

A Case for Angels: Abū l-Barakāt's Alternative to Avicennan Rationalism

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I argue in this paper that Abū l-Barakāt's well-known rejection of the Active Intellect opts to find another ground of knowledge than intellect that emphasizes the soul's self-knowledge. Recent work by Benevich, Griffel, and others have argued that his theory of knowledge as perception is a nominalist form of unified direct realism. This claim starts with the idea that the soul is one, and so has no faculties, and thus sense-perception and cognition are not different in kind; it is a *unified* theory of knowledge. Furthermore, definitions and meanings do refer to the object and not just the name. Hence, it is *realist*. Their general form, however, only has mental existence; it is a *nominalist* theory. I explore two consequences to this interpretation. One is an epistemological one, the other cosmological.

The epistemological consideration is that, if Abū l-Barakāt rejects a real distinction between cognition and sense-perception, then he must also reject a distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. I argue that this rejection is not simply empiricism (all knowledge is due to sense experience), since it also includes the experience of non-material things like the soul's self-knowledge. To explain this, I argue that Abū l-Barakāt presents us with a theory of self-perception (*idrāk al-idrāk*) to replace Avicenna's theory of the intellect. I explore in what ways this theory of self-perception could be considered a theory of consciousness, reflexive knowledge, self-awareness, or other kinds of knowing.

Secondly, I argue that with the Active Intellect gone, Abū l-Barakāt shifts the focus of how the rest of the cosmos comes into play. I point out how his epistemology is reflected in his cosmology, and to what extent Abū l-Barakāt substitutes the work of the Active Intellect for the work of the angels who are in the celestial spheres or discards the need for that work entirely. So I consider whether knowledge is solely grounded in the human mind, or is due to the structure of a world where human minds and angels closely interact with one another. For Abū l-Barakāt, knowing things might be a case for angels.