

CREATION IN MINIATURE: VARIETIES OF THE MICROCOSM IN THE RASĀ'IL IKHWĀN AṢ-ṢAFĀ'

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ABSTRACT

The microcosm-macrocosm analogy is a widely elaborated idea in Islamic philosophy. In the *Rasā'il* of Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā', the correspondence between man and the surrounding reality is an essential theme, and the Ikhwān employ the idea in their philosophy in various formulations. This paper examines different elaborations of the idea of man as the microcosm in the *Rasā'il*. The aim is to examine to what extent the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is prevalent in the philosophy of Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'. In order to explore the idea in all its variety, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is in this paper defined in a broad manner including in the scrutiny explicit as well as implicit occurrences of the idea. The analogy is approached from four perspectives. Firstly, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is examined as a part of the cosmology in the *Rasā'il*. Then the concentration is on man's position as the miniature of creation in the philosophical system of the Ikhwān in general. Thirdly, the idea of man as the microcosm is approached from the corporeal aspect and the focus is on the explicit comparisons between man and the surrounding reality. The last and, in the case of the Ikhwān, the most important theme is the microcosm as an epistemological concept in the *Rasā'il*. In that context, the motivation for the idea is also discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The search for correspondences between man and the surrounding reality appears in many philosophical and religious traditions. Analogical thinking has been considered natural for a human being. As Nader el-Bizri declares, the elaboration of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in the history of human thought indicates "the profound historical human longings to detect cosmic patterns that may be interpreted in terms of anthropomorphic configuration of resemblance" (El-Bizri 2006: 6). In this paper, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy will be examined in Islamic thought as a part of the philosophical system of Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'.

The microcosm-macrocosm analogy connected with the Greek term was most probably presented for the first time in the *Physics* of Aristotle (Allers 1944: 321). The idea itself is of much earlier origin. It has been developed in the east and west; the idea is present already in Presocratic philosophy and it is an essential feature of the early Indian and Iranian traditions. In the philosophy, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is most often present in implicit form, as an underlying assumption or self-evident fact with influence in the background of the philosophical system. Sometimes the analogy takes explicit forms and the philosophers provide detailed listings of the existing correspondences. Then the parallel features or structural similarities are employed in the description of the compared entities; for example, the order of human society is explained by describing the astrological order of the celestial bodies. In the microcosm-macrocosm analogies, correspondences can be found between man and the universe as a whole, or man can be compared with some smaller unity, for example, a city-state or some man-made construction.

Regarding Islamic philosophy, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy has been present in it since the first Muslim philosopher al-Kindī (d. 866). Influence on the microcosm ideas of Muslim philosophers emanated from both Eastern and Western traditions, and in the texts of Islamic medieval philosophers the idea receives various formulations. In Islamic philosophy, the Greek term was replaced by *‘ālam ṣaghīr*. The term itself does not occur that often in texts of Muslim philosophers. However, ideas, which evidently have in their background the supposition of the existing analogy between man and the macrocosm, do occur quite often in different forms. It is widely recognized that the first extensive and diverse treatment of the microcosm theory in Islamic philosophy can be found in the *Rasā’il* of Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’, *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*. This has been acknowledged, among others, by George Perrigo Conger (1922: 50): “In spite of its naïve and fantastic views, one may say that it is in the *Encyclopaedia* of the Brethren of Sincerity that the theory that man is a microcosm first becomes imposing. It is no longer fragmentary, but fundamental; and it is no longer isolated, but linked up with a comprehensive and correlated world-system.”¹

Besides more than a century and a half of Western research on the *Rasā’il*, there is still no agreement either on the original form of the text, on its dating, or on the identification of the writers. The text was most probably completed during the second half of the 10th century in Basra.² The *Rasā’il* mentions that the text was

¹ In more recent research, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka states that, in the *Rasā’il*, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy was for the first time applied literally and fully (Tymieniecka 2006: xii).

² Different estimates place the composition of the *Rasā’il* between the end of the 9th century and the beginning of the 11th century. Louis Massignon (1913: 324) observed that the poetry cited by the writers indicates that the text cannot be prior to the beginning of the 10th century. On the other hand, references to the text were, according to A.L. Tibawi, so abundant in the last decades of the 10th century that there is reason enough to assume that the text had already been completed by that time (Tibawi 1955: 35–36).

composed by Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafāʾ, the Brethren of Purity. Therefore, with the intent of identifying the composers, many scholars have been searching for a group of writers. However, in the post-fifties research, the myth of the brethren has been questioned and the way the writer conceals himself behind a mysterious group has been considered as a stylistic feature.³ On the wider scope, the identification of the Ikhwān has concentrated on defining the relation between Ismāʿīlism and the *Rasāʾil*, which was the major theme in the research on the text for the whole 20th century.⁴ Also, the mystical dimension of the text and its impact on later Sufism is accentuated in the research (see, e.g. Diwald 1979: 11–24). In recent decades, Ian Richard Netton (1979: 65–67) has laid emphasis on the strongly eclectic nature of the *Rasāʾil*. He describes the writers as “Wisdom Muslims” and stresses, among others, two important aspects amalgamated in the text: qurʾānic elements and foreign ideas, such as Greek philosophy.

The *Rasāʾil* is divided into four parts, proceeding from concrete sciences towards abstract ones. The parts are again subdivided into tractates. The edition employed nowadays constitutes of altogether 52 tractates.⁵ In addition to the encyclopaedic value of the *Rasāʾil* as a declaration of the scientific disciplines of the time, the main purpose of the text seems to be the transmission of an esoteric, mystically oriented philosophy. The philosophical system forms a synthesis of, on the one hand, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian and more esoteric philosophical traditions, such as Hermetic and Neopythagorean thought, and on the other hand, religious – Christian and most importantly Islamic – traditions. The thought of the Ikhwān is phrased in popular style and, as el-Bizri (2006: 11) points out, the philosophy of the Ikhwān and especially their microcosm-macrocosm analogy should be treated as a folk-belief of the educated urban people of the time of its writing, more than skilled philosophical analysis.

The Ikhwān dedicate two of the 52 tractates to the treatment of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, one in the second volume, which discusses the natural sciences, *On the Saying of the Wise That Man is a Small World*, and the other in the third part on psychology, *On the Saying of the Wise That the World is the Big Man*. While in

³ S.T. Stern (1964: 420–421) claims that the obscure group described in the text does not even refer to the writers themselves. According to him, the mysterious brethren are a portrayal of an ideal community rather than a description of an existing group. In this paper, I will not contribute to this discussion and I will treat the Ikhwān as the writers of the text.

⁴ The most significant scholar in this respect is Yves Marquet, who has published a dissertation and dozens of articles on the thought of the Ikhwān that he interprets through Ismāʿīlī concepts (see, e.g. Marquet 1985). Although the *Rasāʾil* spread widely in later Ismāʿīlī and especially Ṭayyibī circles, many scholars argue against the Ismāʿīlī background of the text. Among the features conflicting with Ismāʿīlī thought is, for example, its attitude towards the Imam. (See, e.g. Tibawi 1955: 34.)

⁵ The number of the tractates and their original content are debated questions. There is a contradiction in the number of the tractates even in the text itself; various passages of the *Rasāʾil* refer to 51 tractates altogether.

the tractate *the World is the Big Man* the Ikhwān utilize the microcosm idea mainly for the purpose of describing the ontological structures of the world as a whole, in the tractate *Man is a Small World* the main concern is on man and his faculties. Apart from these tractates, the idea appears frequently in the work, so it is clear that for the Ikhwān the microcosm theory is not restricted to the fields of natural sciences and psychology, but also has a theological, as well as a mathematical dimension.

The essential position of the microcosm idea in the *Rasā'il* has been recognized widely. However, the idea has not been comprehensively studied. Usually, in the research on Islamic thought, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy has been approached from some specific perspective and an extended study of the idea has not even been considered. Sometimes the idea of man as the microcosm has been narrowly defined and some formulations of the theory have been excluded from study. This has led to oversimplifications, as we will see in Rémi Brague's treatment of the idea of imitation in the Islamic microcosm theory.

My aim in this study will be to present an overview of different formulations the idea of man as the microcosm receives in the thought of the Ikhwān. My intent is to broaden the scope of the treatment of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy and examine the occurrence of the idea in the *Rasā'il* in all its variety. The treatment of the microcosm will not be limited to the occurrences of the idea attached to the term *'alam ṣaghīr*. I will include in my examination contexts in which the idea is present as an underlying assumption influencing the philosophical system as well as contexts in which the analogy is approached explicitly. I will examine which elements in the philosophy of the Ikhwān are connected with the idea of man as the microcosm. I will also study the explanations the Ikhwān give for this analogy; why there is this manifold parallelism between man and the universe. In order to define the Ikhwān's position in the history of philosophy, I will place their elaborations of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in the classification of the microcosm theories represented by Rudolf Allers (1944) in his article *Microcosmus from Anaximandros to Paracelsus*.⁶

2. MAN IN THE COSMOLOGY OF THE IKHWĀN

Neoplatonic Emanationism plays an essential role in the cosmology of the Ikhwān. In this kind of ontological system, originally created by Plotinus, existence has its origin in the passive principle, One, which is in the Islamic tradition replaced by the active Islamic God. From the Creator, existence emanates to all levels of reality, hypostases, which form a strict hierarchy. Each level receives existence from the

⁶ Masataka Takeshita (1987: 74–109) analyzes the microcosm-macrocosm theme in Islamic thought through the same classification. However, the classification is present in his treatment of the analogy merely as a reference to it and he does not analyze the classification more profoundly.

level above it. In the Ikhwān's formulation of the emanationistic system, the reality constitutes of all together nine hypostases. The second hypostasis emanating (*fāda/ṣadara*) from the Creator is the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿAql al-Kullī*), which, along with the third and the fourth levels, the Universal Soul (*an-Nafs al-Kullī*) and the Prime Matter (*al-Hayūlā al-ʿUlā*), belongs to the purely spiritual realm. The fifth and the sixth hypostases are the Nature (*aṭ-Ṭabīʿa*) and the Absolute Body (*al-Jism al-Muṭlaq*), both concepts originating in Aristotelian philosophy. Below these levels are located the material beings, the first of them being the celestial bodies (*al-ajrām al-falakīya*), each dominating one of the nine spheres. Four elements (*al-arkān/al-ummahāt*), earth, fire, air and water, form the eighth level of emanation. The ninth hypostasis, the World of Generation and Corruption (*ʿālam al-kawn wa'l fasād*) consists of beings that are different kinds of compositions of the four elements. (*Ras.* III (35): 237) The creatures of the World of Generation and Corruption form their own hierarchy, the three kingdoms of the minerals, plants and animals. Man is the last link in the chain of being and sums up all existence.

The cosmic order of the Ikhwān is cyclical. As everything has its origin in the Creator, it also returns to that principal unity.⁷ When each of the levels achieves its perfection and the Universal Soul completes the actualization of the forms, which it has received via the Universal Intellect, the levels of being return to their origin, to the level above it. The end of the cycle is called the Grand Resurrection, in comparison with the small resurrection, the resurrection of an individual human soul. (*Ras.* II (16): 49) The cyclical order of the universe and the way in which it prevails at all levels of being is explained in the *Rasāʿil*, for example, with an analogy between Muslim worship and the astrological order. The position of the Kaaba as the centre of the earth corresponds to the position of the earth in the geocentric universe. The Muslim pilgrimage to the Kaaba is compared with the motion of the planets in their spheres. (*Ras.* II (16): 39–40) According to the Ikhwān, the parallel cyclical system can be perceived at each level of reality: in the spheres, nature, human society and the life of an individual man. In this manner, the parallelism between the microcosm and macrocosm is a basic principle in the cyclical world-order; the cycle of the universe is parallel to the life cycle of a human being.

Neoplatonic hierarchical ontology is compounded with Neopythagorean numerology in the *Rasāʿil*. For the Pythagoreans, numbers are the true essences

⁷ In Neoplatonic philosophy, the emanation and the return to the unity are explained by two activities. The outer activity is directed downwards and causes the emanation. The inner activity is directed upwards and makes the being yearn to return to its origin. In Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 1240) thought, these activities are described by the terms *ʿubūdīya* (servanthood) and *rubūbīya* (lordship) (Izutsu 1983: 238). Shihāb ad-Dīn as-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) employs in the same context the concepts of *qahr* (domination) and *maḥabba* (love) (Suhrawardī (a): 102–103). The Ikhwān do not clearly define this pair of concepts. Though *ishq* (love), to which the Ikhwān dedicate the whole 37th tractate, can, when it is understood in its spiritual form as desire for God, be considered as corresponding to the inner activity of Neoplatonism.

of things, the origins of beings. Sometimes the position of numbers in Pythagorean thought has even been compared with the position of ideas in Platonism (Allers 1944: 373). The Pythagorean view that beings, in their essence and attributes, follow the nature of numbers recurs in the *Rasāʿil*, and all the existing beings are said to have a numerical correspondence. Following the world-order based on Emanationism, each level of being has its correspondence in numbers. According to the Ikhwān, God's numerological correspondence is to number one. In Pythagorean thought, one is not the first number, but the beginning of all of them, their origin. Resembling the Islamic God, it is indivisible and without rival. "Like one, which neither has parts nor rival among the numbers, God, praised to be His Loftiness, has no rival among the created and nothing resembles Him. As one includes all the numbers and observes them, so does God, great to be His Majesty, know all things and their essences." (*Ras. I (1): 55*)

As the intensity of existence diminishes farther one descends from God in the chain of being, so the numbers grow according to the distance from the source of all the numbers. Like three follows two and four three, so is each level of being dependent on the level above it and owes its existence to that. It is the Universal Intellect that corresponds to the first number, two. The Universal Soul corresponds to three and the Prime Matter to four. These three purely spiritual beings together with God form the basis for everything, just as all numbers are derivable from one, two, three and four. (*Ras. I (1): 53–55*) Until the eighth level of being, the numerical value follows the hierarchy of beings in the chain of emanation. At the ninth level, the hierarchy of numbers makes an about-turn; minerals correspond to tens, plants to hundreds, animals to thousands and the mixture of these to one. (*Ras. III (32): 181–182*) Though man forms part of the class of animals (*ḥayawān*), he is also the microcosm, a mixture of all beings in the sublunary realm. In man the diversity turns into the unity again. Man's correspondence is to number one. Cosmologically, man as the microcosm is an indispensable link that, as the ultimate goal of the creation, reunites the created. In the Ikhwān's idea of man, the most important attribute of God, Unity, is connected to man. "Man is the unity after all the diversity, like the Creator, praised to be His Loftiness, is the unity before all the diversity" (*Ras. II (26): 475*).⁸

⁸ Allers (1944: 357) points out that the repetition of the unity, which is typical of the idea of man as the microcosm, can be problematic from the perspective of Neoplatonic cosmology. The absolute unity of One and the diversity that is a characteristic of material beings makes it impossible for a lower emanation, such as a human being, to include in it the features of the higher emanations. Allers remarks that a combination of Neopythagoreanism and Neoplatonism is one way to avoid this problem. Therefore, in the Emanationistic cosmological system, that assumes the idea of man as the microcosm, the Neopythagorean influence is usual.

3. MAN – MODEL AND GOAL IN THE CREATION

Though the writers of the *Rasā'il* are fond of Greek philosophy and often refer to pagan thinkers, Islamic revelation, in the form of citations of the Qur'ān and ḥadīths, is strongly present in the text. The Ikhwān validate their philosophical ideas by verifying them with the holy revelation. Regarding the idea of man as the microcosm, the recurring verse is “the creation of you all and the resurrection of you all is nothing but the creation of one soul” (Qur'ān 31:28).⁹ In the *Rasā'il*, the verse is attached to the microcosm-macrocosm analogy, on the one hand, as a confirmation of the existence of the Universal Soul and, on the other, as a validation of the idea of the human archetype Adam.

3.1 Man as a Psychophysical Whole

A theme that recurs in the contexts in which the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is treated in the *Rasā'il* is the dichotomy between corporeal and spiritual. Man, as a combination of the material body and the spiritual soul, is *ar-rutbat al-wuṣṭā*, a middle being. He compounds characteristics of the spiritual and the material worlds.¹⁰ Just as man is a combination of the body and the soul, so is the universe as a whole a combination of material and spiritual. “In the human being, the meanings of all the beings, from the simple (*basā'it*) to the composites (*murakkabāt*), are brought together, because the human being is a combination of the evil material body and the simple spiritual soul. Therefore, the wise call man the microcosm and the world the Big Man.” (*Ras.* III (32): 188) Allers (1944: 404) classifies this kind of elaboration of the microcosm idea as elementaristic microcosm analogy. In its simplest form, the elementaristic analogy is based on the dichotomy between matter and spirit, which is present in man as well as in the universe as a whole. This equivalence locates man in a special position among the created: at the centre of the universe. In the *Rasā'il*, the microcosm analogy of this kind appears especially in the contexts in which the position of the world as the Big Man is accentuated, for example, in the following passage from the second volume, dedicated to natural sciences:

⁹ “Mā khalqukum wa lā ba 'thukum illā ka nafsin wāḥidatin.”

¹⁰ Ibn 'Arabī makes more advanced elaborations of this same idea employing the qur'ānic (23:100) term *barzakh*. He uses *barzakh* especially of the imaginative world, which forms an intermediate level between the material and spiritual worlds. However, every being can be seen as an intermediate being between two levels of existence. Man is *barzakhī*, because in him are integrated the spiritual soul and material body. (Chittick 1989: 14–15) This kind of microcosm idea is present also in Suhrawardī's thought. In the allegorical story the *Sound of Gabriel's Wing*, Suhrawardī ((b): 220–221) describes the human prototype Gabriel as the middle being between the spiritual and the material worlds. Gabriel is said to have two wings, the right one representing light and the left one representing darkness. In the light-metaphor employed by Suhrawardī, the light stands for pure existence while darkness symbolizes non-existence.

Know, O brother, what the wise say of the world, meaning seven heavens and the earths and what is between them; they call it the Big Man. This is due to the fact that it has one body in which are combined the spheres, different layers of the heaven, four elements and the creatures of the World of Generation and Corruption. They also think that it has one soul that with its faculties dominates all parts of the body, like the human soul works everywhere in the human body. (*Ras.* II (16): 24–25)

From the perspective of Emanationistic ontology, the correspondence between man and the universe is treated by examining the parallelism between the Universal Soul and the human soul. The microcosm-macrocosm analogy is present especially in the contexts in which the Ikhwān enlighten the reader about the domination of the Universal Soul over the universe. The whole universe is explained as working in a manner corresponding to a city. The city and its inhabitants live and trade according to their laws. From time to time they end up in confrontational situations and then they turn to the qāḍī, who judges and rules the life of the inhabitants in his weekly court sessions. The rule of the Universal Soul over the lower souls works in a corresponding manner. While the court sessions of the Islamic judge take place every seven days the cycles of the Universal Soul last seven thousand years. (*Ras.* III (34): 219) The Ikhwān clarify the same topic by comparing the universe with a tree:

The world domination passes to different branches of being from the roots: these roots originate in the roots, which finally end in the roots combining all the other roots. In this way, the reality as a whole resembles a tree, which has roots and stem and in it branches and twigs, and in the branches and twigs leaves and among them flowers and colourful, juicy and fragrant fruits. (*Ras.* III (34): 214)

These analogies, handling the position of the Universal Soul, search for correspondences between the universe and some smaller entity, but at the beginning of the tractate it is mentioned that the human soul operates in the human body in a parallel manner.

The relation between corporeal and spiritual is essential from the anthropological perspective of the microcosm idea as well. According to the Ikhwān, a man is man principally for his spiritual aspect, not for his physical characteristics (*Ras.* II (17): 59). Nevertheless, it is mentioned several times in the *Rasā'il* that man is the microcosm both corporeally and spiritually (e.g. *Ras.* II (26): 457 and I (7): 259). The Ikhwān describe the human soul as a prisoner in its bodily prison, (*Ras.* III (34): 218) which is a Neoplatonic metaphor popular also in Sufi literature. The tone of the analogies is not always this pessimistic and in most cases the Ikhwān define the relation between the corporeal and the spiritual aspects of man in terms of mutual need. The soul, in its relation to the body, is like the flesh of a fruit to the peel, a dressed man to his cloths, a rider to his horse or a ship to its crew (*Ras.* II (23): 379; II (17): 59; II (26): 459).

Although these analogies explicitly place the body in a position subordinate to the soul, and the obvious aim of the writers is to accentuate the dominance of spiritual over corporeal, the description implies that the body is seen as a crucial instrument for the soul in its reaching for perfection. The instrumental value of the body for the human being is accentuated in an analogy, which compares the soul with a craftsman. The soul operates in the body like the craftsman in his forge, employing all faculties and parts of the body for its own purposes as the craftsman uses his utensils. (*Ras.* II (23): 384–385)

In the analogies, reality is described as a holistic unity that is dominated in its entirety by the same power. Everything is dependent on the Universal Soul and forms part of the same functional whole. This is also an indication of holistic characteristics in the Ikhwān's idea of man; the human being forms an entirety which is dominated by the soul. All spiritual and physical faculties of man together with the parts of his body work as a whole. As the branches of a tree can only flourish and bear fruit by receiving nutrients from the roots, so can man flourish spiritually solely in the harmonic dominance of the soul over the bodily faculties.

3.2 Adam – the Sum of Species

In the *Rasā'il*, Adam is represented as the prototype for the whole human race. Citing the well-known ḥadīth, the Ikhwān agree that God created Adam in his own image. He is the forefather of the human being (*abū al-bashar*) and the vicegerent of God on earth (*khalīfat allāh*). Adam is the universal, absolute man (*al-insān al-muṭlaq al-kullī*), who combines all potential human attributes. He is the universal human soul, which is present in each human individual. (*Ras.* I (9): 306)¹¹ In the research, the Ikhwān's Adam has been linked with the Ismā'īlī imam (Marquet 1973: 367).

Although Adam works as a model in the creation of man, the idea of man as the model in the creation of the universe is not present in the microcosm-macrocosm analogy of the *Rasā'il*. Man as a kind of divine plan according to which God creates the universe has worked as an explanation for the existing analogy between man and the macrocosm in various traditions, for example, in Indo-Iranian mythology.¹² Though manifold Indo-Iranian impact on the idea of the microcosm

¹¹ A similar idea of Adam as the microcosm can be found, for example, from Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) (al-Ghazālī: 31). Gabriel, a Suhrawardian human archetype and the guardian angel of the human species, resembles al-Insān al-muṭlaq al-kullī as well. Like Adam, Gabriel is the transmitter of the holy knowledge to the material world. In addition to Gabriel, Suhrawardī ((a): 132) calls the human prototype *Rāvan-Bakhsh*, which refers to the transmitter of the Holy Spirit in Zoroastrian tradition.

¹² For example, in Zoroastrian tradition there is a myth of the primordial human prototype, which existed before the creation of the cosmos. The earth is created from different parts of his body

in the *Rasā'il* has been indicated by Geo Widengren (1980: 305), as he points out, the Ikhwān do not explain their microcosm-macrocosm analogy in this way.¹³ The idea of the universe as the transmitting level between man and God has usually been attached to the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in Eastern traditions. For example, in the cosmology of Ḥarrānians, the universe is in the middle-position between man and God. The celestial bodies form the body of God, each of them corresponding to different parts of it. God is materially present in the universe in the form of his incarnation, the celestial bodies. Each of the celestial bodies also has its correspondence in the parts of the human body. In this way, in the Ḥarrānian thought, the celestial bodies form a transmitting level and there is an indirect correspondence between man and God. The Ikhwān's highly transcendental image of God does not allow this kind of interpretation of the microcosm theory. However, Yves Marquet (1966: 69) finds parallel speculation from the Ikhwān's ontological system, only placed at a different level of the hierarchy of beings. In the *Rasā'il*, it is described that the souls of the celestial bodies are angels emanating from the Universal Soul – they are faculties of the Universal Soul. According to the Ikhwān's well-defined hierarchy of souls, from the angelic souls emanate all the souls of the lower, material world. As man is the microcosm, in the human soul are integrated all souls of the material world. In this way, the human soul indirectly corresponds to the Universal Soul. In the Ḥarrānian thought, the celestial spheres as corporeal beings are considered as the intermediate level between man and God, while in the *Rasā'il* the spheres are treated as a spiritual intermediate level between man and the Universal Soul.

In the *Rasā'il*, *muwalladāt*, the composite creatures of the material world, are divided into three groups: minerals, plants and animals. Each of these groups has its specific faculties: minerals are born and destroyed, plants receive nutrients and sleep and animals sense and move. The human being includes everything in the universe and brings together the faculties of all composite beings of the material world. The Ikhwān present a listing of different animals and their characterizing features and remark that man shares all these features.

Regarding what is said of man participating in all beings in their special characteristics, you should know, O brother, let God help you and us with his spirit, that each animal species has its special characteristic, which is

and finally the first man Gayōmart is created from his feet. (Zaehner 1961: 259) This idea is thought to originate in Indian mythology and it gives one explication for the microcosm-macrocosm analogy: the correspondence between man and the universe is due to the fact that the universe was created from the human prototype and, for this, the world is a copy of the human form.

¹³ There are, however, traces of this ancient idea in Islamic philosophy; Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) mentions in his work *Rawḍa-yi Taslīm* that man has been working as a model (*namūdār*) in the creation of the universe (aṭ-Ṭūsī: 134). In spite of this, in this same work, aṭ-Ṭūsī describes the relation between man and the universe like the Ikhwān and remarks that the universe has been the model in the creation of man, not vice versa (aṭ-Ṭūsī: 41).

innate to it. All of these characteristics can be found in the human being; man is brave like a lion, cowardly like a rabbit, generous like a cock, niggardly like a dog, modest like a fish, fanciful like a raven. (*Ras*. II (26): 474–475)

The long list represents dozens of animals and their special features. It is mostly constructed of opposite-pairs: the whale is mute while the nightingale is talkative and the fox is wicked while the sheep is mild. In this way, the Ikhwān classify animals into two categories, into those who are defined by positive attributes as opposites to the lazy, savage and in many other ways useless ones.¹⁴ The classification draws a contradictory image of man; sharing all these features, man has a potentiality for everything, for extremely negative features as well as for positive ones.

While the lion is described as the brave one of the animals and the bee is the dexterous one, the characterizing feature of the human being is his essence as the microcosm.¹⁵ Man has the potentiality to become sheepish as well as doglike. As the middle being between the material and the spiritual worlds, man is also able to reach the features of the beings located in the spiritual world: angels. The unique characteristic of the angel is immortality. (*Ras*. II (26): 473–475) At the same time, man carries potential evil in him; in the soul of man, are drawn the potential characteristics of jinn and devil (*Ras*. II (26): 457). Perfecting his soul one has to conquer the lower features in order to actualize the potential angel concealed in the human soul.

The perfect prototype of man, Adam, is an all-integrating being whose soul includes all the features manifested in the universe. As we will see in the chapter on epistemology, he also contains the model for human perfection.¹⁶ One characterizing example of the eclecticism of the Ikhwān is the following, frequently quoted, passage, a description of an ideal man. In it, the perfect man is described as a combination of the features that for the writers appear as positive ones, as a kind of microcosm of manhood: “his origins are Persian, by religion he is Arab, by religious school he is ḥanīf,¹⁷ by education Iraqi, by spirit Hebrew, by conduct Christian, in piety like a Syrian, in science like a Greek, in insight like an Indian,

¹⁴ In spite of that, the picture that the Ikhwān give of their attitude towards the animals in the animal narratives in other parts of the *Rasāʾil* seems rather optimistic. Each of the animals has its specific feature, through which it can attain perfection characteristic for its species.

¹⁵ A Jewish philosopher Ibn Ṣaddīq (d. 1149) is especially fond of the Ikhwān’s idea of man as the being summarizing the features of the animals. In his magnum opus *Microcosm*, Ibn Ṣaddīq elaborates the idea of the microcosm using the analogy of the Ikhwān in many ways. (Doctor 1895: 19)

¹⁶ Suhrawardī’s Gabriel resembles Adam also in this: in addition to being an archetype of humankind, Gabriel also forms an ideal image of man. Like the Ikhwān, Suhrawardī ((a): 134) also indicates that all the faculties of plants and animals are included in the human being.

¹⁷ According to the current edition of the *Rasāʾil*, this should be translated “Ḥanafī”. However, regarding the context and the religious pluralism of the Ikhwān, I follow the translation that has also been employed by Godefroid de Callatay (2005: 73).

in manners like a Sufi, by morals like an angel, in opinions superhuman and by knowledge God-like” (*Ras.* II (22): 376).

4. THE HUMAN BODY – MAP OF THE REALITY

In the cosmology of the Ikhwān, the idea of man as the microcosm is present for the most part implicitly, as a fact that has its impact in the background of the philosophical system or as a mere mention with no further explication. The microcosm idea appears in its most explicit form in the passages in which the parallelism between man and the reality around him is explained systematically, feature by feature. In this chapter, I focus on these explicit analogies that, following Allers’s classification, can be regarded as structural analogies (Allers 1944: 348–367). As mentioned before, the Ikhwān’s idea of man is strongly holistic and a strict division between the bodily and the spiritual aspects of man would be artificial. Nevertheless, the structural analogies approach man mainly from the physiological perspective and in the analogies, which will be treated in the context of epistemology, the concentration is on the spiritual aspect of man. The structural analogies can be examined from three perspectives according to the counterpart to man in the analogy: architectural, sublunary and astrological. This should not be taken to connote that the analogies occur in the *Rasā’il* logically following this division; the writers keep their quite chaotic style throughout the work and analogies between different layers of the reality appear as combinations in the tractates. This could be seen as an indication of the way the analogical thinking prevails in the Ikhwān’s philosophy. Correspondences are found at all possible levels; man is compared with the universe as a whole. Like Hermetic thinkers, the Ikhwān describe the reality to be full of parallel layers within each other.

The above-mentioned Pythagorean numerology has a central role in the corporeal analogies; they are often based on a numerical parallelism. The same numbers recur throughout the *Rasā’il*, and even if they sometimes seem forced and artificial, they are never haphazard. Some numbers are chosen for the analogies due to their importance in numerology or letter mysticism, some for their mathematical value. The Ikhwān are especially attracted to the numbers that are first ones in series of numbers; the speciality of number two is due to its position as the first number, three is the first odd number and nine is the first odd square number (*Ras.* I (1): 56–57). In the analogies occur numbers that have significance, for example, in astrology; the number of lunar mansions, 28, which also has letter-mystical significance as the number of characters in Arabic alphabets, recurs in the analogies. Numbers that have both numerical value and occurrence in the universe appear frequently; twelve signs of the zodiac, nine spheres and seven planets find various parallels with the human body and soul. Though some numbers stand in a special position in the

Rasā'il and numerology is a central discipline for the Ikhwān, the writers advise avoiding going too far in numerological speculation. This kind of misunderstanding prevails among dualists as well as Christians, who have concentrated too much on the speciality of numbers two and three (*Ras.* III (32): 180). The numerological aspect is in any case only one dimension of the analogies; according to the Ikhwān, the correspondence between the human body and the universe is qualitative as well as quantitative (*Ras.* II (26): 463).

In the passages that approach the microcosm-macrocosm analogy from architectural perspective, the concentration is on correspondences between man and some man-made construction: a city or a house. The city is said to be constructed following the form of man. Different building materials and features have their correspondences in the human body. The streets and rivers are arteries and veins, the city gates find their correspondence in the apertures of the body. Later in the same tractate, the Ikhwān compare the human body with a house. The legs are said to correspond to the foundation of the house, the face is the facade, the mouth corresponds to the entrance and the chest is the courtyard of the house (*Ras.* II (23): 381–384). Usually the Ikhwān compare the inhabitants of a city or a house with the spiritual faculties and senses of man. For example, in the passage that depicts the way the human body was constructed following the model of a city, the Ikhwān mention three tribes that inhabit the city; angels, jinns and men. These tribes are described corresponding to the three parts of the human soul. Jinns represent the lowest, lustful soul (*an-nafs ash-shahwāniya*), men the sensitive, animal soul (*an-nafs al-hayawāniya*) and angels the highest, speaking soul (*an-nafs an-nāṭiqā*). (*Ras.* II (23): 381–382) Though the material constructions are usually described as parallels to the human body, there are exceptional analogies in which the higher, spiritual faculties are compared with man's corporeal aspect and some of the assistant's posts have been handed over to the body parts. For example, the tongue is seen as the porter of the house and the hands work as servants, the fingers as craftsmen (*Ras.* II (23): 383–384).

Everything in the sublunary world is constituted of four elements. Elements and their correspondences in the human body have been examined already in the first elaborations of the microcosm in Western philosophy, for example, by Presocratic philosophers. This kind of correspondence occurs also in Hermetic tradition. In the *Rasā'il*, the number four recurs in the microcosm analogies and correspondences to four elements are found in the human body in many forms. Water, air, fire and earth are compared with the four humours of the body. The elements are dominated by four natures as well as four humours by four temperaments (*Ras.* II (22): 197). As there are four elements, so does the human soul have four parts; mineral, vegetative, animal and angelic (*Ras.* II (26): 473). The analogies that examine the parallelism

between man and the universe geographically are also located in the sublunary sphere:

The human body is in its structure like the earth: bones are like mountains, marrow like minerals. Entrails are like the ocean, intestines like rivers, veins like rivulets, flesh is like the soil. Hair is like plants, hairy areas of the skin like fertile lands while bald areas are like marsh. The front-side of the human body is like inhabited lands and the backside is like unpopulated hinterland. The face is east, the back of the head is west. The right side of the body resembles south while the left side is like north. Breath is like wind, words like thunder, voice like lightning, laugh like the daylight, crying like rain, suffering and sorrow like the darkness of the night. Sleeping is like death, awakening like life, childhood like spring, adolescence like summer, adulthood like fall and old age like winter. (*Ras.* II (26): 466–467)

Widengren (1980: 302–304) remarks that the influence of Iranian and Indian mythology is evident in this analogy. In the Hermetic Corpus as well, the correspondence between man and the earth has been described in a similar manner. For example, the position of terrain and watercourses resembles that of the analogy represented by the Ikhwān. (Festugière 1950: 127)¹⁸

Astrology is one of the most important disciplines for the Ikhwān; exploring the reality above, a human soul starts to yearn for the angelic, heavenly realm and man concentrates his thoughts on the spiritual (*Ras.* I (3): 137). The great interest the Ikhwān express in astrology can be seen as a sign of Hermetic influence on the text. The microcosm-macrocosm analogy has been treated widely from the astrological perspective in the *Rasā'il*. As Marquet (1973: 243–244) remarks, the Hermetic impact is emphasized especially in the microcosm speculation, which concentrates on man as a corporeal being. One of the dominant features of Hermetic tradition is the emphasis of the technical and practical aspects of philosophy (Walbridge 2001: 46). In the *Rasā'il*, this practical aspect is most clearly present in the tractates treating magic and alchemy. The same practical dimension characterizes astrology as well. Susanne Diwald (1979: 17–18) describes astrology as a superior counterpart of alchemy, which, instead of the sublunary reality approaches the reality above the lunar sphere. Both include the technical aspect. When the parallelism between man and the universe is presented at the astrological level, the microcosm-macrocosm analogies also have practical value; planets are considered to have influence on the sublunary world as well as on an individual human body. This pseudoscientific idea, resembling the present-day popular astrology, was a generally accepted scientific view at the time the *Rasā'il* was written.

¹⁸ In the Hermetic Corpus, as in the *Rasā'il*, the head is said to be parallel with the sky (Festugière 1950: 127). As Takeshita (1987: 99) points out, al-Ghazālī also presents a similar analogy, but in his version the sky is compared with the brain and the celestial bodies find their correspondence in the spiritual faculties of man.

According to the Ikhwān, the parallelism between the microcosm and macrocosm is present from the very first moment of a man: as the human life begins from a drop of sperm, the earth also has its origin in a drop.¹⁹ After the conception, an embryo is every month of pregnancy under the influence of a different planet. The first planet to have its impact on the developing embryo is Saturn. After receiving the influence of each of seven planets, during the eighth month of pregnancy, the embryo returns to the sphere of influence of Saturn. (*Ras.* II (25): 433–442) In the human body, its nine materials are arranged in the same manner as nine spheres. The materials of the body are bone, marrow, nerves, veins, blood, flesh, hair, nail and skin. (*Ras.* IV (49): 231 and II (26): 463) Skin, being the outermost of the materials, corresponds to the outermost of the spheres, *muḥīṭ*. The twelve signs of the zodiac find their parallels in the apertures of the human body. On the other hand, the apertures and their different functions are explained by their resemblance to the planets. For example, the mouth corresponds to the mansion of the Sun and the navel to the mansion of the Moon, for both have the same function in different periods of human life: in the womb, the navel is the aperture receiving alimentation and after birth, the mouth works for this purpose. (*Ras.* II (26): 463–465) At the mental level, human life in its different events, joys and sorrows, corresponds to the life-cycle of the celestial bodies and the whole course of life of a man can be explained in terms of the astrological reality (*Ras.* II (26): 467).

Man has been placed on the earth to dominate it as God's vicegerent. In like manner, each planet dominates its own sphere by its angel-soul. In the context in which the Ikhwān clarify the astronomical order of the planets, different astronomical phenomena are described in terms of man and human society. The Ikhwān compare the hierarchy between the celestial bodies with the hierarchy prevailing in human society. (*Ras.* I (3): 145–151) In another tractate, the Ikhwān explain the central position of the Sun in the universe with the structure of a city; as the dwelling of the king is situated at the central location in the city, so is the Sun placed in the centre of the spheres (*Ras.* II (16): 30). In the human body, the Sun is situated in the central sphere and corresponds to the heart, not only for its location, but also for its function. As the heart pumps blood to flow everywhere in the human body, so does the Sun radiate its light to the whole universe. Both have their essential position in the maintenance of life. In the same way, each organ finds its correspondence in different planets. Rather surprising is the Ikhwān's equation of the stomach with Venus. The planet usually attached to the greatest pleasures and joy is in the *Rasā'il* connected to the need for alimentation. (*Ras.* II (26): 476–479)

¹⁹ This idea is already known in the early Indo-Iranian tradition. Widengren (1980: 303–308) states that the Ikhwān are the transmitter of the idea for Muslim philosophers. Later in Islamic thought, the idea of the origin of the world in a drop appears in the texts of such thinkers as Nāṣir Khusraw (d. after 1072) and al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283). The influence of the embryology of the Ikhwān has also been recognised in *Sirr al-Khalīqa*, a text attributed to Apollonius of Tyana (Weisser 1980: 230).

The physiological analogies are the most explicit form of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy and sometimes even annoyingly exaggerated in their search of similarities. Correspondences that the physiological analogies seek are structural and concentrate on similarities in the function and relations between different parts of the compared entities. In these analogies, man *is* the microcosm, with no conditions. Conger (1922: 51) recognizes the Ikhwān's way of employing the astrological analogy as an innovative feature in the microcosm theory. In the earlier elaborations of the idea, the main purpose of these analogies had always been to describe human being in terms of astrology. The Ikhwān seem to claim that knowledge concerning the heavenly spheres can be grasped by examining the human body and they draw analogies in order to describe the astrological reality through the human being. The anatomical analogies, especially in their astrological form, turn the human body into the source of knowledge of the surrounding reality; it is possible to understand the function of the universe by contemplation of the human body. Because of the limitedness of human life and of man's ability to see everything in it, God created man as a summarizing counterpart to the universe. Man himself as the microcosm is seen as a key for the attainment of knowledge.

5. THE MICROCOSM AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONCEPT

He knew that the universe is wide and big, and that it would be impossible for a man to travel everywhere in order to see everything in it; human life is so short in comparison with the diversity of the universe. He, in His wisdom, decided to create the microcosm, in which the whole macrocosm is summarized. (*Ras.* II (26): 462)

The idea of man as the microcosm is mostly treated in the *Rasā'il* as a self-evident fact. Godefroid de Callataÿ (2005: 24) mentions that the writers do not present any explicit reason for the parallelism between man and the universe. In many previous traditions, the microcosm-macrocosm analogy had been explained by the position of man as the model in the creation of the universe. As Widengren (1980: 305) indicates, the Ikhwān did not adopt this explanation. It seems that the main reason for the parallelism is, in the Ikhwān's view, not related to ontological, but to epistemological ideas. When the reasons for the parallelism between man and the universe are treated in the *Rasā'il*, they are usually related to knowledge. The Ikhwān seem to assume that God created the analogy between man and the universe for educational purposes. Only a person who acknowledges that everything is integrated into the human being can attain real knowledge.

One who wishes to master all sciences and claims to be able to answer the questions we posed above has to be asked to answer these questions with one basis and one analogy. He can only do this if he takes as a basis, instead of any other form: spheres, celestial bodies, elements, animals or

plants, the human form. Whichever he may chose from the other forms, he would never be able to find the analogy to every existing thing in it. He can only find all answers in this one form that we have arrived at in our investigations and which we have employed. (*Ras.* IV (2): 12)

This citation from the part concerning the theological sciences indicates the way in which one can attain the real knowledge of the essences of things. The Ikhwān claim to have found one basis and analogy in the universe that summarizes the whole reality and conceals all the knowledge: the human form. It is like the well-preserved table, *al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*, in which all the sciences and wisdom have been drawn. Knowledge, in spite of being the most important reason for the whole microcosm-macrocosm analogy, is linked with it in many ways in the *Rasāʾil*.

5.1 The Question of Self-knowledge

The real knowledge can be attained, according to the Ikhwān, through philosophy and logic as well as religious sciences. The importance of scientific knowledge and rationality is evident; this can be perceived already from the manner the Ikhwān arrange their work in the form of a scientific encyclopaedia. In spite of this, the Ikhwān find no contradiction between the revelation and rationality. According to the *Rasāʾil*, they share the same divine source and both aspire to reach the same goal; the purification of the soul (*Ras.* III (28): 30). In the *Rasāʾil*, the scientific disciplines have been organized into a strict hierarchy according to which they should be studied. The lower discipline is said to be a reflection of the one above it (*Ras.* I (1): 70).²⁰ In this way, the hierarchically higher discipline always represents the real essences of things more clearly than the ones below it though both are images of the same reality. This kind of parallelism between the ontological and epistemological structures of reality is a characterizing feature for the Neoplatonic theory of knowledge.

The Ikhwān see an all-embracing knowledge of the universe as the obvious goal for a human being. Like Gnostics, the Ikhwān consider knowledge as the means of salvation. Knowledge of the real essences of things, in addition to sincere thoughts, true moral and virtuous character, and good deeds, is mentioned in the *Rasāʾil* as a condition for the purification of the soul (*Ras.* III (28): 30). Though knowledge leading to salvation is necessarily spiritual knowledge, belonging to man for his soul, the sensory knowledge due to his corporeal aspect is also an absolute prerequisite for salvation (*Ras.* III (35): 246–247). The importance the Ikhwān give to the sensory knowledge is an exceptional feature for a theory of

²⁰ Though resembling it, the Ikhwān's way of arranging scientific disciplines differs from the Aristotelian division. While for the Ikhwān mathematics is placed before physics, for Aristotle the mathematical sciences are already a step closer to the theological ones. As de Callatay (2005: 66) remarks, this might be due to the Pythagorean influence in the *Rasāʾil*.

knowledge that has been strongly influenced by Neoplatonic epistemology. In this way, the Ikhwān again demonstrate their respect for the bodily aspect of man; also, in their theory of knowledge, man's twofold essence as a psychophysical whole is accentuated. A similar feature is perceivable in the handling of self-knowledge in the *Rasā'il*. The Ikhwān divide self-knowledge into three stages. The lowest is the knowledge of oneself as a corporeal being. The second level of self-knowledge concerns the acknowledgement of one's spiritual faculties. Finally, the highest stage is the understanding of the whole that the two prior levels form. A man who has reached true self-knowledge acknowledges himself as a combination of corporeal and spiritual. (*Ras.* II (23): 379)

The requirement for self-knowledge recurs in the *Rasā'il*. As the Ikhwān emphasize on several occasions, self-knowledge is considered the beginning of all knowledge, a basis for all science. Self-knowledge is also related to man's position as the microcosm. As the microcosm, man can, by contemplating himself, obtain knowledge concerning the world around him – understand its structure and functions. Self-knowledge is also attached to the knowledge of God through the Delphic Maxim, which appears in the *Rasā'il*, for example, in the form: “who knows himself, knows God” (*Ras.* I (1): 76, IV (49): 193). Alexander Altmann (1969: 8–11) has studied the idea of man as the microcosm from the perspective of the Delphic Maxim. He describes the way in which some Muslim philosophers, among them Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), have amalgamated the idea of man as the microcosm with the Delphic Maxim and the Homo Imago Dei theme. Man as an image of God may know God by self-contemplation. Takeshita (1987: 86–91) notes that, even though both, the Delphic maxim and the Homo Imago Dei ḥadīth are present in the *Rasā'il*, the Ikhwān do not elaborate the microcosm idea binding these three ideas together. One needs to know himself in order to obtain the highest knowledge, because self-knowledge is the first step towards this. However, the Ikhwān do not consider self-knowledge to *directly* reveal anything about God. Also, the sphere of the structural microcosm-macrocosm analogies of the Ikhwān is strictly limited to the material world.²¹ The knowledge that man can deduce from self-knowledge is primarily concerned with this world.

Although the microcosm theory of the Ikhwān is in this way limited to the material world, its ultimate goal is the knowledge of the spiritual. The division of the reality into manifest (*ẓāhir*) and concealed (*bāṭin*), which is a prevailing idea in all esoteric Islam, including Ismā'īlī thought and Sufism, is widely employed in the *Rasā'il*.²² As the Ikhwān emphasize, “the lower is a sign of the higher” (e.g. *Ras.* II

²¹ On the contrary, for example, Ibn 'Arabī compares human faculties with the whole reality, including into his analogies the spiritual world, the divine throne and footstool (see, e.g. Ibn 'Arabī: 38). However, the Ikhwān never step beyond the nine spheres in their microcosm-macrocosm analogies.

²² It should be noted, however, that these concepts differ in the thought of the Ikhwān from their Ismā'īlī counterparts in some aspects (Netton 1979: 53–62).

(23): 380). According to them, “God made the material things parallels and signs of the spiritual beings, which are only grasped by the intellect. He made the way of the senses ladders to ascend to the realm of the intellectual knowledge, since that stage of knowledge is the highest goal for a soul.” (*Ras.* III (35): 246) In this way, the knowledge of the material world can lead to the knowledge of the real essences of things and the spiritual knowledge can be derived from the knowledge concerning the material world.

The characterizing features of the Ikhwān’s idea of the microcosm seem to be twofold. The microcosm-macrocosm analogies approach the reality from the sphere of the natural sciences. The Ikhwān never step beyond the nine spheres in their explicit microcosm-macrocosm analogies. However, the ultimate goal of the analogy is to reveal something about the spiritual world. Nature, and the human being as a miniature of it, works as a code through which the hidden secrets of the spiritual world can be grasped. This idea has characteristics of the microcosm theory in its symbolic form. In Allers’s symbolic microcosm theories, an essential feature is the way to see man as a source of knowledge from which the realities of the spiritual beings can be interpreted (Allers 1944: 326).

5.2 Knowing as Imitation of the Surrounding Order

One essential epistemological aspect in the microcosm theory of the *Rasā’il* is the employment of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in the descriptions of the process of acquiring knowledge. In this context, the idea is again treated in its most explicit form, as comparisons between the features of two entities. Now the emphasis is on the spiritual faculties of man instead of the corporeal aspect treated in chapter four. Again the comparisons are manifold and the role of the macrocosm is given to different layers of the reality.

Sometimes the processing of knowledge is described with the terms of astrology. In that case, the analogies resemble the corporeal astrological ones and they concentrate on structural similarities. Five senses and the relations between them are compared with planets. The noblest among the human faculties, intellect (*‘aql*) and the faculty of speech (*nāṭiq*) find their correspondence in the Sun and the Moon. The Ikhwān describe the meaning of the intellect for the speech in the following way: “As the Moon takes light from the Sun passing through 28 lunar mansions, so does the speech take meaning for spoken things (*alfāz*) from the

intellect and expresses them with 28 Arabic consonants” (*Ras.* II (26): 464–465).²³ As in the corporeal astrological analogy, the human faculties not only correspond, but are also under the influence of the celestial bodies. However, the human soul contains the possibility to free itself from this dependence. The key to this liberation is knowledge – developing the intellectual faculty of the soul. The intellect in this way has an essential role concerning the free will of a man.²⁴

Comparisons describing the process of knowledge take their most evolved forms when the sociological aspect is involved. In the city-state metaphors, the emphasis is on describing the hierarchical system of acquiring knowledge in comparison with the governance of a city-state.

The human body, in all its extraordinariness, in its structure and in the order of its parts, resembles a city. The soul is like the king of the city and its faculties are like soldiers and officers in it. Its activities and movements in the body are like inhabitants and servants. That is to say, the human soul has various faculties, whose number is only known by God, the Sublime. All of these faculties have their own particular location in the human body and their own particular relation to the soul. (*Ras.* II (26): 468)

The highest officials of the state work in the process of acquiring and handling knowledge. The process is directed by *‘aql*, intellect, but it forms a mechanism that demands all other members of the structure to work as active participants – as an ideal head of state has to recognize his own leading position, but can only succeed with the aid of his ministers, messengers and other assistants. They are all dedicated to their own areas, just as each of the human senses has its own specific way to acquire information about the surrounding reality. Senses that work as royal messengers have their spiritual counterparts that help the intellect in processing knowledge.

In one of the analogies, the senses are promoted to prophets, each of them bringing its own revelation and law. The task of distinguishing the false prophets from the true ones, usually belonging to God, is now given to the spiritual faculties, which process the knowledge that is passed to them. (*Ras.* II (26): 467–471) This indicates the Ikhwān’s tolerance towards other religions, even to religious pluralism. In the same way as all senses observe the same objects and reality with diverse methods, the different religions approach one God from distinct angles.

From the epistemological perspective, the city-state metaphors describe the human mind as a functional whole in which all faculties co-operate. The high status given to sensory knowledge in the epistemology of the *Rasā’il* is accentuated also

²³ In many passages of the *Rasā’il*, the Ikhwān employ metaphor of light to describe the intellect and its actions in the universe (see, e.g. II (24): 416). The light metaphor was later widely employed by, for example, al-Ghazālī and Suhrawardī.

²⁴ As noted by Netton (1982: 51), the view that the activity of the planets controls the actions of man is in contrast with the Mu‘tazilī concept of free will, which the Ikhwān in other respects seem to have accepted. Adel Awa (1948) has studied the Mu‘tazilī characteristics in the thought of the Ikhwān more profoundly and he actually declared the *Rasā’il* a post-Mu‘tazilī-text.

in these analogies. With the descriptions of the process of acquiring knowledge the Ikhwān reveal something essential to their definition of knowledge; acquiring knowledge is for them drawing the forms of the objects of knowledge into the human soul as “the seal of the ring is pressed to the wax” (*Ras*. III (35): 243).

In Allers’s classification, the city-state metaphors could be characterized as holistic. In this kind of microcosm-macrocosm analogy, which has its predecessor in Plato’s *Republic*, the political system is seen as a reflection of the harmony that the human organism received in the creation. (Allers 1944: 367–369) The holistic analogies reveal the same harmony repeated in different layers of reality, in the human mind as well as in a human society. Al-Fārābī (d. 950) has employed the city-state metaphor primarily for the purpose of introducing his political ideals.²⁵ Regarding the city-state metaphors of the Ikhwān, some political ideals can be perceived in them as well. They can be interpreted as declarations of support for the hierarchical society; each member of the society should take care of his duties in order to make the entire society work. However, apart from the political dimension of the analogies, the primary intention of the Ikhwān is to demonstrate through them the ideal way the process of knowledge should work.

Brague (1997) examines the idea of man as the microcosm in Islamic philosophy in his article *Deux versions du microcosme: Être le monde en petit ou imiter le monde en grand*. In Brague’s view, the ancient idea of the microcosm lost one of its fundamental elements in the hands of Muslim philosophers. The idea of man as the microcosm is often attached to imitation. The macrocosm is thought to form an ideal that should be imitated in order to become like it, a microcosm. However, the Arab philosophers, according to Brague, employed the term *‘ālam ṣaghīr* in order to describe the existing situation. In the texts of the Arabs, the term microcosm ceased to be employed to express an ideal that should be imitated, but to describe the way things are. This is, according to Brague, mainly due to three things. One of them, applying to all three monotheistic traditions, is the written revelation. When God had given them the law and orders in written form, people were no longer obligated to seek the moral codes from the universe around them. On the other hand, the sources used by the Arabs were not extensive and gave an incomplete image of the idea of the microcosm developed in the earlier philosophy. The third reason is linguistic: *‘ālam ṣaghīr* does not include the same twofold meaning as its Greek predecessor *μικρὸς κοσμος*. The Greek term refers to the harmonic, ideal order, which the Arab term does not imply. For all this, according to Brague, the Muslim philosophers do not employ the term microcosm in the contexts in which

²⁵ According to Muhsin S. Mahdi (2001: 58–59), a distinctive element in al-Fārābī’s analogical descriptions of his political ideals is that he proceeds from the unknown to the known; from the description of the astrological order, he passes on to the activities of the human soul. Then he draws analogy to the political order in a human society.

it would express an ethical ideal; imitating the surrounding reality as the key for virtuous conduct is not connected with the term microcosm in Islamic philosophy.

Brague studies the issue of imitation in the microcosm idea of al-Fārābī and the Ikhwān, which he assumes as extreme representatives of the idea in Islamic philosophy in this respect. According to him, the idea of imitation was preserved in the thought of al-Fārābī, but only in an implicit manner; al-Fārābī does not use the term *‘ālam ṣaghīr* in his texts. The Ikhwān, who employ the term, assimilated the idea but only in its descriptive form; the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is, according to Brague, present in the *Rasā’il* only in descriptions of the existing situation. If the idea of the microcosm in the *Rasā’il* is solely treated at the corporeal level, the way in which it appeared in the analogies presented in chapter four, this statement is justified. The corporeal analogies of the Ikhwān describe the existing correspondence between the human body and the surrounding reality; they do not include encouragement to become a microcosm. However, the idea of imitation is present in the analogies approaching man from the spiritual dimension. The ideal way in which the human mind should work in the process of acquiring and processing knowledge may be perceived in the surrounding reality: in the activity of the planets or in the political system of an ideal city-state. In this way, man is urged to imitate the surrounding reality in order to attain perfection.²⁶ The imitation of the macrocosm is also perceivable in the type of microcosm presented below, which could be characterized as the psychological microcosm.

5.3 Story of the Wise King and the Potential Microcosm in the Human Mind

The Ikhwān illustrate their views in the *Rasā’il* continuously with metaphorical narratives in which they often employ Indian and Iranian literary traditions. The following history is in the tractate *On the Saying of the Wise that Man is a Small World*. It explains the position of man as *al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*:

It is told that there was a king, who was the wisest of the wise and the noblest of the nobles. He had young sons that he loved and respected and he was willing to prepare and educate them well before setting them at his court, because in the royal position cannot be seated but the sophisticated, educated, righteous and immaculate. The king, firm and wise in his opinions, decided to build them a castle [...] He appointed to each of them a room in the castle and drew on the walls of the rooms all the knowledge he wanted to teach to his sons, describing all things in which they needed to be educated. (*Ras.* II (26): 460)

²⁶ Even more evidently than in the *Rasā’il*, the idea of the imitation of the surrounding reality appears in the microcosm-macrocosm analogies of al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī. The influence of the Ikhwān on the idea of the microcosm of al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī has been examined by Takeshita (1987: 92–108).

The sciences that were painted on the walls were divided into six categories. There were all scientific disciplines, from mathematics to theological sciences. The king ordered his sons to educate themselves in these sciences and to contemplate their meanings. After that, they should return to him as wise men. At the end of the story, the Ikhwān explain the inner meaning of the narrative: “The wise king is himself the exalted God. His sons are humanity (*insānīya*) and the castle is the whole sphere. The rooms of the castle are the human form (*ṣūrat al-insān*). The sciences described on the walls are the wonderful structure of the human body and the written information represents man’s faculties and knowledge.” (*Ras.* II (26): 461)

The story of the wise king resembles the metaphor of seven spiritual castles concealed in the human soul, which is popular also in the medieval Sufi literature.²⁷ In Sufism, a mystic passes through stations (*maqāmāt*) on his way towards perfection. In the Sufi version of the spiritual castle metaphor, these stations are described as seven castles, or seven rooms of a castle. The mystic proceeds by passing through six of them and reaches the seventh castle, or the innermost part of the castle, in which he finds perfection, Godly Presence. Each of the stations is reached in specific order and completed before passing to the next one. These castles, or rooms of the castle, are concealed in one’s own soul. In this way, in the Sufi thought, the human soul includes a miniature of its perfection, a microcosm. Likewise in the story of the Ikhwān, the knowledge has been divided into six groups, which the wise king painted on the walls of the castle. In the *Rasā’il*, the knowledge stands in an essential position and the study of different sciences is seen as a well-organized process, which proceeds from concrete to abstract disciplines. Resembling the stations reached by a Sufi in his process of perfection, each of the sciences is studied and perfected in an organized order. The scientific disciplines that in the allegorical story stand for the faculties and knowledge of the human soul could be compared with the stations of Islamic mystical thinkers. As the Sufis reach the six stations before achieving the vicinity of the Lord, the human being in the story of the Ikhwān perfect the faculties and knowledge before entering the court of God. Both Sufis and the Ikhwān find a miniature for perfection in the human soul and describe the soul as a castle.

From the story of the wise king, it can be inferred that all knowledge is concealed in the human form. At the moment of creation, the forms of all creatures were drawn into the human soul. In order to actualize this mental microcosm, man must

²⁷ Luce López-Baralt (1992: 107–126) finds the idea of seven spiritual castles quite universal. According to her, it can be traced back to the early Babylonian as well as Persian traditions. A corresponding metaphor is employed, for example, in the Jewish *Hekhalot*-writings, written during the 5th and the 6th centuries. In Islamic tradition, the idea of seven castles of the soul was present already in the 9th century, in the writings of a Baghdadi mystic Abū al-Ḥusain an-Nūrī (d. 907). Later the idea was employed, for example, by al-Ghazālī in his *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn* and Najm ad-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. 1220).

seek knowledge of all things existing in the created world. In this formulation, the microcosm idea works as an explanation of man's potential ability to achieve knowledge of everything. In the tractate dedicated to sensory knowledge, the Ikhwān urge the reader to contemplate the reality around him, because all knowledge is potentially integrated into the human soul. The Ikhwān remark that by examining the essences of the things it is possible to actualize this knowledge. (*Ras.* II (24): 416)²⁸ This can be seen as a psychological interpretation of the microcosm. In the context of the psychological microcosm, Allers (1944: 330–331) accentuates the discussion on the problem of universals, which was one of the most important themes in the medieval philosophical discourse. The most fertile ground for the microcosm analogy in its psychological form is in Platonic philosophy, where the acquisition of knowledge is seen as a formation of the real essences of things, ideas, into the human mind. For this reason, the psychological microcosm analogy has been elaborated mostly by philosophers influenced by Platonism and especially Neoplatonism.

Sari Nuseibeh (1996: 835–837) characterizes the epistemological systems of Muslim philosophers by dividing them into two groups: one closer to the theological epistemology and the other following the Neoplatonic theory of knowledge. Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) is a representative of the theological side. Nuseibeh characterizes the process of acquiring knowledge in that epistemological system as more subjective in comparison with the Neoplatonic. In Ibn Sīnā's system, the forms of the perceived objects drawn in the human mind are strongly dependent on the individual intuition and, for this reason, differ from the forms existing in the Active Intellect. As an exemplar of a more Neoplatonic epistemology, Nuseibeh mentions al-Fārābī. As is peculiar to Neoplatonism, in al-Fārābī's system, ontology and epistemology are bound together. The forms that man receives into his particular intellect in the process of acquiring knowledge are the real essences of things and parallel to those in the Active Intellect. Hence man, who has perfected himself intellectually, is a reflection of the Active Intellect and includes the real essences of the objects of knowledge. Actually, in both epistemological systems described above, the particular intellect that has reached its perfection could be seen as the microcosm reflecting the whole universe. Hence, the psychological microcosm theory can be observed in both mainstreams of Islamic epistemology, although it is more clearly present in the Neoplatonic branch of it. However, few of the Muslim philosophers have explicitly linked their epistemological ideas with the concept of the microcosm. Al-Fārābī's thought, as an example of the psychological microcosm in implicit form, resembles

²⁸ Netton (1982: 17) accentuates that the actualization of the potential knowledge concealed in the human soul differs in the Ikhwān's thought from Platonic *anamnesis* in that there is no assumption of remembering something that would have been in the human mind before birth.

the epistemology of the Ikhwān in this interpretation of the microcosm idea.²⁹ In the psychological microcosm-macrocosm analogy, the imitation of the macrocosm is an essential idea and the whole process of acquiring knowledge is about turning one's intellect into the ideal, the image of the surrounding reality.

The *Rasā'il* is ambiguous about whether the microcosm at the level of the human intellect concerns man as an individual or humankind collectively. Perhaps the Ikhwān refer to the form of the human archetype, Adam, whose form is the model for all human souls after him. It is not an individual human whose intellect potentially reflects the whole universe, but man at the cosmic level. The human archetype Adam knows everything in the universe, as is mentioned in the Qur'ān, "He told Adam the names of all things" (Qur'ān 2:31). Human beings collectively correspond to this archetype and therefore they can know everything in the universe together.³⁰ Elsewhere in the *Rasā'il*, it is argued that "one soul would never have the capacity for all the knowledge, but it has to be pursued by all the people together" (*Ras.* III (42): 404).³¹ On the other hand, this could imply a twofold understanding of the potential microcosm in the human mind. In a parallel manner, as the resurrection of the individual is seen as "the small resurrection" in comparison with the day of resurrection of the universe, the perfect individual man as a mental microcosm could be understood as the microcosm at one level while mankind would collectively form the microcosm at another level.

CONCLUSION

The idea of man as the miniature of the creation extends to all central themes of the *Rasā'il*. The Ikhwān employ the layers of the microcosm theory originating in different historical periods extensively, and the diversity of the different interpretations of the idea is presented in the *Rasā'il*. Regarding the division of Allers, the analogies in the *Rasā'il* have features of elementaristic, structural, psychological, symbolistic and holistic microcosm theories. As in the whole philosophical system of the Ikhwān, eclecticism is also characteristic of their microcosm theories; in the microcosm speculation of the *Rasā'il*, the features of

²⁹ Brague (1997: 533) does not examine the microcosm idea of this kind in the context of the Ikhwān and al-Fārābī. Nevertheless, he mentions that some Muslim philosophers, for example, Ibn Sīnā and Miskawayh (d. 1030), develop the Neoplatonic idea of the microcosm at the level of the Intellect.

³⁰ Izutsu (1983: 218–219) indicates that Ibn 'Arabī considers man the all-integrating being, *al-kawn al-jāmi'*, at the cosmic level, but does not consider an individual perfect man a microcosm.

³¹ The same idea occurs elsewhere in the *Rasā'il* formulated as: "It is not possible for one man alone to reach all the knowledge, because life is too short and there is too much to do." (*Ras.* I (2): 100) This idea could also be linked with Hippocrates's maxim "ars longa, vita brevis", which has been used by Muslim philosophers especially in the discussion about the positions of the different scientific disciplines and their methods. For example, Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) employs statements of this kind defending the use of the syllogism in the *Faṣl al-Maqāl*.

various philosophical traditions are brought together, with Hermetic, Neoplatonic, Neopythagorean and Iranian mythology being the dominant ones.

The analogy between the microcosm and the macrocosm is present in the *Rasā'il* in so many contexts that it seems to receive even contradictory characteristics. The *Rasā'il* is ambiguous about whether man is the microcosm or should struggle to become one. On the one hand, the parallelism between man and the surrounding reality is represented as a prevailing characteristic of man in the structural corporeal microcosm analogies. On the other hand, potentiality and the expression of an ideal are strongly present in the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in its epistemological interpretations. Also, the question of whether man forms (or might form) a microcosm as an individual or collectively, as a representative of the human species, is twofold in the microcosm-macrocosm speculation of the Ikhwān.

A fundamental idea in the Ikhwān's image of man is the dual nature of the human being; the idea of man as a holistic combination of the material body and the spiritual soul is present in all analogies, even if the concentration is on only one of the aspects. The domination of the soul over the body is widely explained in the analogies. However, the Ikhwān seem to have been especially fascinated with the bodily aspect of man; the analogies examining man as a corporeal being are a distinctive feature in the thought of the Ikhwān. The dichotomy between spiritual and corporeal is extended to the area of epistemology and the role of the sensory knowledge in the human perfection is an issue closely related to the analogy between the microcosm and macrocosm. Though the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is a dominant feature in the cosmology and anthropology of the Ikhwān, one of its foremost features is its attachment to the theory of knowledge. In the epistemological sense, man as the microcosm is approached in the *Rasā'il* both structurally, as a source of knowledge primarily concerning this world, and psychologically, in order to explain the possibility to achieve all knowledge. Knowledge appears in the *Rasā'il* also as a motivation for the idea; man was created in the form of the microcosm in order to make all knowledge available to him.

In the research literature, I have more than once come across the adjective "naïve" in the descriptions of the microcosm idea of the Ikhwān. Then the microcosm-macrocosm analogy is usually understood in its narrowest form, as the explicit comparisons between man and the surrounding reality. Certainly, the detailed comparisons declaring the similarities between the human body and the earth cannot be approached as the most serious philosophical analysis. However, to understand the microcosm-macrocosm analogy only in the form of the explicit comparisons is to make a cruel simplification, unfortunately common for the study of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy. If the analogy were examined in its entirety, including in the examination also the implicit forms of it, the study of the microcosm

idea in Islamic philosophy could probably bring to light some unrecognized features of the Islamic idea of man.

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