2016), p. 61–80.

<sup>98</sup> This same passage is later picked up by both Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631) and Mullā Ṣadrā to argue in favor of the concomitance of existence and individuation. See Mullā Ṣadrā, *Al-ḥikma*, vol. 5, p. 101; Mīr Dāmād, *Muṣannafāt Mīr Dāmād*, ed. A. Anvar (Tehran: Anjuman-i Athar, 2003), p. 53. Mullā Ṣadrā, however, believed that it was stated by Fārābī.

<sup>99</sup> Also further discussed in the following sentences of the above-discussed passage. As I believe this section from *Al-ta'liqāt* is remarkable for any study of individuation in the post-Avicennian period, Benevich, who rightly cites it, could have elaborated more on its significance in his study of individuation in Suhrawardī. See Benevich, "Individuation," p. 19.

<sup>100</sup> These terms will be discussed in the final section of this paper.

Placing the individual beyond the reach of mind, that is out of the realm of Porphyrian universals, Avicenna implies that he does not expect the five universals to account for individuality: whether it be the infima species or accidents and properties, individual is not to be understood and subsequently defined in one way or another by these notions. Porphyrian universals are the means for *description* with recourse to which the knowing subject can differentiate the individual in question, i. e. a mere epistemic-discriminative function, and they cannot – however exhaustive they might be – help fully comprehend and *define* the individual; a more full-blown epistemico-ontological significance of the individual *per se* still needs to be acknowledged. With the aid of the universals, we at best acquire a *definite description* rather than an *essential definition*.<sup>101</sup> On Avicenna's view regarding the existence and individuation, understanding an individual is not merely its being distinguished from others through a relative knowledge, but it needs to be known in and of itself in virtue of a sensible, extramental encounter. Therefore, the Peripatetic path does not even lead to the knowledge of the individual, but provides some practical distinction. Socrates *per se* cannot be known in the conceptual realm of mind but as *a human* conjoined with his accidental attachments that renders him *distinct* from other human individuals.<sup>102</sup> As a result, with only the universals, we cognize Socrates not as Socrates but as *not-others*, i. e. we only recognize what are not Socrates. It can be said that Avicenna is asking us to find the individual, hence its individuation, in the extramental domain and consequently abandon any efforts to conceptualize it in order to *define* it.

On this account, it is with the benefit of some prior *extramental knowledge* that the knowing subject becomes sure that the mental image of, for example, Socrates is not shared by any other individual – Avicenna says that you happen to have some prior knowledge through physical or extramental encounter that all the characteristics attributed to Socrates are not also someone else's.<sup>103</sup> In general, to have of the individual an

<sup>101</sup> “Avicenna admits that definite descriptions can succeed in giving us quasi-definitions of individuals, but he denies that the individual as such thereby becomes intelligible.” See Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 260.

<sup>102</sup> These “other human individuals” only includes those around the knowing subject from whom Socrates could be differentiated thanks to his accidents. However, according to Avicenna, it is always possible to be there some other individual(s) of whom the assemblage of these very accidents could be predicated. Therefore, these universal concepts provide the knowing subject with practical aid in telling apart rather than metaphysical understanding of Socrates.

<sup>103</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Al-madḥal*, p. 70. If we are unable to find another individual in



immediate understanding which is essentially exclusive, the knowing subject is expected to have recourse to the sensible world, and not to rely on Peripatetic prescribed notions that offer, as it were, discriminative knowledge of individuals for the practical purpose of differentiation.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, this is important to note how closely the epistemological and ontological aspects of the question are interwoven. Avicenna seems to be unhappy with the relegation of Socrates to his distinctive features. Arguing that Socrates cannot be *known*, but merely *distinguished*, in virtue of the universals (i. e. question of epistemology) means that there is something unique about Socrates which constitutes an indispensable part, if not all, of his identity and it escapes the so-called universal knowledge (question of ontology). He writes:

The designator (*al-muḥaṣṣis*) is that through which existence is determined for the thing and it is set apart from anything similar to it. And the designator enters in the existence of the thing and the individuator (*al-muṣaḥḥis*) enters in its constitution and its generation.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, epistemologically, the faithful mental image of Socrates is the one that is immediately and closely linked to the extramental world, and that can be verified only via *iṣāra* (reference) to *that* ontologically autonomous, unique substance.

By the same token, in his discussion of the knowledge of particulars, Avicenna uses the example of solar eclipse: even if we knew all the accidents of an eclipse taking place at a specific time and place to the degree that no single accident remained unknown to us, our knowledge would still be universal.<sup>106</sup>

It may not be possible for you to judge at this moment the existence or nonexistence of this eclipse, except by knowing the particulars of [the celestial] motions through sensory observation... There must have occurred to you through [sensory] observation a referred-to thing (*šayʿ muṣār ilayhi*) so that you know the state of that eclipse.<sup>107</sup>

possession of the same bundle of attributes as Socrates, it should suffice for our marking Socrates out in our mind. But this is more a pragmatic approach to our knowledge of Socrates.

<sup>104</sup> Such universal concepts have no direct correspondence with the primary substances in the extramental world of which these images are but generalized abstractions. The association between extramental reference and individuation or instantiation is frequently mentioned in Avicenna's work. For example, see Avicenna, *Al-šifāʿ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 196, 228.

<sup>105</sup> Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, ed. by Badawī, p. 107; Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, ed. by Mousavian, p. 303.

<sup>106</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʿ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 360.

<sup>107</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʿ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 361. The example of the eclipse is mentioned again in

The significance of sensory perception for the knowledge of individuals, as highlighted here, shows that from the viewpoint of this Avicennian stance the likeliest way to fathoming the individuation of the particulars is through individual, non-universal knowledge derived from sensation; any other type of knowledge would lead us to non-individual, universal knowledge unable to shed light on the individuality of individuals. He writes of the individual that “there is no path to it except through observation and the mind gains no knowledge of it but through sensation.”<sup>108</sup> In his discussion of definition, he also stresses that definition is an intelligible notion and hence incorruptible. It is thus impossible to predicate, at all times, this abstract concept of a particular, corruptible thing – which is bound to cease to exist at some moment:

The predication of definition of it would be true for one period, false in another; and, as such, the predication of definition of it would always be based on conjecture (*al-ẓann*), unless, besides intellectual definition, there is some *direct reference* or *observation* whereby it becomes defined by its definition through such a reference. If this does not obtain [i. e. there happens to be no reference or observation], it is [only] conjectured (*maznūn*) to have its definition... Thus, whoever undertakes to define corruptible things undertakes to render them eternal and goes astray.<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, sublunary individuals can have no exclusive conceptual definition. They belong to another plane of knowledge – different from the theoretical, Peripatetic knowledge – whose epistemic means is sense perception.

Accordingly, “the capability to be an object of sensory reference” can be an equivalent to “[material] existence.”<sup>110</sup> This can also explain why Avicenna juxtaposes “reference” and “existence” in his groundbreaking passage in *Al-madḥal*.<sup>111</sup> This Avicennian effort to weigh in in support

*Al-taʿlīqāt* where Avicenna states that the definition is essentially (*bi-l-dāt*) for the universal and it is only accidentally (*bi-l-ʿaraḍ*) for the individual. He then suggests that the definition of the eclipse does not hold *essentially* for this very particular eclipse since it must be also predicated of other eclipses.

<sup>108</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 246.

<sup>109</sup> Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 247. I have used, with minor modifications, Marmura’s translation here. See Michael E. Marmura, *The Metaphysics of the Healing* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press: 2005), p. 189.

<sup>110</sup> Bahmanyār discusses both intellectual and sensory references and maintains that intellectual reference does not exclude the predication of many, and it is only the sensory reference that excludes such predication. See Bahmanyār, *Al-taḥṣīl*, p. 305.

of individuals has not received the attention it deserves in both medieval and modern literature.<sup>112</sup> This is to be noted that even Black, whose study of the individuation of human soul is severely inspired by the *Al-madhāl* passage, states that this leaves us with significant ambiguities.<sup>113</sup> I believe the novelty of this passage can be attributed to some awareness in Avicenna's thought about the individuals being downplayed in the Aristotelian-Porphyrian tradition.<sup>114</sup> Through the brief study of Porphyry and Fārābī, I sought to lay more stress on Avicenna's insight and his attempt to tear through the universal-oriented framework which had stopped short of providing the necessary epistemological means and ontological grounds for particulars as extramental identities.

As a closing remark, I should state that Avicenna may not *primarily* intend to stress the empirical knowledge or sensory perception – at least it is no priority in this context – but his recourse to sensory perception is the epistemological derivative of his metaphysical recognition of

<sup>111</sup> *Wujūd* (existence) as employed by Avicenna is more similar to extramentality and being subject to reference. He does not seem to have considered mental existence here and on some other occasions (Compare with *Al-šifāʾ: Al-mantiq*, vol. 1, p. 79). For example, when he talks about phoenix (*ʿanqā*) he explicitly states that “if it is said that [phoenix] is existent, it is a lie.” He does not even consider the possibility of mental existence. (Avicenna, *Al-šifāʾ: Al-mantiq*, vol. 1, p. 100) Nicholas Rescher, though not based on a comprehensive study of Avicennian oeuvre, believes that Avicenna rules out the possibility of anything not having actual existence to bear predicates. See Nicholas Rescher, “The Concept of Existence in Arabic Logic and Philosophy,” *Studies in Arabic Philosophy* (Pittsburgh, 1967), p. 72–3. Fallahi is also of the belief that although Avicenna frequently emphasizes that universal affirmative statements include both existent and nonexistent subjects, in many cases he only considers the existent ones and he consequently makes actual statements.

<sup>112</sup> Abharī appears so far to be the only medieval thinker who has noted its significance. And among the modern scholars are Deborah Black and Allan Bäck who have put stress on it. See Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 255–281; Bäck, “Ibn Sina on the Individuation,” p. 23–42.

<sup>113</sup> See Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 259. The very criticism Black makes against Avicenna's lack of elaboration on “individual intention” could somehow be directed at her own study since her article, as one of the most important studies on Avicenna's problem of individuation, “fails to exploit the possibilities that individual intention” (Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 273) could offer in light of other Avicennian parallel efforts such as his notes on individuation in *Al-taʿlīqāt* or his neologisms around individuation (some of his terms will be discussed in the final section of the present paper).

<sup>114</sup> Suhrawardī could be better read against this Avicennian background. See Benevich, “Individuation,” p. 19.

the individual which evades mental, universal perception. As a result, associating sense perception and the knowledge of particulars sit well together:

The referred-to thing is not known through mental perception, rather it is known through sensory perception.<sup>115</sup>

It is inevitably the empirical knowledge, which is best reflected in “sensory reference,” that leads us to the individual.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study suggests that the *Isagoge*, as a seminal work in the Peripatetic tradition, hardly grants the individual its due ontological significance, and its individual identity is put in the shade of its universal identity, i.e. the individual becomes equivalent to its infima species narrowed down by a bundle of accidents. As an inevitable upshot of Porphyry’s proposed conceptual framework in the *Isagoge*, intra-species individuation is to be accounted for in terms of universals which, at best, merely mark the individual out and do not lead to any kind of self-sufficient knowledge of the individual. In this context, the epistemico-metaphysical significance of the individual *per se* is left unnoticed. Inevitably, individual counts only within two relations that it has: one with its shared infima species of which it is an instantiation and beyond which it enjoys no essential features of its own, and the other with its conspecifics from which it can be told apart through a universal-bound knowledge which is hardly concerned with the intrinsic uniqueness of the individual and only seeks to differentiate it from others. Consequently, via this approach, the inspection of the individual is to be ceased once we are able to differentiate it. Even the answer to the question “What is Socrates?” would be “rational animal” (i.e. the assemblage of two universals) or at best there could be added to it a few more accidental features which are still shareable by others, with hardly any reference to something unshareable with and unique to Socrates.

I then sought to show how Avicenna, with all the diverse suggestions he has for addressing the problem of individuation, made a noteworthy step toward a new examination of individuals both epistemologically

<sup>115</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ta’līqāt*, ed. by Badawi, p. 116; Avicenna, *Al-ta’līqāt*, ed. by Mousavian, p. 336.

and ontologically. Ontologically, he brought in the notion of “individual intention” and *šaḥṣiyya*,<sup>116</sup> and regarding the epistemological aspect of the question, he highlighted the pivotal function of sense perception and extramental reference for the knowledge of the individual, rather than the Peripatetic universal definition.

Avicenna may not offer an ultimate answer to the question of individuation, but he reveals serious signs of awareness of the fact that individuals are overshadowed by the Peripatetic universal-based outlook. In this regard, after inspecting Avicennian accounts of individuation, Deborah Black, with special focus on the above-mentioned passage from *Al-madḥal*, writes that Avicenna remained ambivalent in his explanation of individuation and that he failed, although he had all the requisites, to present a new ontology of individuals and a new account of their intelligibility.<sup>117</sup> Black rightly stresses that Avicenna did not provide a definite solution for the problem of individuation. Nevertheless, I contend that with Avicenna’s pioneering, though quite unsystematic, move toward considering individuals in their individuality and modifying the Peripatetic purely universal-based view of the individuals with his emerging ontology, there occurred a considerable progress in the study of individuation.<sup>118</sup>

His valorization of the individuals is reflected in his: 1. Philosophical discussions of individuation; 2. Terminology regarding the individuals, e. g. *taṣaḥḥus* and *šaḥṣiyya*, as will be discussed in the appendix. As for his philosophical discussions, besides his efforts to provide “some form” more particular than specific form, Avicenna underlines the *material existence* of the individual whose knowledge requires extramental reference (*iṣāra*) to and direct encounter (*bi-l-ḥiss*) with it. Assigning to each individual a *unique character* which cannot be known through universals and mental analyses, but only through sensory perception acquired in virtue of a physical reference to this very identity or character, bears

<sup>116</sup> A few Avicennian terms, including *šaḥṣiyya*, will be studied in the Appendix.

<sup>117</sup> Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 278.

<sup>118</sup> Deborah Black too is of the same opinion: “Though in the end he appears unwilling to exploit fully the possibilities afforded to him by this notion [i. e. “individual intention”], nonetheless Avicenna’s gesture in the direction of a unique individuating principle marks an important development in philosophical discussions of individuation” (Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 256). With “important development in philosophical discussions,” Black generally has the Latin scholastic philosophy in mind but Suhrawardī evidently continues these Avicennian insights in his “revolutionary attempt” (Benevise, “Individuation,” p. 2) for the problem of individuation. This was also later welcomed in the Sadrian school.

resemblance to *primitive individuation*.<sup>119</sup> Along this line, it could be suggested that with Avicenna's quite innovative outlook the individual started to gain more epistemico-ontological momentum.<sup>120</sup>

## 6. APPENDIX: AVICENNA'S TERMINOLOGY

Avicenna's discussions of individuation are well reflected in his terminology. He employed or coined terms that found their ways into the mainstream logico-philosophical discourse. The term that often came to designate *individuation* in Islamic philosophy was *tašahḥuṣ* which means "becoming *šaḥṣ*." *Šaḥṣ*, in its technical sense, has been the equivalent for the Greek καθ' ἑκάστων and ἄτομον meaning individual and particular in the earliest translations into Arabic. The oldest and the only text – which is also the only pre-Avicennian text – in which I have found *tašahḥuṣ* in its logico-philosophical meaning, namely individuation or discernibility,<sup>121</sup> is *Al-ta'liqāt* attributed to Fārābī.<sup>122</sup> It is however proposed that, at least, those passages from that book containing the term *tašahḥuṣ* could not have been composed by Fārābī.<sup>123</sup> One of the arguments is based on the fact that in no other work by Fārābī can we find this term even once and also the attribution of *Al-ta'liqāt* to Fārābī is untenable.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, nobody before Avicenna, including many authors that have been thus studied, have ever used this term as signifying "individuation."<sup>125</sup> It is Avicenna who appears to have used this term for the first time and noticeably, right after him, the term is abundantly found in the works of his pupils and successors. Clearly, with the

<sup>119</sup> By "primitive individuation" I mean there is no universal being instantiated by the individuals. Individuals with their own unique identities are just there. Individuals are the very solid facts filling the world and not the inferior facts derived from a superior concept or universal.

<sup>120</sup> Benevich discusses the case of three later thinkers in the Islamic tradition who tried to continue a similar effort which I contend can be better understood in light of the present study. See Benevich, "Meaning and Definition," p. 72–108.

<sup>121</sup> In the classical, non-technical Arabic language it would mainly mean "becoming corporeal or becoming embodied" but its sense as *becoming distinct* or *becoming determined* is the influence of the philosophical literature.

<sup>122</sup> Fārābī, *Al-ta'liqāt*, ed. by Hossein Mousavian (Tehran: IRIP Press, 2014).

<sup>123</sup> See Pournamdar and Azimi "Fārābī and the Co-occurrence," p. 61–80.

<sup>124</sup> Hassan Ansari, *Miyān-i kalām wa falsafa* (Tehran: Rayzan, 2016), p. 136–7.

<sup>125</sup> To name only some of them: Yahya ibn 'Adī (d. 974), Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (d. circa 985), Abu-l-Ḥasan 'Āmirī (d. 992), Ikhwān al-Šafā' (9th-10th century), al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064), al-Khwarizmī (10th century), along with much of the material translated into Arabic.

contributions of Avicenna, *tašahḥuṣ* had a sudden and widespread presence in the logico-philosophical literature in Arabic.<sup>126</sup>

As a completely philological discussion without going into philosophical scrutiny, it must be pointed out that the term which was previously used to designate something close to individuation was mainly *tamayyuz*.<sup>127</sup> The exact reason behind this unprecedented choice of word is not very clear to us, and even Avicenna himself, as the innovator, does not make any linguistic references about his adopting *tašahḥuṣ* rather than the more common *tamayyuz*. Still, there is a noteworthy difference in their signification: *tamayyuz* and *tašahḥuṣ* are both intransitive verbal nouns denoting the act through which a thing acquires certain characteristics. The former, however, has a relative sense to it: when something undergoes *tamayyuz* it becomes *mutamāyiz*, that is, distinct from others. As a result, *tamayyuz* already indicates a kind of difference and distinction which is meaningful when there is at least one other thing from which a given thing, namely the *mutamāyiz*, is differentiated. *Tamayyuz* is meaningless for a thing in itself, regardless of other individuals and things in the world, as it must be *from* something else.

Contrary to *tamayyuz*, *tašahḥuṣ* makes complete sense when even there is nothing else other than the *mutašahḥiṣ*, i. e. the thing that has undergone *tašahḥuṣ*. It means becoming *šaḥṣ* which was originally the counterpart of the Greek ἄτομον (individual). Therefore, a thing may well be a *šaḥṣ* (individual) while there exists no other individual in the world. *Tašahḥuṣ* is merely becoming an individual and owning personal identity. For example, the sun, as the only member of its species, has gone through *tašahḥuṣ* but not *tamayyuz* since there is no other sun from which it might have needed to be differentiated. Hence, every individual in the world has gone through *tašahḥuṣ* but not necessarily through *tamayyuz*. Avicenna even occasionally refers to God as *šaḥṣ* and that his *tašahḥuṣ* is essential (*dāti*) but never does he speak of God's *tamayyuz*.<sup>128</sup>

On this account, we can conclude that before Avicenna there were hardly any clear philological traces of the notion in question, i. e. *individuation* or *becoming an individual* – at least not in a systematic

<sup>126</sup> Pournamdar and Azimi “Fārābī and the Co-occurrence,” p. 67–8. Even if we suppose, though it is against some solid pieces of evidence, that the passages from *Al-ta'liqāt* are written by Fārābī, Avicenna is again important in his systematic use of the term and notably promoting it.

<sup>127</sup> There are also two other verbs: *inḥiyāz* and *infirād*.

<sup>128</sup> Avicenna, *Al-ta'liqāt*, p. 145.



manner. All that mattered was the epistemological distinction which is required for telling a given individual apart. Differentiation of the individuals used to be discussed and brought into attention at the cost of their ontological significance and it is manifestly reflected in the pre-Avicennian terminology – the verb *taʿayyun*, denoting “becoming primary substance” or “becoming individual,”<sup>129</sup> is also very likely to have appeared with Avicenna.<sup>130</sup>

Avicenna’s having recourse to *taṣāḥḥuṣ*, considered at least on a merely philological level, shows the emergence of a kind of awareness regarding the individuals. In this new context, the individual is especially inquired about its becoming an *individual*, becoming an existent, primary substance, and not solely about how it may be distinguished. Avicenna is evidently bringing on the notion of “becoming individual” rather than “becoming distinct.” This terminological innovation on its own can be revealing to a large extent about Avicenna’s view on individuals: he tries to accentuate the ontological significance of individuals that had but a dim reflection in the previous terminology.

Moreover, it is quite telling that the term “*ṣaḥṣiyya*” is also very likely to have been employed for the first time by Avicenna.<sup>131</sup> He mentions the “*ṣaḥṣiyya* of Zayd” which is to be realized or determined in our minds as the knowing subjects. Avicenna is well aware that even if some of the accidents tell Zayd apart and lead us to him, rather than any other human in the world throughout the history, we are still ignorant of his real

<sup>129</sup> This is perhaps inspired, whether directly or not, by Ibn al-Muqaffa’s (d. 759) use of *ʿayn*. He puts *ʿayn* in place of Aristotle’s *πρώτη οὐσία* (primary substances) which was later translated as *ḡawhar*. See Ibn al-Muqaffa, *Al-manṭiq*, ed. by Mohammad Daneshpazhuh (Tehran: IRIP Press, 2002), p. 11.

<sup>130</sup> I have not found *taʿayyun* in the pre-Avicennian literature as signifying “individuation.” I believe it is Avicenna who starts employing it in this technical sense, though with less frequency compared to *taṣāḥḥuṣ*. It must be noted that Mullā Ṣadrā, without providing any evidence, maintains *taʿayyun* is relative and it is meaningful in relation to others, whereas *taṣāḥḥuṣ* is meaningful in itself. Etymologically and according to the pre-Sadrian literature, it is not clear why Mullā Ṣadrā is assigning such a semantic function to *taʿayyun* which is a verbal noun meaning “becoming *ʿayn*,” i. e. becoming an object or substance in the world. See Mullā Ṣadrā, *Al-ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya*, 9 vol. (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāt, 1981), vol. 2, p. 15.

<sup>131</sup> Even if there had been another thinker using this term in this philosophical sense, although I have not come across them so far, I am sure it is used by Avicenna for the first time in a systematic, comprehensive manner. This could be further corroborated by Wisnovsky’s observation that, regarding *ṣayʿiyya* with its suffix as *-iyya*, “Māturidī’s predilection for abstract nouns [ending in *-iyya*] was a trait Avicenna certainly shared.” See Robert Wisnovsky, “Notes on Avicenna’s Concept of Thingness (*ṣayʿiyya*),” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 10 (2000), p. 181–221, 196.

identity (*šahšiyya*) or his true definition. As far as I have searched the pre-Avicennian texts, *šahšiyya* was never used to indicate identity or the essential constituent of an individual; it was mainly used in adjectival sense meaning feminine individual (masc. *šahšī* / fem. *šahšiyya*). This novel sense given to *šahšiyya* as a noun to signify something within the very individual is quite noteworthy. It can be regarded as part of the same effort to lay stress on the traditionally neglected particulars. This *šahšiyya*, which is an Avicennian term – at least, even if he was not first to use it, he definitely appropriated and promoted it – is also what Avicenna in the important passage from *Al-madḥal* referred to as *ma<sup>c</sup>nan šahšī* which is the unique exclusive property of an individual and it seems to be the key to breaking from the dominant, conventional understanding of the individuals.<sup>132</sup> This is ironic that Avicenna bestows upon individuals their character (*šahšiyya*): he uses or popularizes the term *šahšiyya* as individual character or identity for the first time, and this identity (which could be the equivalent of the Avicennian “individual intention” or “individual meaning”) requires a different ontology and epistemology.<sup>133</sup>

In addition, it should be noted that Avicenna employs “referred-to matter” (*mādda mušār ilayhā*) in the form of this very nominal compound, as far as I have found, only twice in his corpus. One of them is in the above-discussed passage from *Al-madḥal* and the other occurs in *Al-ta<sup>c</sup>līqāt* in almost the same discussion of individuation.<sup>134</sup> It means that the matter receptive of reference, which is not an unfamiliar notion in Avicennian philosophy, is linguistically formulated here differ-

<sup>132</sup> The potential and likely relation between individual intention (*ma<sup>c</sup>nan šahšī*) and identity (*šahšiyya*) could make Avicenna’s appeals to individual intention appear, for Deborah Black, as less “disappointing and underdeveloped” (Black, “Avicenna on Individuation,” p. 277).

<sup>133</sup> Therefore, instead of holding Avicenna and his pupils as those who “start from universals and therefore are in need of finding something, a magical property that would turn universals into particulars,” (Benevich, “Individuation,” p. 22) we should attribute this stance to the pre-Avicennian, Peripatetic philosophy. Suhrawardī’s “revolutionary attempt,” as put by Benevich, in explaining individuation could have been also in all probability inspired by Avicenna’s efforts to break with the Aristotelian-Porphyrian tradition (Benevich, “Individuation,” p. 13–22).

<sup>134</sup> See Avicenna, *Al-ta<sup>c</sup>līqāt*, p. 50. Although the Arabic *išāra* here reminds us of the earliest Arabic Aristotelian terminology during the Translation Movement, Avicenna’s employing this term in this specific context can still be significant. The translators sometimes preferred to translate terms such as τὸδε τι or sometimes ἄτομον as “the wanted through reference” (*maqṣūd ilayhi bi-l-išāra*), “this substance” (*hādā al-jawhar*), “this individual” (*hādā al-šahš*), or “a referred-to individual” (*šahš mušār ilayh*).

ently and this may suggest his deliberate choice of word to emphasize the inextricability of reference and individuation.<sup>135</sup> This could be seen as part of his playing up the importance of sensory perception. For an individual to be realized and determined, it must be conjoined with matter capable of being referred to, not matter in general or *designated* matter.<sup>136</sup> It is pertinent to note that Avicenna does not use other terms such as “determined” or “designated” (*mādda muta‘ayyina*, *mutaḥaṣṣiṣa* or *muḥaṣṣaṣa*) but he prefers to say “referred-to matter.” Therefore, taking its equivalent in Latin as *materia designata*, however similar it might be to “referred-to matter” in its denotation, is not quite accurate in conveying the Avicennian intention.<sup>137</sup> “Reference,” and not “designation,” is germane in the context of the knowledge of the particulars: designation could happen through the universals that, for the perception of individuals *per se*, Avicenna tries to warn against. For example, matter may be designated by the accidents which are counted as universals but it is never “referred to” extramentally through accidents. In other words, the *iṣāra* (sensory reference) is toward something that has extramental existence, whereas the designation could be also used for mental images.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> “The individual becomes individual through the conjunction of the separable and inseparable accidents with the specific nature and the designation of a referred-to matter to it.” Avicenna, *Al-ṣifāʾ: Al-madḥal*, vol. 1, p. 70.

<sup>136</sup> “Designated matter” is a better equivalent for *mādda muḥaṣṣaṣa* (Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 111, 126), *mādda mutaḥaṣṣiṣa* (Avicenna, *Al-taʿlīqāt*, p. 42) or *mādda muʿayyana* (Avicenna, *Al-ṣifāʾ: Al-ṭabīʿiyyāt*, vol. 1, p. 47).

<sup>137</sup> “Designated matter” appears in the recent translation of *Al-madḥal*. See Avicenna, *The Healing, Logic: Isagoge*, ed. Di Vincenzo, p. 155. We may consider the etymology of “designate” which is derived from the Latin *designare*, itself based on *signum*. Avicenna does not merely intend to *designate* or mark out an individual which can be obtained through accidents.

<sup>138</sup> As mentioned earlier, *iṣāra* is originally an Aristotelian notion and its equivalent is also found in the *Isagoge* in the form of the demonstrative pronoun “that” in Porphyry’s reference to Socrates as “that (*dāk*) white” or “this (*hādā*) approaching” (as discussed in the section about Porphyry; see Badawi (ed.), *Mantiq*, vol. 3, p. 1035; al-Ahwani (ed.), *Isāgūḡī*, p. 76). Avicenna may not have changed its semantic extension and it still denotes the primary substances, but he refines its intension to simply signify an epistemological feature of primary substances that attests to their ontological uniqueness and individuality.