Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and the Avicennan Tradition: Metaphysics and Mental Existence

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يا من شموس أنواره أضائت وجوه النفوس الزاكية وعكوس أشعّته أنارت نجوم العقول الهادية، حمدك عن لسان قدرة العقل في الأفق الأقصى-، ولك المجد الّذي لا سبيل إليه للمنتهى وأنت وراء ما لا يتناهي بما لايتناهي. إحتجبتَ بشدّة ظهورك عن أبصار بصائر المفارقات الناظرة، ورتّبتَ بكمال عنايتك الأولى على حسب ازدواج جهتي القهر والمحبّة سلسلتي الأنوار المدّبرة والقاهرة. يا آخذ العقول والنفوس بنواصيها أنّ نفساً جائزة هبطت من ذروة كمالها، فاغتربت في مغارب هاوية الإدراكات الحسّية ورجعت عن صوب تجرّدها؛ فانتكست في مغائب زاوية اللذّات الجسميّة، ثمّ أنتك تائبةً من ذنوب الهيولى؛ فطلبتك وناجتك مسهرة الأعين في حيّ جودك على باب عطائك وتذكّرت، فسارت راجعةً إليك مضرّمةً نار اللهف في مهجة الأسف رانّةً على ضالّتها من الحكمة المتلفة، نزيلةً بجوار فنائك؛ فهل لها إليك من سبيل أو تردّها في انقلاب الناكبين من غير دليل؛ لا بل تبلّغها حقّها بالوصال وتؤدّي إليها قسطها من الكمال. ربّنا وربّ مبادينا أنت مبدأ الوجود ومعاده، فمنك بدأ في بادئ الأمر وإليك يعود في عائده؛ وفضلك ذخر طود الإمكان وعماده؛ فلك منك حمد يكون إزاءً لوافر إفضالك ورافده. وصلواتك على ذوي الزلفة لديك وأولى السفارة من لدنك من الذوات المقدّسة النفوس المطهّرة؛ ملوك بقعة الشرف والعصمة ورؤساء حظيرة العلم والحكمة، نفوس جسد الإمكان وشموس فلك العرفان، مخصّصةً بيت قصيدتهم وصدر جريدتهم، مقوّم الشريعة النقيّة السمحاء، ومتمّم الطريقة القيمة البيضاء، **محمّداً وآله** نجوم سماء العصمة والهداية، وأقمار فلك الإمامة والخلافة، وحماة معالم الدين وهداة سبل العلم واليقين، وسيّما من هو منهم بين أعاظم الأمّة؛ وهم أرومة الفضل وأشرف قبائل النوع كالمعقول بين المحسوس، إمام طبيعة الإمكان وأمير نوع الإنسان، **عليّ بن أبي طالب** بأطائب التسليمات وأزاكيها؛ ربّ بدأت فتمّ؛ يا واهب الحياة ومفيض العقل، خقلت فأهدِ؛ قضيتَ فاعف؛ ملكتَ فأنعم.

لولا الإعتبارات لبطلت الحكمة

Arabic saying attributed to Plato

ABSTRACT

This is a study of the metaphysics of necessary existence in the thought of the thirteenth century Persian polymath Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). It argues that Ṭūsī is part of an important conceptualist turn within the interpretation of Avicenna's metaphysics around the thirteenth century, and that two key principles within his metaphysical scheme provide the essential means by which he defends the tenor of his predecessor's general ontology against its detractors in the aporetic tradition. These principles, each one of which is presented in their historical manifestation, are the (1) the ambiguity of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) and (2) the being of reason (*al-iʿtibār al-ʿaqlī*). The integrity of these concepts as well as the importance they have to the verification (*taḥqīq*) of Avicenna's metaphysics is demonstrated with reference to the single and undoubtedtly most important idea within the Avicennan metaphysic, namely, its conception of a being which is necessary of existence in itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*). Avicenna makes two fundamental claims about the nature of such a being: that it is "sheer oneness" and that it is a being the essence of which is identical to its existence. The former establishes the unicity of the divine essence, while the latter affirms the identity of its essence and existence (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*), both of which are the consequence of it being necessary in itself. Avicenna's detractors in the theological tradition rejected both of these claims by confuting the notion of divine aseity. I consider the cumulative objections raised by three of Avicenna's major critics, namely Ghazālī (d. 1111), Shahrastānī (d. 1153) and Rāzī (d. 1210)—and then demonstrate how each of these principles in Ṭūsī's thought effectively defends the Avicennan conception of the Necessary Existent.

By a gradual discovery of the fecundity of rationate beings since (at least) the time of ʿUmar Khayyām, I argue further that the concept of a being of reason (*al-iʿtibār al-ʿaqlī*) is the single most important development in the mainstream post-Avicennan tradition. The second part of this thesis is therefore devoted to the notion of mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), a realm of being which ontologically grounds the subsistence of rationate being. The final part of this dissertation provides a discussion of Ṭūsī's innovative solution to the problem of correspondence; that is, how does a being of reason correspond to reality if *per definiens* it is a being incapable of mind-independent existence? This requires a foray into the metaphysics of truth and one of the most important philosophical ideas in the whole of post-classical Islam: 'the thing itself' (*nafs al-amr*). I examine the novel contributions which Ṭūsī has made for the inauguration and subsequent development of this concept in the post-Avicennan tradition. The trajectory of this dissertation may be thus be described as journey from 'being Necessary' to 'being mental' to 'being true'.

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ABBREVIATIONS

WORKS OF AVICENNA (IBN SĪNĀ)

Ishārāt	*Al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. Qum, 1373 Sh [1994]
Mabdaʾ	*Al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*. Tehran, 1363 Sh [1984]
Mubāḥathāt	*Al-Mubāḥathāt*. Qom, 1413 [1992]
Najāt	*Al-Najāt min al-gharq fī baḥr al-ḍalālāt*. Tehran, 1387 Sh [2009]
Shifāʾ: Burhān	*Al-Shifāʾ: al-Burhān*. Cairo, 1954
Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt	*Al-Shifāʾ: al-Ilāhiyyāt*. Cairo, 1960
Shifāʾ: Madkhal	*Al-Shifāʾ: al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*. Cairo, 1952
Shifāʾ: Metaphysics	*Metaphysics of the Healing*. Provo, 2009
Shifāʾ: Nafs	*Al-Shifāʾ: al-Nafs*. London, 1959
Taʿlīqāt	*Al-Taʿlīqāt*. Tehran, 2013
ʿUyūn	*ʿUyūn al-ḥikma*. Lemma cited in Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*.

WORKS OF FAKHR AL-DĪN RĀZĪ

Maʿālim	*Maʿālim uṣūl al-dīn*. Cairo, 1970
Mabāḥith	*Al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya fī ʿilm al-ilāhiyyāt wa-l-ṭabīʿiyyāt*. Qom, 1429 [2008]
Masāʾil	*Al-Masāʾil al-khamṣūn fī uṣūl al-dīn*. Cairo, 1989
Maṭālib	*Al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliyya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*. Beirut, 1987
Muḥaṣṣal	*Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-mutaʾakhkhirīn min al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-ḥukamāʾ wa-l-mutakallimīn*. Lemma cited in Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*.
Mulakhkhaṣ	*Al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī l-ḥikma*. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Hunt 329.
Sharḥ al-Ishārāt	*Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. Tehran, 1384 Sh [2005]
Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn	*Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-ḥikma*. Tehran, 1415 [1994]
Tafsīr	*Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*. Beirut, 1978-1983.

WORKS OF NAṢĪR AL-DĪN ṬŪSĪ

Maṣāriʿ	*Maṣāriʿ al-Muṣāriʿ*. Tehran, 2004.
Qawāʿid	*Qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid*. In Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*.
Sharḥ al-Ishārāt	*Al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt li-l-Shaykh Abī ʿAlī Ḥusayn b. ʿAbd Allah Ibn Sīnā maʿa l-sharḥ li-l-Muḥaqqiq Naṣīr al-Din Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ṭūsī wa-sharḥ al-sharḥ li-l-ʿAllāma Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Abī Jaʿfar Rāzī*. Qom, 1373 solar [1994].

Sharḥ al-Masʾala	*Sharḥ Masʾalat al-ʿilm*. Beirut, 1985
Taʿdīl al-Miʿyār	*Taʿdīl al-miʿyār fī naqd Tanzīl al-afkār*. Tehran, 2007.
Tajrīd	*Tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid* [=*Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*]. Alexandria, 1996.
Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal	*Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* [= *Naqd al-Muḥaṣṣal*]. Beirut, 1985.

WORKS OF AL-ʿALLĀMA ḤILLĪ

Asrār	*Al-Asrār al-khafiyya fī l-ʿulūm al-ʿaqliyya*. Qom, 2009.
Iḍāḥ	*Iḍāḥ al-maqāṣid min Ḥikmat ʿayn al-qawāʿid* [=*Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*]. Tehran, 1959.
Jawhar	*Al-Jawhar al-naḍid fī sharḥ manṭiq al-Tajrīd*. Qom, 1984.
Kashf al-Murād	*Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*. Beirut, 2005.
Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid	*Kashf al-ḥaqāʾiq fī sharḥ Qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid*, Beirut, 1993.
Manāhij	*Manāhij al-yaqīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*. Mashhad, 2009.
Nihāya	*Nihāyat al-marām fī ʿilm al-kalām*. Qom, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

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وهذا خبطٌ يقتضي عدم التميّز بين الأمور الإعتباريّة والأمور الخارجيّة؛

Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 104.

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The following study seeks to provide a contextualised foray into the thought of one of the most important philosophers of the mediaeval Islamic world. He is Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (597-672/1201-1274), "Master of Ṭūs" (*Khʷāja-i Ṭūsī*), a renowned philosopher, mathematician, scientist and all-round polymath who is unquestionably one of the towering minds of the thirteenth century, an influential figure whose intellectual feats have reached far beyond the Islamic world, but whose overall contribution to the emerging post-Avicennan philosophical and theological tradition is still, relatively speaking, underappreciated. Primarily known to Western scholarship as the inventor of the "Ṭūsī Couple", a mathematical solution to the problem of the equant in the Ptolemaic astronomy,[1] and somewhat negatively for his political involvement in the Ilkhanid dynasty during the post-Mongol aftermath,[2] Ṭūsī stands at the dawn of not only a completely new phase in the social and political framework of later mediaeval Islamic history, but also the beginning of a new chapter in the intellectual sciences themselves, leading the charge as it were of a new *avant garde* group of personalities from a wide variety of backgrounds and specialisms the like of whom was rarely seen before in the history of Islam. He is not merely an astronomer, but a metaphysician also; not merely an ethicist, but a remarkable theologian also; not merely a logician, but a prodigious mathematician also; not merely a political advisor, but a cultural reformer also; and like others of his generation represents a figure of universal knowledge and learning. In this regard one could easily maintain that his short treatise on the

[1] See Saliba, G. and E. S. Kennedy (1991).

[2] See Michot, Y. (2003).

forty four compartments of knowledge entitled the *Divisions of Wisdom*[3] is in point of fact just a glowing personal résumé of all his accumulated knowledge, for Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī has written something of enduring significance in each and every one of these fields of learning, writings which have then later become a standard point of reference for thinkers subsequent to him in the post-classical period.[4] If one thinker alone could debunk a generational myth among orientalist scholarship of a so-called "decline" in the intellectual sciences in Islam, then he, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, would for sure be that individual. It is not all surprising to see that key personalities of later Islamic history, such as al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, another of the great minds of the post-classical period but of the fourteenth century, referring to him as "the best of verifiers" (*afḍal al-muḥaqqiqīn*),[5] or, as Mīr Dāmād often says, as "the seal of philosophers" (*khatam al-ḥukamā'*).[6] He cannot be likened to a faculty of learning but rather an entire university.

Now, having said this, it suffices to reason that no one study alone—nor even a single individual for that matter—could do justice to the breadth and depth of Ṭūsī's intellectual output. This study will therefore focus on his theory of general metaphysics and in particular his critical engagement with Avicenna and his detractors albeit with a special emphasis on the philosophical devices he utilizes to negotiate a synthetic interpretation of Avicenna's pronouncements on a general theory of being (*wujūd*) and the criticisms levelled thereof by his theological detractors. By examining the trajectory of particular unit-ideas which have special currency within Avicenna's thought and seeing how these were received by later thinkers, we shall seek to demonstrate conclusively that Ṭūsī can no longer be simply referred to as a "defender" of Avicenna's philosophy without due acknowledgement also of the *positive* impact which a *negative* tradition of reading Avicenna has had upon this thought. As we shall explain, Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's philosophy is itself an interpretation of that philosopher's system, representing what is perhaps best described as a synthesis between the general tenor of Avicenna's philosophy and the correctness of some important criticisms levelled against it by key figures of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth century. Like his other writings, therefore, Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt* is just as

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[3] See Stephenson, J. (1923).

[4] See Ṭūsī, *Aqsām al-ḥikma*, pp. 526-528.

[5] See al-Jurjānī's glosses in Mīrak al-Bukhārī, *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*, vol. 1, p. 35^{1-5}.

[6] Mīr Dāmād refers to Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn with a variety of honorific titles, including *inter alia* "the seal of verifiers," (*khātam al-muḥaqqiqīn*), "the outstanding commentator" (*al-bāriʿ al-shāriḥ*), and "the seal of exacting scholars" (*khātam al-muḥaṣṣilīn*); see for example the entry 'Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī' in the index of names in Mīr Dāmād, *Kitāb al-Qabasāt*, p. 491.

equally indebted to other parts of Avicenna's *oeuvre* as it is to the works of other thinkers in the intervening period. It is partly due to this growing convergence between thinkers' ideas that the works of scholars operating within the intellectual sciences become increasingly interdependent the further one goes into later Islamic history, as clearly evidenced by the flourishing of commentary literatures which in the past, for reasons better or worse, has significantly burdened western scholarship. And whilst there can be no denying the fact that any scholar working on the later intellectual traditions is presented with a significant methodological challenge in terms of apprising texts which are layered one upon the other, this point at least still stands: that it would be hardly fair to the breadth and depth of later Islamic thought, not least its dialogical character and *modus operandi*, to isolate figures outside of their interlocking contexts, thereby presenting the thought of what might be an important figure outside of its connected history. Hence in order to really appreciate the significance of a thinker like Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, it is only appropriate methodologically speaking that we assess not only the inner connections between his own ideas but also their connection with those of his predecessors, not however haphazardly and without obvious reason, but rather because they are directly and *discernibly* connected to one another. Such an undertaking undoubtedly places an extra burden on the shoulders of modern scholarship and the personal aptitude of individual scholars; but only in this way can the later Islamic tradition—and perhaps the history of thought generally speaking—be presented in its proper historical unfolding, that is to say, in the connected sense in which ideas, despite their emergence in different times and places, are nonetheless directly impacted by previous thinking and directly impactful on subsequent thinking.

It is in this sense of a connected approach to the history of ideas that we have set out in our study of Ṭūsī's thought. . Of the six chapters which comprise this dissertation, therefore, only two are properly speaking devoted to him. That is because what we wish to do is situate Ṭūsī in the wider historical context of what is now commonly referred to as the post-Avicennan tradition,[7] thereby demonstrating through an analysis of the philosophical themes that energise this period the historical significance of his thought in light of that which preceded him. Our method is thus one which follows the history of ideas, understood as we have described it here, and does so in the hope of convincing the reader of his importance in the history of that idea which we will be investigating.

[7] See Wisnovsky, R. (2005; 2013).

The Problem

The measure of a man's influence is perhaps to be found in the extent to which he is spoken about long after he has gone. By this standard alone Avicenna is undoubtedly one of the most "talked about" philosophers in the history of Islam, who is perhaps rivalled by only one other great Shaykh, namely Muḥyī l-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī. As a complete system, Avicenna's philosophy has left an indelible mark on the history of ideas and continues to be debated even today. It has been surrounded by controversy from the moment he put his ideas onto paper. It has been contested and outlawed at various points in the history of Islam, to an extent even that criticising him became a sure means of livelihood for some mediaeval scholars. Much of what exists in contemporary Western scholarship about Avicenna's historical reception is also negative in that rarely, if ever, do we hear about those personalities who *defended* him, though the situation has only recently started to improve.[8] The historiography of the Avicennan reception, it might be argued, is so heavily tipped on the side of criticism that one may legitimately ask how he ever became such an influential figure for later Muslim personalities. Ghazālī attacked him; Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī attacked him; Sharaf al-Dīn al-Masʿūdī "doubted" him; Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm Shahrastānī attacked him; Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī "injured" him; Averroes also criticised him; Ibn Taymiyya attacked him; and so on.

One of the areas of Avicenna's thought which was especially contested by a torrent of criticisms was his notion of a being which is necessary of existence in itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*). The majority of these criticisms have a common tendency to focus on two key essential aspects which Avicenna claims are necessary for a First principle which is Necessary of Existence, that It must first be being of "sheer oneness" and second a being whose essence is identical to Its existence. Though here separated out these are but in actual fact just one claim seen from two different perspectives. Both are a consequence of the fact that the Necessary Being is "necessary of existence from all Its aspects" (*wājib al-wujūd min jamīʿ al-wujūh*), as we shall explain below. This dissertation provides a philosophical journey through the history of these criticisms from Ghazālī all the way through to Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. If one wanted to, one could say this entire study focusses on a single conclusion of Avicenna's metaphysics and its subsequent reception, namely, the assertion that *there is a being that is necessary of existence in itself, the essence of which is identical to its existence.* If one proposition could summarise the essence of Avicenna's philosophy, this is probably it. Both its parts before and after the comma have been debated at great lengths up until the present. In the

[8] See, for example, Al-Rahim, A. H. (2009).

first part, the question focusses on the nature of necessity (*wujūd*) and whether or not its meaning inflicts multiplicity upon the nature of the Necessary Existent, so that if it were to do so it would undermine Avicenna's claim of divine simplicity. In other words, how could divine aseity imply divine unicity if the property of "being necessary" itself requires positive reference *in divinis*? The second part of the proposition claims that the divine essence is identical to the divine existence. As we shall see, the logic that leads to this conclusion is a significant result of Avicenna's renowned essence-existence distinction, a principle which undergirds much of his thinking on this matter and which he expresses with the formulaic statement "*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*" (His "essence" is His "existence"). For sake of ease we shall refer to this as the Avicennan "identity-thesis", and shall later on explain why it is a key principle of his general metaphysics. Apart from its significance to Avicenna's own thought, however, it is also one of the most historically controversial aspects of his philosophy, and for reasons that we are going to explain, it is rejected by Ghazālī, Shahrastānī and Rāzī.

Ṭūsī accepts the proposition *prima facie*; that is, he accepts that yes there is a being which is necessary of existence in itself, and yes it is one the essence of which is its existence. However, in order to defend it he takes what I shall call an "intensionalist approach" to Avicenna's metaphysics, and I claim this is the most significant development in mainstream Avicennism and—more generally speaking—philosophy in Islam in the post-classical period.[9] An intensionalist approach is one that claims that certain distinctions only apply *in intensio*, and are not corresponded in things themselves *in extensio*. In other words, if something can be distinguished outside the mind (*fī l-khārij*), then it must be distinguishable in the mind (*fī l-dhihn*) also; but the reverse of this proposition is not necessarily true: not everything that can be distinguished in the mind need necessarily be distinguished outside of the mind as well. From this most basic presumption,

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[9] The word 'intension' is my translation of the Arabic word '*mafhūm*'. In theoretical contexts this word simply means 'whatever is understood by a particular term', *mafhūm al-shay'*, and is ordinarily juxtaposed with the term '*miṣdāq*', the thing itself to which this meaning (*mafhūm*) points, i.e. its referent. In normal usage the word '*mafhūm*', therefore, just refers to a thing's 'meaning'. However, both terms, *mafhūm* and *miṣdāq*, can be used adverbially, as in *mafhūman* and *miṣdāqan*, in which case what is being emphasized is the particular sense in which something is being spoken of. In nearly all cases the difference between them is always the same as the difference between the English terms 'intension' and 'extension', therefore connoting the distinctions that occur at the level of the concept itself (*mafhūman*) or at the level of its referent (*miṣdāqan*). So, for example, the term 'human being' is a universal *mafhūman*, i.e. one can predicate the meaning of this term to more than one individual. But the human being itself *miṣdāqan*, i.e. the real individual, is a particular. By referring to the 'intensionalist turn' in the interpretation of Avicenna's metaphysics, therefore, I am referring to post-Avicennan understanding that distinction between the essence (*māhiyya*) of a thing and its existence (*wujūd*) is intensional (i.e. *mafhūman*), not extensional (i.e. *miṣdāqan*); in other words, essence and existence are two different *meanings* in the mind not two different *things* outside the mind.

the "adherents" of Avicenna's philosophy invented one of the most important philosophical devices in the history of ideas: the *al-iʿtibār al-ʿaqlī*. This is a notoriously difficult term to translate, and can be interpreted in different ways depending on whether one approaches it from its psychological or ontological underpinnings. Seen from the point of psychology, it is a "mental construct" and an idea fashioned in the mind which is not abstracted from extramental reality. Its true significance, however, needs to be emphasised from the perspective of ontology; namely that it is a pure 'rationate being' (*ens rationis*), a 'being of reason.'[10]

In this dissertation an attempt shall thus be made to explain the ideogenesis of the concept of *iʿtibār*, of the Islamic philosophers' notion of a being of reason, and does so by adopting a methodological strategy that considers the dialectical history of the debates between two different streams of the post-Avicennan tradition: the *theological* Avicennan tradition and the *philosophical* Avicennan tradition.[11] The former group consists mainly of disputants trying to pick holes in the Avicennan system for the seeming ulterior purpose of defending this or that theological tradition; the latter of individuals who, perhaps unconcerned about any underlying theological dogmas, see great merit in Avicenna's philosophy for what it is but who are nonetheless not insensitive of the backlash from the theological tradition. For the philosophical tradition, the process of "verification" (*taḥqīq*) is not defending Avicenna for Avicenna's sake, but rather "getting to the truth" (*taḥqīq*) of the matter even if that means modifying or improving on or rejecting what Avicenna says. The intensionalist approach to Avicenna's philosophy is a perfect example of a philosophical product that emerged onto the scene after a long dialectical engagement between vying factions surrounding Avicenna's philosophy. However, since every being of reason (*iʿtibār ʿaqlī*) is predicated on a mode of being that is "being in the mind", it is hardly surprising that the question of "mental existence" (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*) is one the novelest and at the same time most controversial topics of post-classical

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[10] Throughout this dissertation I have used the translation 'being of reason' to render a particular sense in which the term *iʿtibār* and *iʿtibār ʿaqlī* are used by thinkers such as ʿUmar Khayyām and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. I borrow this label from the Latin Scholastic tradition and in particular from the Catholic theologian Francisco Suárez (d. 1617), whose primary work *On Beings of Reason* (De entibus rationis) provides a robust defense of purely mind-dependent objects of knowledge. It should be added that there is a remarkable affinity between Ṭūsī's explanation of their ontology and Suárez's explication of the metaphysics of beings of reason, one that could make for a fruitful comparative study of the Arabic and Latin reception of this aspect of Avicenna's philosophy in the future.

[11] This is a crude distinction because it creates the false impression that all theologians in Islam are essentially opposed to philosophy, which is of course completely false. The justification for using it however has to do with the *institutional* observation that the majority of Avicenna's early disputants in the Islamic East are trained theologians coming out of the *madrasa* system, whereas the majority of his early defenders are members of the intellectual community who are unaffiliated to the *madrasa* network, and more often than not professionally trained physicians

Islamic philosophy. This dissertation will also shed important new light on the formation of this mode's rise to importance in the post-Avicennan period.

Structure of Study

This dissertation is divided into two parts and six chapters. Part one of this study (entitled "Metaphysics") explores the history of objections to Avicenna's notion of necessary existence. Chapter 1 lays the foundations by introducing the criticisms made by Ghazālī in his *Tahāfut* (Discussions IV-IX). I argue that whatever the purpose Ghazālī had in mind when he wrote the *Tahāfut*, he had enough sagacity to be able to identify that the key principle underpinning the whole Avicennan metaphysic is the notion of "being necessary" or necessity (*wujūb*) for short. As Ghazālī realised, the necessitarianism of Avicenna's philosophy is precisely what makes it untenable as a viable "Islamic" philosophy, since it implies *inter alia* that the First principle cannot be "involved" in the world. He cannot know it (problem of God's knowledge of particulars), He cannot (directly) create it (problem of emanation), and even if He emanates it He cannot choose to do that (problem of God's freedom), and He cannot (directly) interact with it (problem of miracles). Ghazālī is the first thinker, therefore, to single out "necessity" as a problematic notion in Avicenna's modal ontology, and not surprisingly—perhaps—rejects the concept out of hand in the *Tahāfut*.

Chapter 2 turns to Avicenna's next major critic: Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm Shahrastānī. He is a much more direct critic of Avicenna's metaphysics than Ghazālī was and shows little reserve in pinpointing what he thinks are obvious "contradictions" (*tanāquḍ*) in Avicenna's thought. The most pernicious of these claims have to do with Avicenna's characterisation of the primary notions 'existence' (*wujūd*) and 'necessity' (*wujūb*). According to Shahrastānī, Avicenna runs into a number of contradictions by characterising 'existence' as an analogous term (*ism mushakkik*), and as a result cannot avoid a metaphysics in which a First principle bound by the essential property of "being necessary" is not thereby inflicted by composition. Shahrastānī's aim is therefore twofold: (*a*) to show that 'existence' cannot be an analogous term; and (*b*) to show that the property of 'necessity' entails a necessary distinction *in extensio*. Both contentions lead to the conclusion that the Necessary Being cannot be "sheer oneness" as Avicenna claims. Likewise, in Chapter 3, I show how similar arguments are made by Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī—who is arguably the most important of Avicenna's theological disputants. Unlike his predecessors, Rāzī is a systematic critic of Avicenna's thought, whose objections to Avicenna are masqueraded in the form of so-called "commentaries". The majority of Rāzī's successors were less than impressed with his treatment of

Avicenna's philosophy, however, and even within the Sunni tradition itself scholars such as Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī and al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī and others besides would point out the uncritical verification of Avicenna's ideas in the writings of Rāzī. Rāzī is completely oblivious to Avicenna's doctrine of analogy (*tashkīk*), and himself a strong advocate of the view that existence (*wujūd*) is superadded (*zāʿid*) to the essence (*māhiyya*) of God—a view which is vehemently rejected in all of the major manuals of Sunni *kalām* in the post-Avicennan period. Concomitantly, Rāzī holds that every being (*mawjūd*) regardless of whether it is Necessary or possible has a real distinction (*in extensio*) of essence and existence. And as a result, Avicenna's identity-thesis (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*) must be false.

Chapter 4 introduces Ṭūsī to the discussion. Naṣīr al-Dīn authored two direct refutations of Rāzī's works: the *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* and his super-commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*. He also wrote the *Maṣāriʿ al-Muṣāriʿ*, a point by point refutation of Shahrastānī's *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa*. Since both Rāzī and Shahrastānī pick up the mantle left behind by Ghazālī, Ṭūsī's refutations of them are also rebuttals of their original archetype—namely, Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*. The importance of Ṭūsī is thus to be noted in the fact that he stands at the end of a long aporetic tradition whose members had together cumulatively conspired to create a battery of objections to Avicenna's general metaphysics. I show how, by the (re)introduction of two key principles, Ṭūsī sweeps aside all of these objections and thus overturns—in the areas in which are focussing in this study—an entire aporetic movement. He thus resuscitates the vitality of Avicenna's general metaphysics albeit in a questionably non-Avicennan manner. The first key principle is one that is resolutely Avicennan and that is the doctrine of the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). He shows why all of his theological predecessors in the aporetic tradition either misunderstood or deliberately ignored this crucial aspect of Avicenna's philosophy. By failing to observe correctly Avicenna's teaching on the distinction between absolute and individual existence, each of Avicenna's theological disputants misinterpreted the import of his identity-thesis and therefore objected to something which was never Avicennan in the first place. The second key observation is that of "a failure to distinguish between beings of reason and true objects of extramental existence" (cited at the top of this Introduction). In this respect Ṭūsī takes a much more liberal attitude toward Avicenna's philosophy, and introduces concepts which are suspiciously non-Avicennan. But Ṭūsī never set out in life with the aim and purpose of defending Avicenna *per se*, but rather with the aim and purpose of defending the truth. As he demonstrates in his writings on astronomy and mathematics, he is part of the ancient Hellenic tradition, yet still nonetheless concerned with getting at the truth of matters more than simply blindly following what his predecessors have said. He thus admires past figures like Ptolemy and Euclid but is not afraid to write revisions on their theories to

improve them and get closer to the truth (*taḥqīq*). The same applies for Avicenna; if there are mistakes—i.e. things which are not as close to the truth as they could be—that doesn't mean you attack your predecessor; but rather that you improve to the best of your ability what he left behind, since much of what he says is good and sound. Only when something has no possibility whatsoever of being salvaged should it be disregarded entirely. "Verification" (*taḥqīq*) for Ṭūsī is not proving Avicenna right but proving the truth to be correct. And being part of that ancient Hellenic tradition he recognises that that is how human societies work; each one passing on its achievements to future generations who then either improve it further or replace it with something better. Ṭūsī's notion of *taḥqīq* is thus one of constant verisimilitude.

Part Two of this dissertation focusses on mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*). If beings of reason are a *conditio sine qua non* for metaphysical science, then it goes without saying that mental existence must be true mode of being. In Chapter 5, I provide a detailed breakdown of all of Rāzī's arguments for the rejection of this mode of existence and show how without it he ends up in a full endorsement of the Platonic theory of Forms. By contrast, in Chapter 6, I demonstrate why Ṭūsī's philosophy is much the superior given his perspicacious understanding of why a truly critical philosophy must engage with the act of knowing itself and its underlying metaphysical framework. I end the dissertation with a discussion of Ṭūsī's novel proof of the necessity of a transcendental Intellect through his consideration of the ontological conditions that guarantee the truth of necessary propositions. It is here that we shall introduce one of the most intriguing aspects of post-classical Islamic philosophy, a truthmaker theory, known as *nafs al-amr* or "the thing itself". By following the history of the specific topics chosen for this study, I argue that the post-Avicennan philosophical tradition, from 1250 through to the early modern period, is a "Ṭūsīan synthesis".

PART I

METAPHYSICS

CHAPTER 1

GHAZĀLĪ'S ATTACK ON THE METAPHYSICS OF NECESSARY EXISTENCE

Introduction

When Avicenna set out proving the existence of a being necessary of existence in itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*) he did so knowing full well that if such a being existed it would have to be more than just an existent (*mawjūd*), but a being which is also simple (*basīt*), uncaused, pre-eternal (*qadīm*), unchanging and immaterial (i.e. an intellect, *'aql*). Each of these characteristics would also then in turn lead to further consequences, and cumulatively they would combine to circumscribe the nature of the being whose existence Avicenna has proven if his argument is successful—each further entailment doing its bit in the process to determine the essential properties belonging to the being which is necessary of existence in itself. The force of such a method for proving the existence and essential properties of a Necessary Being is that it is founded on a single principle, *viz.* the property of '*being*-Necessary' (*wājib al-wujūd*), one which Avicenna himself calls the primary attribute of the Necessary Existent.[1] As Adamson shows, Avicenna's proof of the Necessary Existent is not therefore merely a proof of Its *existence* but also one of its essential properties (*al-ṣifāt al-ḥaqīqiyya*), of a being characterized by the attributes of oneness and eternality and immateriality, and so forth.[2] Hence there is no being which is 'necessary of existence in itself' which could fail to be described in these terms. And so it is that in this newly discovered method that Avicenna proffers a robust metaphysical proof for establishing the traditional idea of a monotheistic deity, God, which does not rely on either Aristotle's arguments from motion or the *mutakallim*'s argument from temporal beginning (*ḥudūth*); Avicenna's proof of a Necessary Being is a strictly *metaphysical* proof.[3]

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[1] See Adamson, P. (2013).

[2] Ibid., pp. 176–188.

[3] On Avicenna's proof for the existence of a Necessary Being, see Davidson, H. (1987); Marmura, M. (1980); Mayer, T. (2001).

Avicenna's theology is thus quintessentially founded on the concept of *necessity* (*al-wujūb*): any properties which are established for the First are done so by virtue of It being that thing (*viz.* the Necessary of Existence), where throughout the argument the operative principle is *being*-Necessary. Although from Avicenna's perspective this provides an aesthetically refined philosophy built up from a single metaphysical notion, theologically—as the historical reception of his thought amply betrays—it was met with passionately vehement opposition from all directions by the *mutakallimūn*, the self-styled defenders of the "orthodox" dogma and creedal tenets of Islam. Avicenna's inspiration came from philosophic reason; theirs from the revealed Word of God, the Qur'an, albeit that even their *kalām* was intermingled with a curious natural philosophy espousing an atomist physics which was no doubt inherited from the Syriac-Christian reception of Greek philosophers adhering to the school of Democritus, whose thought had still been circulating around the time of Islam's formation in the Near East. While early Muslim *kalām* developed in the lap of an austere atomism, therefore, Avicenna's philosophy did away with that vision of what constituted the nature of things entirely. He instead opted for the Neoplatonized Aristotelianism of the *falāsifa* whose system of thought championed not just a particular cosmology involving immaterial intellects, but also a theory of nature—*viz.* hylemorphism, the theory of matter and form—which was also just as equally foreign to the *kalām*.

Avicenna's theology and philosophy of nature (which includes his noetic theory and doctrine of the soul) were thus for the most part complete anathema to the *mutakallimūn*, there being little surprise that sooner or later condemnations and criticisms of Avicenna's thought would quickly become their preoccupation. As circumstances would have it the opportunity to do just this was made even more propitious by socio-political factors. Avicenna died a couple of years before Tughril Beg had united the Turks into a confederacy of tribes and conquered Persia to establish the Seljuqid dynasty; and within a further twenty years the Seljuqs under Tughril Beg would capture the cultural capital that was Baghdad from the Buyids in 1055. Through a series of institutional reforms designed by the Seljuqid vizier Nizām al-Mulk, the Seljuqs, with Alp Arslan now at their head, combined political opposition against the Fatimids in Cairo and the Nizārī Ismaʿilis in the mountain fortresses of Alamut with a toughening of religious fervour for Sunni Islam in the Central Islamic Lands. In 1065 and with much spirited zeal, the first Niẓāmiyya college (*madrasa*) was founded at Baghdad—a religious institution that would serve the imperial policy of the Seljuqid state and its ambition for political and ideological hegemony across the Muslim world. From here and other such similar colleges elsewhere across Persia and Central Asia, a regular supply of trained Sunni *ʿulamā* was regularly being churned out by the Seljuqid administration at every major centre of the

Islamic world to defend the ideological borders of "orthodox" Islam just as Turkic warriors were defending the now firmly established political body of the Seljuq empire at its frontiers.[4]

It was under these socio-political and cultural conditions that Avicenna's thought entered the fray and began attracting the attention of religious scholars (*'ulamā*), and like other contemporary "heretical" movements it too would have to endure the brunt of Ash'arite and non-Ash'arite scholars' criticisms. Even though it was aimed at defending correct religious opinion the initial reaction to Avicenna's philosophy was in part politically induced and thus imbibed in the wider circumstances of Seljuqid policy and reform. Al-Juwaynī was the first religious scholar to engage critically with the *falāsifa* as far as we know in any professional capacity at the Niẓāmiyya college at Baghdad, but his engagement with Avicenna's thought barely touched the surface thus limiting it effectiveness. However, as everyone knows, everything changed with his successor Ghazālī.[5] His chief contribution to the ideological endeavour which the Seljuqid administration promoted is the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, an essay in which Ghazālī criticises and condemns in his capacity as a religious scholar and jurist twenty different beliefs of the *falāsifa*, three of which are tantamount to excommunication (*kufr*) from Islam and therefore eternal damnation.[6]

Now, even though the *Tahāfut* plays a crucial role in the dialectical history between post-Avicennan philosophy and *kalām*, it is not a systematic critique of philosophy. Its aim as Ghazālī himself explains is much narrower in purpose. It is certainly not an attempt to reconstruct philosophically the theological creed of Islam, but neither is it a rejection of philosophy and its methodology *per se*.[7] Rather, the explicit aim of the *Tahāfut* is to lessen the confidence with which the *falāsifa* claim their doctrines to be demonstrative (*burhānī*) and indubitable (*yaqīnī*) by showing in each of the twenty discussions that either the premises of an argument are unfounded or that the conclusion of an argument does not follow from its premises.

This chapter focusses on Ghazālī's critique of the metaphysics of necessary existence and his criticisms of the Farābian and Avicennan conception of the Necessary Being, the essence of such a being, Its existence and primary attributes. These topics are treated in seven individual chapters of the *Tahāfut* (Discussions IV-X) as follows:

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[4] Makdisi, G. (1961).

[5] On Ghazālī's biography, see now the excellent study by Griffel, F. (2009).

[6] On Ghazālī's legal judgement (*fatwa*), see Griffel, F. (2000).

[7] See Janssens, J. (2001).

Discussion IV:	On showing their inability to prove the existence of the Maker of the World
Discussion V:	On showing their inability to prove that God is one
Discussion VI:	On the Divine Attributes
Discussion VII:	On refuting their statement that the First cannot share with another in terms of genus
Discussion VIII:	On refuting their statement that the existence of the First is simple
Discussion IX:	On showing their inability to sustain a proof that the First is not a body

Under each of these headings Ghazālī produces a range of objections which are designed to provoke the so-called demonstrative nature of the positions which he asserts are adhered to by the *falāsifa* and in a manner that attacks them at the level of principle. Our aim here is identifying what these principles are and why they are objectionable according to Ghazālī so that in later chapters we can show that not only did these objections have a continued resonance in the thought of later scholars, but also in order to appreciate the reactions of the philosophical community against the criticisms of the theological tirade against Avicenna's conception of a Necessary Being. It is only after the diachronic nature of these debates is followed from their origin in Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* and their ongoing development in later scholars' thought up until Ṭūsī's lifetime that the importance and scale of his defence of Avicenna's general metaphysics can be fully appreciated.

On Avicenna's inability to prove the existence of a Maker (*Tahāfut*, Discussion IV)

As stated in its title, the aim of the Fourth Discussion is "to show that the philosophers are unable to prove the existence of a Maker of the world".[8] The reason, Ghazālī explains, is that philosophers like Aristotle, al-Fārābī and Avicenna believe the world to be pre-eternal (*qadīm*), of having been an existent for infinite past time, and therefore without a beginning or "first" (*lā awwal lahu*) for its duration. Yet, from an early period in the history of *kalām* it had become standard procedure to categorize existent things as either existents that did not begin to exist (*ghayr muḥdath*) and therefore pre-eternal (*qadīm*) or existents that began to

[8] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 78.

exist (*muḥdath*)—this being in the *mutakallim*'s ontological scheme an exhaustive division (*taqsīm ḥāṣir*) of the category of existent things.[9] That which is pre-eternal is juxtaposed with the originated in the form of a logical opposition: nothing which is pre-eternal could have begun to exist nor could anything that began to exist be considered as pre-eternal. And from the perspective of traditional *kalām* only God is pre-eternal and therefore the only being which does not have a beginning for its existence. By contrast, everything that is "other than God" (*kull mā siwā Llāh*)—which in the parlance of *kalām* is 'the world' (*al-ʿālam*)—must have begun to exist. Hence, for the traditional *mutakallim*, the criterion that distinguishes created things from un-created things and sets creation apart from the Creator (*al-ṣāniʿ*) is whether or not something *began to exist*.

Given a range of arguments to show that the world began to exist and as such must have been originated due to a cause, the *mutakallim* formulates a proof of God's existence (nowadays referred to as the Kalām Cosmological Argument) along the following lines:[10]

	Everything that began to exist requires a cause for its origination.
	The world began to exist[11]
Therefore:	The world has a cause for its origination

This argument only works if the middle term is assented to. The reason why the world is in need of a cause is because the world *began to exist*, which is also the reason why the Creator of the world cannot have a cause since It, by definition, did *not* begin to exist and is therefore pre-eternal. An existent thing's need for a cause therefore depends in the *mutakallim*'s estimation on whether or not something began to exist, and only in that case where a being has no beginning is the need for a cause eliminated. Yet since the chain of causes cannot regress *ad infinitum*, the series of temporally originated things must terminate in a First cause, a being whose own existence did not have a beginning and is therefore pre-eternal (*qadīm*), and that is God. In short, the *kalām* argument for God's existence proceeds on the proviso that anything which *began to exist* must be caused and that anything which had not *begun to exist* must be uncaused.[12]

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[9] For *kalām* proofs of the existence of God, see Wolfson, H. (1974); Davidson, H. (1987).

[10] For the specifics of this proof, see Davidson, H. (1987: 117–212).

[11] The minor premise of the argument also requires demonstrating. For the full argument and discussion, see de Beaurecueil Laugier, S. and Anawati, G (1959).

[12] ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Ṭūsī in his adjudicative-commentary on the *Tahāfut* argues that this proof is so obvious that "it is known even to brute animals" (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, p. 165).

To say that a single thing is both pre-eternal (*qadīm*) and caused (*maʿlūl*) is therefore deemed to be a contradiction according to the scholars of early *kalām* since, by definition, the pre-eternal has no beginning to its existence, and therefore absolutely no need for a cause. As it happens this is precisely the contradiction which Ghazālī claims the *falāsifa* have fallen into in the Fourth Discussion of his *Tahāfut*. Now since, according to the *mutakallim*, the need for a cause can only be established for things that began to exist, the *falāsifa*'s claim that the world lacks a beginning eliminates the world's need for a principle, and for this reason the *falāsifa* are unable prove the existence of a Maker given that whatever is pre-eternal has no beginning, and whatever has no beginning has no need for a cause. What is crucial to note however is that whereas for Ghazālī the need (*ḥāja*) for a Maker depends on the world having a beginning, for Avicenna this needn't be the case. In other words, an argument to establish whether or not something has the need for a principle does not depend on the middle term that it must have *begun to exist*.

For a start, Avicenna distinguishes two different senses for each of the terms 'origination' and 'pre-eternal' by pointing out that something can be originated (*muḥdath*) either "with respect to time" (*bi-ḥasab al-zamān*) or "with respect to essence" (*bi-ḥasab al-dhāt*):

'Eternal' is said of a thing either [(1a)] with respect to *essence* or [(1b)] with respect to *time*. The eternal with respect to essence is that thing which in itself does not have a principle by which it is an existent, whereas the eternal with respect to time is whatever does not have a first for its temporal duration. The originated also is of two types: [(2a)] the first is that which in itself has a principle by which it is an existent; and [(2b)] the other is whatever has a beginning for its temporal duration, having become an existent after not having been [such that] there would have been a previous time during which it was a non-existent and which has now ceased to exist. The meaning of all of this is that there had been a time in which it was a non-existent.[13]

Avicenna thus deems it possible for something to be simultaneously *pre-eternal* with respect to time and *originated* with respect to essence, meaning that it can therefore be both originated *and* pre-eternal from different perspectives but nevertheless still in need of a principle given that it is originated from at least one perspective. Avicenna calls this 'essential creation' (*al-ḥudūth al-dhātī*), and the world he says is "created" in this way, i.e. essentially not temporally. Despite not having a temporal beginning (i.e. it is pre-eternal), therefore, Avicenna still characterizes the world as something "originated" *qua* essence (*dhāt*), and this he thinks is sufficient reason to establish its need for a principle (*mabdaʾ*).

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[13] Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 532–533.

It is crucial to note that this idea is linked to a broader and more fundamental aspect of Avicenna's metaphysical theory, one which states that a thing which is caused essentially must be something for which "the concept of existence is not included in its essence".[14] Avicenna's metaphysics of causation is a direct result of his distinction between the essence—strictly speaking, quiddity—of a thing and its existence, its *māhiyya* and its *wujūd*.[15] So anything which is 'essentially caused' must have therefore had existence *occur to* its essence, and this Avicenna reckons is a type of "creation" albeit one that is not preceded by non-existence (*ghayr masbūqin bi-l-ʿadam*). Now since what is created essentially is not preceded by nonexistence, i.e. it is not created *ex nihilo*, it cannot be characterized as having a temporal beginning or first moment (*awwal*), for it follows that only those things which are created *qua* time have their existences preceded by nonexistence, implying that only those existences which are preceded by non-being had a beginning—a point in time at which they *began to exist*.

Avicenna distinguishes between each of these forms of creation with the terms *ibdāʿ* and *ṣunʿ*. Things which are created *essentially* are originated by God through *ibdāʿ* whereas things which are created *temporally* are originated through *ṣunʿ*. Depending on which sense of origination (*ḥudūth*) one is referring to, then, a thing will either be created (*maṣnūʿ*) at a particular point in time, having had non-existence precede it; or it will be created (*mubdaʿ*) without having been preceded by non-existence, and would hence be pre-eternal. In all this it is plain to see that the underlying metaphysical principles which are at work in Avicenna's theory of causation is his distinction between essence and existence, as well as the consequent notion that if something does not have the *necessity of existence* included in the concept of its essence that it will be something caused *qua* essence.

For example, in the *Logic* of the *Ishārāt* (I.10) Avicenna states:

> Know that whatever thing has a quiddity (*māhiyya*) is only ever realized as an existent in things or as something conceptualized in minds by its parts being present with it; and that if it has a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) apart from being existent in one of these two modes of existence and is not constituted by it, then existence will be a *meaning* relating to its reality as a separable or non-separable accident.[16]

Likewise in the *Metaphysics* (IV.20) of the *Ishārāt* he writes: "Anything for which the [concept of] existence does not enter into the comprehension of itself (*fī mafhūmi dhātihi*) in accordance with what we have

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[14] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.20, p. 108^{17-18}.

[15] On Avicenna's essence-existence distinction, see Bertolacci, A. (2012); Belo, C. (2009); Eichner, H. (2012); Rahman, F. (1958; 1981).

[16] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* I.10, p. 5^{3-6}.

considered previously [i.e. *Ishārāt* I.10], then the existence [of that thing] will be a non-essential constituent of its quiddity [i.e. an accident] and cannot possibly be something which is a concomitant of itself (*lāziman li-dhātihi*), as previously explained. Hence the only possibility which remains is that [its existence] is [acquired] from something other than itself".[17]

Avicenna therefore thinks that whenever the existence of a thing is not identical to its quiddity (or an essential part of that quiddity) that it will not only then have an essence which is distinguishable from its existence, but an existence also that is *caused* by something else conferring existence upon it. According to the metaphysics of causation which Avicenna sets out, therefore, the need a thing has for a cause can only be identified by considering the kind of relation the essence (quiddity) of a thing has with its *extramental* existence. If something has the notion of 'being an existent' (*mawjūd*) included in the idea of 'what it is' (*māhiyya*) then it cannot be caused by an efficient cause and must be the Necessary Existent. On the contrary, if something does not have the idea of 'being an existent' *necessarily* implied in the comprehension of its 'whatness', as, for instance, in the case of the comprehension of a triangle for which it is possible to know 'what it is' but not 'whether it is',[18] then assuming the non-existence of a triangle does not lead to any contradiction. Yet given that something characterized in this way now exists (for example, this man), then its existence—since it is not identical to, nor an essential part of, its essence—must have been conferred upon it; moreover, since whatever has existence conferred upon it is not *in itself* the sufficient principle of its own existence, it must be something caused. Therefore, just because something has existed for all past time does not necessarily mean it is uncaused; infinite past duration not being a sufficient reason to deny, according to Avicenna, the need a thing has for a cause. So given that the length of duration or time something has existed cannot determine whether it has been caused or not, even pre-eternal things can possibly have a cause.[19] And that according to the consensus of the *mutakallimūn* is a contradiction.

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[17] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.20, p. 108^{17-18}.

[18] Cf. Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.6, p. 105^{14-16}.

[19] Of course in Avicenna's thought the only beings that have this dual characterization ("originated with respect to essence" and "eternal with respect to time") are all those beings typical of the Neo-Platonic system that exist above the terrestrial plane: the transcendental Intellects, the Souls of each of the heavenly spheres, the planets and their celestial orbs. For the *mutakallimūn*, Avicenna did what no "religious" person would think of doing: blurring the distinction between what is eternal and what is temporally-originated; between God, the Creator, and the world, His creation.

To clarify, Avicenna identifies the need for a principle by considering how a thing's essence is related to its existence, meaning extramental existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*). As we shall see, the *relational* character of this distinction is crucial to Ṭūsī's understanding of Avicenna's metaphysics and one of the most important developments in the mainstream Avicennan tradition. Since all relations (*iḍāfāt*) according to Ṭūsī are mental constructs or 'beings of reason' (sing. *iʿtibār ʿaqlī*), the relation *per se* between essence and existence must therefore be something intellectual (*ʿaqlī*), that is, of a conceptual nature occurring in the mind. This implies (as discussed later) that the *distinction* between essence and existence is a mental distinction and not a real one. No essence, therefore, is related to existence in things themselves (*fī l-aʿyān*) outside of the mind or reason (*fī l-khārij*). The full consideration of this topic must however be postponed for later. For now, the existence of the relation *per se* is none of our concern.

Now, when Avicenna says that a thing's existence may be related to (*muḍāfun ilā*) its essence, he has in mind not one, not two, but three conceptual notions: the notion of the essence (*mafhūm al-shayʾ*, *māhiyya*), the notion of existence (*mafhūm al-wujūd*), and the notion of the relation *per se* of existence to the essence (*mafhūm al-nisba*). It is the latter of these notions, *viz.* the relation, that gives rise to the modal concepts known as possibility, impossibility, and necessity in Avicenna's metaphysics.

Avicenna thus characterizes 'the possible' as anything for which neither existence nor nonexistence are included in its essence, and hence there would be no contradiction if it were presumed as either existent or non-existent. In other words, the contingent being is one for which "existence and non-existence have an equal *relation* to its essence" (*al-wujūd wa-l-ʿadam mutasāwiyyu l-nisba ilā l-māhiyya*), and the equality of this relation is what makes 'the possible' being something 'non-preponderant' (*ghayr murajjiḥ*) without a preponderating cause. On the contrary, 'the necessary of existence in itself' (*wājib al-wujūd*) is that being for which existence is its essence (*māhiyyatahu inniyatahu*) so much so that a contradiction would arise if it were considered as 'not being an existent' (*ghayr mawjūd*).

Crucially, this does not mean that such a being should *necessarily* exist, but rather that its existence would be necessary *if it exists*. Otherwise it would have been sufficient to think of the concept of 'the Necessary' to know that It exists, which is not what Avicenna is saying. Rather a proof must still be given to determine whether the existence of such a being is really true, whether the concept of it in our minds has a real instance of it outside, which is why Avicenna bothers to formulate such an argument. Had the argument been straightforwardly "ontological" in the modern sense then he would not have taken the trouble to proffer such a proof. However, once that proof is made and the existence of the Necessary

Existent is affirmed, it will then become clear that Its existence must be *necessary* and that it can never have not been an existent.

Finally, 'the impossible' is that thing which, whenever the mind thinks of its quiddity and then relates the notion of existence to it, judges it to be impossible of actual existence, that is, extramental existence. For example, the essence of a "square triangle" is any shape that has the figure of a square and a triangle combined at the same time. This, one might say, is the "essence" and "whatness" of a square triangle which now exists in our minds (i.e. it has mental existence). However, no sooner do our minds *relate* the notion of extramental existence to it than it shall immediately judge this concept to be 'impossible of existence' in extramental existence. Each of the modal categories are characterized in this way. They are concepts resembling judgments about the relation that existence has with a particular essence conceived in our minds.

When Avicenna says that all things are caused which do not have the notion of existence included in the notion of their essence, therefore, he is making a *judgment* about the relation which the notion of thing's *extramental* existence has to the comprehension (*mafhūm*) of "what" that thing is in our minds. This *intellectual* process is what judges and decides whether or not existence is *logically* necessary for a particular subject, which in in its turn directly invokes the concept of modality as the outcome of this judgment.[20]

The metaphysician thus conjures up the notion of a thing's need for a cause in the intellectual act of judging in which that thing is judged as having an equal relation to existence and non-existence, as being something with only the possibility of existence, and these are called possible beings (*al-mumkināt*). The criterion that decides if a thing requires a cause or not therefore is its 'intrinsic possibility' (*al-imkān al-khāṣṣ*, also known as *al-imkān al-dhātī*), which is the possibility of existence in the very comprehension of itself (*mafhūm al-dhāt*).[21] Accordingly, even if for the sake of argument something is pre-eternal, then so long as the idea of its individual existence is not included in the concept of what it is (*māhiyya*), then its existence is judged to be merely possible of existence, and therefore in need of a cause to instantiate it. A pre-eternal world is not relieved of the need for a cause, therefore, simply because it has existed for all past time. By contrast, Avicenna criticised arguments based on other methods for establishing whether or not a

[20] On Avicenna's conception of the modalities, see Bäck, A. (1992).

[21] Avicenna distinguishes two forms of possibility (*imkān*): 'general possibility' (*al-imkān al-ʿāmm*) and 'intrinsic (or individual or specific) possibility' (*al-imkān al-kḥāṣṣ*, *al-imkān al-dhātī*). On the need for a cause being specific possibility and not temporal origination, see Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 522–524.

thing has the need for a cause, whether that criterion is motion as in the case of Aristotle (*Met*. XII.6–10), or temporal-origination as in the case of *kalām*, by pointing out that even though they contained some degree of credence they were nonetheless arguments for the existence of a First principle which proceeded by considering some factor besides existence itself. Opposed to these is Avicenna's "demonstration"[22] for a First cause which is based solely on the essence-existence distinction and therefore exclusively on the consideration of being *qua* being. Avicenna's argument thus reaches the desired conclusion that there must be a Necessary Existent by highlighting only the "metaphysical" factors why the world has the need for a principle (*mabda'*). As he states in the *Ishārāt*:

> Reflect how our proof for establishing the First and Its unity and transcendence from defects does not require the reflection of anything other than being itself (*nafs al-wujūd*); not the consideration of Its creation nor of Its act. And while these [other arguments] may be indicative of Its existence, nevertheless, this procedure [of ours] is more reliable and noble. That is, if we consider the state of being (*ḥāl al-wujūd*) then being—inasmuch as it is being—will testify to [the existence of the First principle] and everything else incumbent on It—*qua* being—afterwards.[23]

Commenting on this passage, Ṭūsī explains that:

> The *mutakallimūn* adduce proofs for the existence of the Creator from the origination of bodies and accidents and by reflecting on the states of creation and each and every one of His attributes. Likewise, the natural philosophers adduce proofs from the existence of motion to the existence of a mover, and from the impossibility of a continuous sequence of movers *ad infinitum* to the existence of a motionless Prime Mover. From there they adduce arguments for the existence of a First principle. As for the metaphysicians they adduce proofs for the existence of the Necessary by considering being (*wujūd*) and the fact that it is either necessary or possible, thereafter determining the existence of Its attributes by examining the entailments of necessity and possibility. From Its attributes they then determine the modality of Its acts and their issuance from Him one by one.[24]

Wisnovsky demonstrates that the essence-existence distinction in contingent beings is so much intricately interwoven into the fabric of Avicenna's metaphysics of causation that it may have even developed out of concerns that were initially aetiological.[25] What adds credence to this assessment is that it is nigh impossible to think of the essence-existence distinction without thinking about causation, and Avicenna it seems

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[22] Avicenna is careful to point out that there can be no demonstration (*burhān*) in strict sense of an argument to the reasoned fact (i.e. *al-burhān al-limmī*) because the Necessary Existent has no cause and therefore no reason for its existence apart from Itself. At best there can only be an indicative argument (*dalīl*).

[23] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.28, p. 110.

[24] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.27, pp. 66^{14-21}.

[25] Wisnovsky, R. (2000; 2003)

clearly intended it to have an implied aetiology, a metaphysics of causation, both in respect of the causes that cause a thing's essence (*asbāb al-māhiyya*) and the causes that cause its existence (*asbāb al-wujūd*); between, that is, the extrinsic and intrinsic causes of being (*mawjūd*). In this way, Avicenna reifies the four Aristotelian causes, the material, the formal, the efficient and the final cause, in terms of his metaphysical distinction between essence and existence.[26] Wisnovsky suggests that Avicenna was therefore continuing the same precedent which was set by his Neo-Platonic predecessors of separating the immanent and transcendent causes of things.[27] A being whose "whatness" (*quiddity*) is not its "thatness" (*quoditty*) and whose essence (*māhiyya*) is not the fact of its existence (*wujūd*) must be one that receives existence from an efficient cause which is outside and beyond itself. Such a being is intrinsically 'possible of existence' (*mumkin al-wujūd*) and one for which nonexistence can be predicated without giving rise to a contradiction since nothing about itself (*dhāt*) implies the necessity of its existence. So the reason, according to Avicenna, why a possible being is caused comes down to the fact that *its existence is not included in its essence*. Hence it must have an efficient cause which is either another possible being or one that has no need for a principle *tout court*. So even if, for the sake of argument, it was possible for an infinite chain of beings to exist wherein each member of the chain is possible of existence in itself considered as a whole and caused by the one immediately before it in the sequence, the chain itself would require a cause since it too is merely possible of existence itself.

Let me explain. Firstly, because it depends for its existence on the parts comprising it, namely, the individual members, the chain could not itself have existed if the parts which make it were not themselves first existent. Now, "that which depends for its existence on another" is just another way of saying what 'the possible' is, so by this definition the existence of the chain must be possible of existence. Furthermore, one cannot argue that the chain is *simply* the aggregate of possible existents since, metaphysically speaking, the parts of a whole are necessarily prior to it in being (*wujūd*) even if their existence is cotemporaneous with its existence. So even if they happen to exist pre-eternally and contemporaneously with the chain itself there would still be a *metaphysical* distinction between them in terms of priority (*taqaddum*) and posteriority (*ta'akhkhur*). The parts of the chain are thus individually and collectively the causes of its existence in a similar manner to how matter is an essential cause of a material substance. Since the chain would not exist without its parts, the chain must be possible of existence. Secondly, it would be absurd to

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[26] On the metaphysics of causation in Avicenna's thought, see Marmura, M. (1981; 1984); Richardson, K. (2013).

[27] See Wisnovsky, R. (2002).

think that a chain consisting of parts that are each individually and in themselves only possible of existence is *itself* necessary of existence.

Having thus established the chain's need for a cause Avicenna can now posit the necessity of a being that is 'necessary of existence in itself' and one 'the essence of which is its existence' (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*). This is because the existence of the chain is either caused by one of its members, or by the chain itself, or by something external to the chain. These are the only three options Avicenna thinks are possible. Avicenna rejects the possibility of the chain's existence being caused by either one (or all) of its parts or by the chain itself, since ultimately this leads to the proposition that something causes its own existence, which is absurd because of the fallacy of priority (*taqaddum al-shay' 'alā nafsihi*). Hence the chain must have a cause beyond itself (option 3) and perforce this has to be a Necessary Existent. If this were not the case then the efficient cause of the chain would have had to be something possible of existence and therefore itself counted as one the members *inside* the chain for whose existence we are seeking a principle. Yet Avicenna has proven that the cause which causes the existence of the chain must be something whose existence is categorized outside the chain of possible beings, and since whatever is *extraneous* to the set of possible things must be necessary in itself, the cause of the chain must be Necessary of Existence. The cause of the chain is therefore a Necessary Existent (*quod erat demonstrandum*).

While it is undeniably true that Avicenna incorporates considerations of an aetiological nature alongside his distinction between essence and existence, this itself is only because of the facilitation of the modal categories which provide the conceptual linkage between the essence of a thing and its existence. The reason why contingent beings have the need for a cause is because of the fact they are inherently 'possible of existence'. They have what Avicenna refers to as 'specific contingency' (*al-imkān al-khāṣṣ*), which means that existence can be removed from them by way of presumption (*bi-l-farḍ*) without this leading to any contradiction.[28] Avicenna therefore divides all existent beings into two fundamentally distinct ontological categories: (1) beings which are necessary of existence in themselves and (2) beings which are possible of existence in themselves. This is the primary division of being *qua* being in Avicenna's thought from whence all the other divisions of being (e.g. the division of possible beings into substance and accident) follow.

So while both thinkers agree that the world is in some sense 'needy' (*muḥtāj*) they disagree fundamentally on what it is that causes this need to arise. In Ghazālī's mind this need arises because the

[28] See Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 546.

world is *temporally* originated (*muḥdath*), it began to exist, whereas even though Avicenna also agrees that whatever begins to exist (*al-ḥudūth al-zamānī*) must have a cause he does not think the world began to exist, yet nevertheless he affirms a cause for it. The lack of a beginning has not in his view removed the world's need of a principle.

By contrast, Ghazālī argues that one either affirms the position of the "materialists" (*al-dahriyyūn*) who claim the world to be of infinite past duration and hence without cause for its existence; or one chooses the option in which the world is created by the act (*fiʿl*) and will (*irāda*) of its Maker at a predetermined point in the past before which there was nothing apart from God Himself.[29] While demonstration proves the latter of these positions to be the correct choice, Ghazālī at least credits the materialists' belief in an eternal world without a Maker to be rationally plausible, so that even though it is contradicted by sound argument and rational demonstrations it is still nonetheless a logically comprehensible position. What is incomprehensible is that there should be a third option between these contradictory positions. In other words, according to Ghazālī, the position of the *falāsifa* is self-defeating. Nothing can be pre-eternal (*qadīm*) and "created" (*mubtadaʿ*) in the sense Avicenna calls "essential origination" (*al-ḥudūth al-dhātī*).

Furthermore, one of Ghazālī's prime objections to Avicenna's theory of essential origination is that nothing can be called an agent (*fāʿil*) that does not produce an action "by way of choice and the knowledge of what is willed".[30] The First cause must therefore be a free agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*) acting through the will (*irāda*) and knowledge (*ʿilm*) It has of what It creates and not merely by way of compulsion (*ījāb*), as Avicenna supposedly claims. The point here is purely semantical inasmuch as nothing can be *named* an 'agent' if it is not characterized by action through will and knowledge—yet according to the *falāsifa*, "whatever proceeds from Him does so by way of necessary compulsion".[31] Ghazālī is here alluding to an important point of Avicenna's cosmology in which everything that exists is either a direct or indirect procession of the First Principle which, because it Necessary of Existence, emanates the First Intellect through Its own act of self-intellection. Now, since the First is *necessarily* self-intellecting and emanation is a *necessary* consequence of that act of knowing Itself, the First cannot choose to create the First Intellect because It cannot choose to intellect Itself. And since whatever is a Necessary Existent cannot "do" one thing at one moment of its existence and not "do" it at another without undergoing some kind of change,

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[29] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 78.

[30] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 56.

[31] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 55.

the emanation of the First Intellect from the Necessary Existent cannot be called an 'act' (*fiʿl*). Thus from Ghazālī's perspective all philosophical heresies which al-Fārābī and Avicenna innovated, such as the denial of God's attributes, the pre-eternality of the world, the First Principle's lack of knowledge of particular things, *etc.* derive in principle from the *falāsifa*'s claim that "God" is 'the Necessary'. 'Necessity' is thus the single most important focus of Ghazālī's attack in the *Tahāfut* on the metaphysical theories of the *falāsifa*.[32]

Accordingly, in his response to the *falāsifa*'s proof of a Necessary Being Ghazālī begins by first criticizing the philosophers' theories of modality, remonstrating that "the expressions 'the possible' and 'the Necessary' are vague expressions".[33] And then subsequently endeavours to show why the Avicennan proof is ineffectual because of its inability to discount through a conclusive demonstration the possibility that the chain of causes itself has no efficient cause. Specifically, Ghazālī strongly insists that Avicenna's argument from contingency does not provide a demonstration (*burhān*) which rules out the possibility of causes simply regressing *ad infinitum* without a terminus, and if that is so then whence the need for a First principle?

Ghazālī's attack can be summarised as follows: In the first step he explains that the only clear signification of the term 'the Necessary' is "that whose existence has no cause". (As we shall see, the actual counter-argument assumes a slightly different definition to the one Ghazālī gives here.) He defines 'the possible' as "that whose existence has a cause".[34] In other words, there are two categories of beings: those which have a cause and those which do not, which, as Ghazālī will try to show, equates with the *mutakallim*'s division of beings into beings which did not begin to exist and those which did. In the second step, referring to the chain of possible beings, he then says:

> Each one [of the members] is possible in the sense that it does not have an *additional* cause to itself, while the whole is not possible in the sense that it does not have a cause *additional* to it and *extraneous* to it. If something else is intended by the expression 'the possible' other than the one we have mentioned, this would be incomprehensible.[35]

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[32] This aspect of Ghazālī's thought ought to be highlighted and earmarked as one of the prime—if not the prime—contention of the entire *Tahāfut*. As we shall see, the concept of 'the necessary' is what, in Ghazālī's estimation, causes all of the theological heresies in Avicenna's thought to arise and must, therefore, either be rejected or reinterpreted; his criticisms of it feature throughout the *Tahāfut*.

[33] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 81. For Ghazālī's views on necessity and possibility, see Dutton, B. (2001); Bargeron, C. (2001).

[34] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 81.

[35] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 81.

Ghazālī is here arguing that the chain *itself* is the Necessary Existent but only in the sense that it does not have a cause "extraneous" to it, which ostensibly is a modification to his earlier definition of 'the Necessary' as "that whose existence has no cause". What he really means to say therefore is that 'the Necessary' is "that whose existence has no cause *extraneous* to it" (*khārijatun 'an dhātihi*).

At this stage Ghazālī's counter-argument is merely a claim, and even if we were to submit to his modified interpretation of 'the Necessary' he has not in actual fact provided any argument to demonstrate the truth of what he says, namely, that the whole has no cause extraneous to it. Of course, from the perspective from which the *Tahāfut* is written the onus does not fall on Ghazālī to prove the truth of this assertion. His aim is a modest one and is simply directed toward showing that as long as this possibility exists Avicenna has not demonstrated the existence of a Necessary Existent beyond the chain itself.

Ghazālī does consider a possible objection, which is that if the chain is the Necessary Existent then this would imply that what is Necessary of Existence is somehow made subsistent by parts which are only in themselves possible of existence, and that is absurd. His first response is a good one: "not everything that is true of the individual units is true necessarily of the aggregate".[36] Ghazālī is clearly aware that it would be a "fallacy of composition" to say that just because the individual members of an aggregate are possible that *ipso facto* the aggregate *per se* must therefore be possible. This conclusion, as Ghazālī explains, does not follow.[37] Now, whilst the principle of what he says is true it cannot be applied in this instance. Avicenna characterizes anything having the dependence on parts as being possible of existence, and dependence for him constitutes need which in turn demands a cause. Hence the reason perhaps why Ghazālī has found it necessary to modify the understanding of what 'the Necessary' and 'the possible' are by adding the qualification "extraneous" to their definitions. So while the chain *per se* is constituted by parts each one representing an *intrinsic* cause of the chain's existence, the existence of the chain as a whole does not require anything beyond its *intrinsic* causes; it does not require an *extrinsic* cause; and that for Ghazālī is the definition of a Necessary Being. The point of all of this seems to be that since the *falāsifa* claim the world to be pre-eternal they are in effect unable to deny the regression of causes *ad infinitum* and therefore "have no way of reaching the proof of the First Principle".[38] If the world regresses to past infinity then each thing

[36] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 82.

[37] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 82.

[38] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 82.

at any particular time is simply caused by the one before it, a situation that continues forever *a parte ante*. Hence the *falāsifa* have not demonstrated that the chain of causes has a First cause.

If the aim of Ghazālī's argument is to deny the chain's need for an extraneous cause, then referring to what 'Alā' al-Dīn Ṭūsī says in his updated version of the *Tahāfut* may be helpful to fill in the gaps of the argument. If there were an extraneous cause, 'Alā' al-Dīn says it would either be one that causes the existence of one of the parts of that supposedly infinite chain or not. According to 'Alā' al-Dīn both options are false. Firstly, suppose the cause which is independent of the chain causes the existence of one of the internal parts. In that case, since the part which is caused by the extraneous cause is a member of an infinite series it will necessarily be preceded by another part which, according to Avicenna, is what causes the existence of the part after it. This in turn would imply that the individual part has *two* causes, namely, the internal cause before it and the one that Avicenna thinks exists outside of the chain. As a principle, however, nothing can be caused twice; nothing can have two *efficient* causes. For this reason, one of these causes must be eliminated. Now, if the prior part within the chain were eliminated the chain as a whole would cease to exist, which cannot be correct, so it must be the one that is retained and the *extraneous* cause is the one eliminated. Hence there is no extraneous cause for the chain's existence.

Secondly, there cannot be a cause that is absolutely independent and extraneous of the composited chain. 'Alā' al-Dīn explains that the reason for this is that "it must be a cause of the existence of [at least one] part in the chain, since were all the parts to exist without it then the composited [whole] would exist without it".[39] It seems to me that this is precisely what Ghazālī wants to say also. Unless the First cause is a terminus and a beginning for the chain it would not be inconceivable that the chain of causes simply continued backwards endlessly *ad infinitum*. Hence Avicenna's argument fails to prove the existence of a First Principle.

Ghazālī's argument however has a concealed premise, which is duly noted by 'Alā' al-Dīn, and that is that "the totality of parts *is* the composite [whole] itself" (*jamīʿ al-ajzā' nafs al-murakkab*).[40] Since the chain is nothing but the sum of its individual parts, and given that the existence of each individual part can be explained by the part coming immediately before it, *ipso facto* the existence of the chain has been explained. One does not therefore need to invoke a further explanation of the chain's existence beyond that which provides a sufficient explanation of what causes each individual part in the chain, since that posits a

[39] 'Alāʾ al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, p. 168.

[40] 'Alāʾ al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, p. 168.

reality for the chain *apart* from the sum reality of all its members. But the chain has no reality other than being the sum of its parts, hence it does not need an extraneous cause to explain "its" existence.

The argument is dialectical. Its aim is to show that none of the three options Avicenna presents as potential candidates for the infinite chain's existence materializes in fact. Avicenna himself rejects the first two options that either one or all of the parts of the chain cause its existence, and now Ghazālī has denied the possibility of the third, the extraneous Necessary Existence. As 'Alā' al-Dīn surmises, since every possibility that Avicenna presented turns out to be false, the initial thesis of the chain being infinite and the world pre-eternal also turns out to be false.

> Since each one of the divisions of a thing has proven to be impossible, that thing itself must be impossible. Therefore, the impossibility of the supposed [infinite] chain having a cause of its existence has been established. If it is impossible for it to have a cause, then [the chain] itself is something impossible given that impossibility of a certain conclusion implies the impossibility of the premise itself (*li-istiḥalati l-malzūm bi-istiḥālati l-lāzim*). Its [*i.e.* the chain's] impossibility is the first thing that is sought, and now that it has been proven impossible it follows that the finitude of the chain of causes for the parts of the world ending at something [First] is possible. Since it cannot be something impossible, it must be necessary of existence in itself. Hence a cause for the existence of the world that is necessary of existence in itself has been affirmed—and that was the second objection, the utmost aim.[41]

Now even though the metaphysics of causation in Avicenna's thought is not our principal aim in this thesis, it suffices to mention that according to Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī the premise on which this argument is built, *viz.* the premise that "the totality of parts is the composite [whole] itself", turns out to be false. The full appraisal of this topic however deserves much more attention, but that is a topic for another day.[42]

On Avicenna's Inability to Prove that the Necessary Existent is One (*Tahāfut*, Discussion V)

'One' (*wāḥid*) as a metaphysical concept is used in philosophical contexts to refer to any being that is either *numerically* one or *essentially* one. According to Avicenna, the Necessary Existent is *necessarily* one and is thus a being which is one in essence and number. This means that It is 'simple' (*basīṭ*), lacking in

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[41] 'Alāʾ al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, p. 168.

[42] Avicenna's argument for the existence of a First principle was ferociously debated in the School of Maragha in the correspondences between Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (published in Nūrānī, 'A. [2004]). The argument was reignited in the post-Ghazālian period by Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī, who argued that the Necessary Being must be a cause of at least one member in the chain and therefore Itself part of the chain, not external to it. I am preparing a translation and study of these correspondences. Due to the limitations of space, however, I will not be discussing this problem any further in this dissertation.

composition (*tarkīb*), and is the *only* one of its kind. As with al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, Avicenna's arguments for the 'oneness' and 'unity' (*tawḥīd*) of the Necessary Existent naturally fall into two categories depending on whether those arguments are aimed at a demonstration of the *numerical* unity of the Necessary Existent (the fact of there being *only* one such being) or the *essential* unity of the Necessary Existent (the fact that it is not composed). In al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's case both objectives are fulfilled by the metaphysical notion of 'necessity'. Let us briefly consider two such arguments for the numerical unity of God's existence.

Al-Fārābī's Argument.

Suppose there are two Necessary Existents. If these are similar in every possible way then there would be only one Necessary Existent, not two. In Islamic philosophy, 'twoness' (*ithnayniyya*) and 'otherness' (*ghayriyya*) are co-implied concepts. Two Necessary Existent beings must therefore differ in "something" in order to counter-balance the fact that they share the property of 'necessary existence' (*wujūb al-wujūd*). This difference must be something essential to each of them or else they would each be an individual existent by virtue of some extraneous accident, which implies that their individual existences are *caused* by some factor beyond themselves, and that is contradictory for a being that is necessary of existence *in itself*. But if they are differing in respect of some inherent *differentia* in their essences then each of these so-called Necessary Existents would be an essence composited of a "common" and "uncommon" factor: the "common" factor being their shared "necessity of existence" and the "uncommon" factor being their individuations (*taʿayyun*). But this results in them being composed (*murakkab*) and thus "needy" of the parts that comprise them, which, according to al-Fārābī, is impossible for a being that is Necessary of Existence. For these reasons there can only be one Necessary Existent (*quod erat demonstrandum*).

Avicenna's Argument

The former argument, al-Fārābī's argument, turns on the premise that the Necessary Existent cannot be a composite (*murakkab*), and is therefore an argument for the unity of God's existence which depends on a proof of His simplicity. Avicenna notched the argument up a level by hypothesizing a situation in which the premise of the impossibility of composition was altogether removed. Let us suppose, he argues, that the expression 'necessity of existence' is a species predicable of more than one Necessary Existent. Since the

presumption now is that it is a species, the 'necessity of existence' (*wujūb al-wujūd*) must have a nature which exists in each individual thing that is a Necessary Existent, should any such being exist.[43]

Thus Avicenna reasons that:

> The 'necessity of existence' is either [1] an inseparable accident of a quiddity (that quiddity being something which has the 'necessity of existence')—such as when we say of a thing that "it is a principle" such that there belongs to that thing an essence and a quiddity after which being a principle is an inseparable accident of that essence, similar way to how the possibility of existence sometimes exists as an inseparable accident of a thing which in itself has a meaning (e.g. that it is a body or white or a colour) and which after that is something possible of existence, [possibility] not entering into its true-nature—; or [2] the Necessary Existent is necessary of existence by virtue of It being necessary of existence, and the 'necessity of existence' itself is a universal nature belonging to It.[44]

The two options Avicenna presents here in somewhat loquacious manner are simply as follows: either (1) the 'necessity of existence' (*wujūb al-wujūd*) is the concomitant and inseparable accident (*lāzim*) of some other thing (*viz.* a quiddity), it being the cause of the Necessary Existent's individuation; or (2) the 'necessity of existence' is itself the essence of the Necessary Existent and the thing by which It is individuated. In the first option the individuation of the species 'necessity of existence' in the single individual Necessary Existent will be caused by something else, while in the second category it is individuated in the Necessary Existent by virtue of itself. The latter of these is the thing sought after in the proof, namely, that the species 'necessary of existence', if it is instantiated, will be individuated in virtue of itself and not because of a cause other than itself, meaning therefore that there can be *only* one Necessary Existent.

In the *Shifā'*, Avicenna provides us with a helpful example to clarify why the species 'necessity of existence' will have only one instantiation if, as he claims, the cause of its individuation is none other than the species itself. Consider the species 'human' which is predicated in the first instance of Zayd and Zayd alone. Because Avicenna is an anti-realist when it comes to the existence of the Platonic Forms (*al-muthul al-aflāṭūniyya*), the species 'human'—that is, the nature 'humanity' (*ṭabīʿat al-insān*)—can only exist in

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[43] Avicenna gives the proof of the existence of the Necessary Existent before the proof of Its unity in the *Ishārāt*. The proof of Its unity however is independent of whether or not there is a Necessary Existent. Its aim is more formidable in that it shows that even before the existence of a Necessary Existent is proven It will *necessarily* be one should It exist. As a result, as soon as Avicenna has proven the existence of a Necessary Existent he will have proven that *that* Necessary Existent is the only one of its kind. This is perhaps the reason why, in the *Najāt*, the proofs for unity (Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 556–566) come immediately *before* the proof of the existence of a Necessary Being (Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 566–568).

[44] Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 557–58.

the external world if it is realized in the form of an individual particular, namely Zayd. In that case, because Zayd is an individual the species 'human' will be said to have been "individuated" in the form of Zayd. Now, if that species happens to be individuated in virtue of itself, then Zayd will be Zayd—that is, an individual, "something individuated"—*because* he is a human; that is, because he has the nature of 'humanity' in him. In other words, because his having the nature of 'humanity' itself causes his individuation nothing else could be a human being since nothing else can be Zayd. If, however, the species 'human' were to be replicated and instantiated for more than one individual, e.g. Zayd and 'Amr, then the cause of its individuation could not have been the very fact that this species now exists in a particular, but rather something else. Zayd and 'Amr would therefore be distinct individuals each having specific individuations (*mā bihi l-iftirāq*) not because they are 'humans' *per se* (*mā bihi l-ijtimāʿ*) but instead because of the personal individuations each of them has and which the other does not, which in this instance is their individual matters known as 'designated matter' (*al-mādda al-mushār ilayh*).[45]

What this example is supposed to show is that if there is more than one being that is Necessary of Existence then each of them would have to have the nature 'necessity of existence' *and* something else besides it to individuate It. Notwithstanding the problems this creates by way of composition, Avicenna shows that even if this were possible *arguendo* still it would not be possible for the Necessary Existent. This is due to the fact that every individual whose existence is individuated by something other than the nature of the species itself is necessarily something *caused*, this being the crucial point of the argument, and we know that a being that is Necessary of Existence cannot be caused or else it would not be the Necessary Existent.

As Avicenna says,

> [T]he individuated Necessary Existent, if that individuation of It is because *It* is the Necessary Existent, then no Necessary Existent shall exist apart from It. But if Its individuation is not because

[45] As Avicenna says: "The same state of affairs obtains with respect to the reality of the Necessary Existent. If it is by virtue of its very self that it is this individuated [reading *mutaʿayyan* instead of *muʿayyan*; cf. Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.18, p. 108 where the expression he uses is "*wājib al-wujūd al-mutaʿayyan*"] thing, then it would be impossible for that reality to belong to another. If the realization of this meaning belongs to this individuated thing [but] not from itself but rather from something other than itself, and it is only what it is because of this individuation, then its individual existence would be derived from something other than itself and would not therefore be the Necessary Existent, which is a contradiction. Therefore, the reality of the Necessary Existent belongs to only the One." (Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.5, p. 279; Marmura modified)

> of that [i.e. it is not due to the fact that it is necessary of existence] but because of some other thing, then It [the Necessary Existent] is caused.[46]

If, as Avicenna argues, the species individuates itself, then the existence of a *single* Necessary Existent will guarantee there cannot be any others besides It. Otherwise, if there were, say, two Necessary Existents, the species 'necessary of existence' will have been replicated twice and instantiated in two individual Necessary Existents, neither of which can be individuated by virtue of the very thing they have in common, namely, 'the necessity of existence'. Something therefore has to give: Either 'the necessity of existence' causes its own individuation or the individuation of 'the necessity of existence' is caused by something else. And if it is caused by something else, then al-Fārābī's argument shows that this leads to composition within each Necessary Being. Yet since the Necessary Being is a simple reality, al-Fārābī concludes that there can only be one Necessary Existent.

Avicenna takes the argument even farther. He argues that even if we suppose that the individuation of the species 'necessity of existence' is caused by something other than itself when it is instantiated and that each Necessary Existent as a result is composed by a part It has in common with another Necessary Existent and some unique part that differentiates each of them from the other and is therefore the cause of their individuations, even then it would not be possible for there to be more than one Necessary Existent. So even if the composition rules *vis-à-vis* the Necessary Existent are relaxed and disregarded in the argument, it would *still* be absurd to think that there could be more than *one* Necessary Existent, a claim which would no doubt be a considerable improvement on the Farābian argument for the unity of the Necessary Existent if it can be proven.

Avicenna thinks this is possible. Whatever being is individuated by something other than the very nature of its species is, according to Avicenna, a being whose *existence* is caused. The argument here is as follows: If 'necessity' constitutes one part that each of the so-called Necessary Existents has in common[47] and another part that is the unique individuation belonging to each one,[48] then what, we might ask, is the association (*nisba*) between them?[49] There are four possible permutations depending on whether the

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[46] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.18, p. 108.

[47] Let's call it '*n*'

[48] Let's call this part '*x*' and '*y*', assuming there are two Necessary Existents.

[49] There must be an associating-relation. As Ḥillī explains: "If there were no associating-relation between the parts it would be possible to separate them, which implies that their coming together and combination is an effect of an

associating-relation is one of accidentality (*ʿurūḍ*, a "weak" relation), or necessary concomitance (*luzūm*, a "strong" relation):[50]

n is a separable accident of *x*	(*n* is *ʿāriḍ* of *x*)	(1)
n is an inseparable accident of *x*	(*n* is *lāzim* of *x*)	(2)
x is a separable accident of *n*	(*x* is *ʿāriḍ* of *n*)	(3)
x is an inseparable accident of *n*	(*x* is *lāzim* of *n*)	(4)

Avicenna argues that all four permutations are impossible.[51] Firstly, suppose 'necessity' is an inseparable accident of the individuation *x*.[52] Ṭūsī explains that this other thing "*x*" that individuates the Necessary Existent is either a quiddity or some property of quiddity. However, this would imply that the 'necessity of existence', since it is not an inherent property of the Necessary Existent's essence, is an *accident*, which in turn implies that the *existence* of the Necessary Existent is also an *accident* of Its essence.[53] As Avicenna says, "[I]f the 'necessity of existence' […] is not something intrinsic to the quiddity of a thing […] then [the 'necessity of existence'] will be an inseparable *accident* for it, like a property [*viz*. proprium, *al-khāṣṣa*] or general accident but not like genus and differentia. If, then, it is an inseparable accident, it will be posterior [to the quiddity] not prior; and whatever is posterior [to something else] is perforce *caused*. Hence the 'necessity of existence' is caused and would not be necessary of existence in itself as we had supposed".[54] Or, as Ṭūsī summarizes, "it follows from the 'necessity of existence' being an inseparable *accident* of [the individuation] that *existence* is caused by the quiddity or by another property belonging it".[55] In short, since any form of accident is always posterior in being to its subject the 'necessity of existence' would be caused

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extraneous cause and that is absurd" (*Nihāya*, vol. 1, p. 100). Since the Necessary Existent has no *efficient* cause the joining of each of the parts within the Necessary Existent cannot be presumed to be due to an outside influence.

[50] Accidentality is a "weak" relation since an accident can potentially be removed from its subject. By contrast, concomitance is a "strong" relation because even though the concomitant property is still an accident, it is nevertheless one that constantly accompanies the subject whenever the latter exists.

[51] See Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.18, p. 108; cf. Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.5, pp. 278–283; cf. idem, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 555–66; cf. Mayer, T. (2003).

[52] This is (2) above.

[53] The is because 'necessity' follows in the wake of 'existence', therefore implying that if 'necessity' is an accident then 'existence' must be an accident also.

[54] Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt* II.11, p. 558.

[55] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.18, p. 43^{2-3}.

by its individuation, therefore implying that the existence of the Necessary Existent is also caused by said quiddity. But given that nothing can be the efficient cause of its own existence, (2) must be false.

The same argument also rules out (1). As al-Taḥtānī explains, a separable accident requires a cause even more than an inseparable one, since whereas in the latter case the accident is caused by the quiddity itself, in the former situation it is caused by something else apart from the quiddity and hence *a fortiori* even more in need of a cause.[56] Since both options entail that the existence of the Necessary Existent is caused, (1) and (2) can be immediately struck off as impossible.

Thirdly, suppose that the individuation (*x* or *y* or whatever) is a separable accident of 'necessary existence', i.e. existence which is necessary. Ṭūsī says that "this would entail that the individuated Necessary Existent is caused by whatever it is that makes It individuated by that individuation".[57] Presumably this is because a *separable* accident requires an explanation for why it is conjoined to its subject whenever it exists alongside it, an explanation which can only be found in the efficient cause. Hence the supposed Necessary Existent would have an efficient cause, which is clearly false. If this were not enough there is a further reason why the individuation cannot be an accident of 'necessary existence', brilliantly articulated in the commentary of Ṭūsī. Avicenna's argument supposes that the 'necessity of existence' is a species and therefore a nature (*ṭabīʿa*) to which an accident occurs causing its individuation. However, since the nature acting as a subject (*al-maʿrūḍ*) for the individuation (*al-ʿāriḍ*) already exists in advance of the individuation that occurs to it, the latter must be occurring to some *existent* nature. But if this is true then either that individuation occurs to a nature that has not yet become individuated, that is, it occurs to a generic nature (*ṭabīʿa ʿāmma*); or it occurs to one that is something individuated and therefore non-generic (*ṭabīʿa ghayr ʿāmma*). Ṭūsī states that the individuation cannot occur to the 'necessity of existence' *qua* something generic. Though he does not elaborate there are two obvious reasons for this. First, if the individuation occurs to an *existent* and *generic* nature then the 'necessity of existence' would be generic (*ʿāmma*) without the individuation *and* individuated (*mutaʿayyan*) with that individuation, thus implying that a single thing is at once both a universal (i.e. predicable of many) and a particular (i.e. not predicable of many), which is impossible. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it implies that a *generic* nature exists in the external

[56] See al-Taḥtānī, *Muḥākamāt* IV.18, p. 42^{7-8}.

[57] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.18, p. 44^{10-11}.

world, and that according to Avicenna's philosophy is downright impossible given that the 'mental universal' (*al-kullī al-ʿaqlī*) only exists in the mind.[58]

So given that the individuation cannot occur to a generic nature it must be an accident of the non-generic form of 'the necessity of existence'. However, this entails that the nature which acts as the subject of the individuation is something specific (*mutakhaṣṣaṣ*), since 'to be non-generic' means to be something specific. But if the specification of the 'necessity of existence' is caused by the very individuation that occurs to it, then whatever causes the individuation to occur to it is also the cause that causes the specification of the Necessary Existent. And since this entails that the Necessary Existent is caused, the individuation of the Necessary Existent cannot be a separable accident of 'the necessity of existence'.

Finally, (4) is false because it implies that the individuation of the Necessary Existent is caused by 'the necessity of existence', and yet it had been supposed in the disjunct of our argument that it is caused by another. As Ṭūsī says, this would then imply that "the Necessary Existent is one but caused by another",[59] and such a being cannot be the Necessary Existent.

In sum: All four permutations lead to the absurd conclusion that the Necessary Existent is *caused* by an efficient cause, and since this contradicts the definition of Necessary Existence one must go all the back to the start of the argument and accept the first disjunct of the argument: namely, that the "cause" of the individuation of the 'necessity of existence' is *itself* and nothing else besides. In turn, since this implies that the 'necessity of existence' *cannot* be a true species and must therefore be predicable of only one being, Avicenna has thus proven the *unity* of the Necessary Existent (*quod erat demonstrandum*).

Ghazālī treats of both the Farābian and Avicennan arguments for the unity of God in the Fifth Discussion of the *Tahāfut*. He begins by raising anew the question of what it means precisely to say that something is *wājib al-wujūd*, 'necessary of existence', once again reasserting his preference that the true signification of this expression is that "something lacks a cause". Now, according to Ghazālī, if this is what 'the Necessary' truly means, then the opening line of Avicenna's disjunctive argument must be "mistaken in its postulation".[60] Recall that in the argument Avicenna put forward for the unity of the First Principle the individuation of the 'necessity of existence' is either *due to itself* or *due to other than itself*. But this according to Ghazālī is badly formulated: if 'the Necessary' is just 'that which has no cause', then it would

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[58] On Avicenna's doctrine of *universalia*, see Marmura, M. (1979; 1992)

[59] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.18, p. 46.

[60] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 85.

be meaningless to ask whether this characterization of Itself is *itself* due to a cause or not; 'that which has *no* cause' cannot be 'that which has no cause' *because of a cause*.

Therefore, according to Ghazālī, it is meaningless to say that the Necessary Existent has no cause for Its individuation *because of a cause*, whether that so-called cause is the 'necessity of existence' itself or something else. As Ghazālī puts it,

> [W]hy is it impossible for two existents having no cause, neither being the cause of the other, to stand firmly? For your statement that that which has no cause *has no cause either by reason of itself or due to a cause is a faulty division*. For the denial of a cause and the absence of the need of a cause for existence do not need a cause.[61]

According to Ghazālī, since 'the Necessary' is that being whose existence has no cause, and given also that "not having a cause" is a privation, it would be meaningless to ask what the cause of this privation might be. But if "the meaning that He is Necessary of Existence is that there is no cause for His existence and no cause for His being without a cause", then it would be "baseless" to argue from the disjunctive categories formulated by Avicenna in his proof of the unity of the Necessary Existent.[62] By rejecting the validity of the division of 'the Necessary' in the Avicennan argument from the hypothesized species 'necessary of existence', Ghazālī avoids having to address the argument at all. He merely side-steps the issue of whether or not the 'necessary of existence' itself can be instantiated into more than one instantiation by protesting that the original division in the disjunctive premise is logically flawed. On the basis of this "faulty" Avicennan proof, Ghazālī therefore concludes that the *falāsifa* cannot prove there to be *only* one Necessary Existent.

His response to the Farābian argument is even more dismissive. Ghazālī simply rejects the main contention of the argument that it is impossible for there to be any kind of composition within the Necessary Existent. So while he admits, on the one hand, "that duality is only conceivable through difference in something and that the difference between two things that are similar in every respect is inconceivable", he nonetheless disparages the *falāsifa*'s assertion of the impossibility of composition by asking the question "why this kind of composition is impossible in the First Principle?", adding that it would be "sheer arbitrariness" to claim that this kind of composition is impossible in the First Principle without conclusive argument.[63] Accordingly, the remainder of the Fifth Discussion is devoted to an

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[61] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 85.

[62] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 85.

[63] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 87.

examination of the different ways which the *falāsifa* claim cause plurality to enter into the essence of the Necessary Existent and a consideration of their arguments as to why each form of plurality must be denied of a being that is Necessary of Existence in Itself. Ghazālī, having shown why the *falāsifa* are unable to prove the unity of the First Principle, now seeks to destroy their claim of the First Principle's simplicity.

On Avicenna's Inability to Demonstrate the Unicity of the Necessary Existent (*Tahāfut*, Discussion V)

The Necessary Existent is a *simple* being (*basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa*). It is 'one' from every so-called "aspect" of Its existence. Not only is It unique in the sense of being the only one of Its kind and therefore numerically one, It is also *essentially* 'one'. For Avicenna, this means that It has no parts, no divisions, no inter-relations, no internal attributes, no definition, not even a "quiddity" (*māhiyya*). As contraries, oneness (*waḥdāniyya*) is related to multiplicity (*kathra*) as simplicity (*basāṭā*) is related to composition (*tarkīb*). When he says that all forms of multiplicity are impossible for the Necessary Existent, Avicenna is asserting the absolute unicity of the First principle and Its transcendence, therefore, from all forms of composition. Needless to say it is the concept of 'necessity' that once again proves decisive for Avicenna's purposes. The full repercussions of the 'necessity of existence' *vis-à-vis* the unity and unicity of the First Principle are detailed by Avicenna in the *Ilāhiyyāt* (VIII.4–6) of the *Shifā'*, and we shall consider these in a short while. The main gist of what he says in these chapters however can be summarised by a principle which is not given in the *Shifā'* but in the *Najāt*, namely the principle that no being which is Necessary of Existence in Itself is rendered subsistent by Its dependence on anything apart from itself.

As Avicenna states:

> It is impossible that the essence of Necessary Existent has principle [parts] which come together to make the Necessary Existent a subsistent [reality], neither the parts of quantity nor parts of a definition or [explanatory] statement. [This is true] regardless of whether they [the parts] be [of a nature] similar to matter and form or of a different kind [e.g. genus and differentia], such as then to render the parts of the explanatory phrase parts of the meaning of His name whereby each part signifies something which, in existence, is something *essentially different* from the others. This is because whatever is characterized in this way has parts each and every one of which is itself different to the other parts and the aggregate itself. If this had been the case, however, then either it would be true that each and every part, for example, has its own separate existence but not true that the aggregate has an existence without them, in which case the aggregate would not be Necessary of Existence; or this is true of some of them but still not true of the aggregate which could not exist without them. So long as an independent existence is not therefore true of the other parts and the aggregate it would not be Necessary of Existence—for indeed, that which is the Necessary of Existence has [independent existence] true of It. If those parts cannot therefore be separated in

> existence from the group, nor the group separated from the parts, and the existence of each part depends on the other, and not a single one of them is essentially prior [to any of the others], then not a single one of them is the Necessary Existent. For we have clarified this by stating that the parts [of a group] are essentially prior to the whole [itself], so that the cause which necessitates their existence must first necessitate the [existence of the] parts and thereafter [the existence of] the whole, none of which is the Necessary Existent. We cannot say that the whole is essentially prior to the parts, but rather that it should be either posterior or simultaneous [to them]. Whatever the case, it would not be the Necessary Existent. From this it has become clear that the Necessary Existent is not a body nor the matter of a body or its form, nor is It the intelligible matter of an intelligible form nor the intelligible form in an intelligible matter. It has no division, not quantitatively nor by way of principle parts, nor is it divisible in terms of the explanatory statement. Hence It is one in each of these three respects.[64]

Avicenna's remarks point to a principle which states that whatever exists *after* the existence of something else must be something caused in itself. This is based on a metaphysical rule in Avicenna's thought which holds that if one thing is posterior in existence to another, then the existence of that posterior thing is either caused by the thing which is prior to it *in existence* or by some third thing. Whatever the case, the existence of the posterior thing would always be *caused*. Now, if the Necessary Existent is composed in any of the five ways that we shall examine shortly, then Its existence is not *merely* the existence of Its parts one by one—since the existence of what is *posterior* in being cannot be identical to the existence of what is *prior* in being.[65] Anything which is capable of being characterized by mereological differences will therefore be composed, i.e., something posterior in existence to its parts, and therefore caused. Hence the Necessary Existent cannot be a composite (*quod erat demonstrandum*).

The threat this poses to Ashʿarite theologians cannot be emphasized enough. According to the followers of al-Ashʿarī, God is necessarily composed in the sense of possessing an essence (*dhāt*) to which a variety of attributes (*ṣifāt*) are superadded. God is not just His essence, nor is He just His attributes, and neither is His essence identical to His attributes nor His attributes identical to His essence. Yet the reason why He is God is because He has an *eternal* Essence and *eternal* attributes. In this regard, Avicenna's metaphysics of Necessary Existence is at loggerheads with traditional Ashʿarite *kalām*, and it's no surprise

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[64] Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 551^{11}–553^{7}.

[65] For instance, the set {A B C} is not the same as the set {B C A}. The *mere* existence of A, B, and C therefore is not sufficient to distinguish between these two sets, and a cause is therefore required to explain why the set, for example, exists in the form {A B C} and not {B C A}.

therefore that Ghazālī has to confront the proposition of God's *simplicity* and the challenge it poses to the theological position which he considers to be the orthodox position.[66]

In the *Tahāfut*, Ghazālī's summarizes Avicenna's discussion in the *Shifā'* (*Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4-7) as follows:[67]

(1) The First cannot be divided into quantitative parts, neither in actuality nor in estimation.

(2) The First cannot be divisible through non-quantitative divisions such as the hylemorphic division of a body into matter and form, not in actuality nor in meaning.[68]

(3) The First cannot possess actual positive attributes since these, if they are also necessary of existence, would share in common the 'necessity of existence' with the essence of the Necessary Existent, thereby entailing that each of the essence and its multiple attributes is composited by an uncommon factor which individuates it from other so-called 'necessary' things.

(4) The First cannot be composed of a genus[69] and specific difference[70].

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[66] See Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, p. 129: "The seven attributes […] are *not* the essence. Rather, they are *additional* to the essence. According to us, the Maker of the world (Exalted is He) is a knower with a knowledge, living with life, powerful with power, and so on with respect to all the attributes."; ibid., p. 139: "All the divine attributes are *eternal*" (emphasis added). As demonstrated by these citations, Ghazālī seemingly endorses two important Ashʿarite doctrines in his work *al-Iqtiṣād*: namely, (1) a *real* distinction between God's essence and His attributes and the eternality of a multiple number of divine attributes (*taʿaddud al-qudamā'*). Unlike Avicenna, however, Ghazālī does not refer, and therefore possibly does not regard, the Ashʿarite distinction between God's essence and his attributes *in re* as a so-called form of "composition" (*tarkīb*). However, in light of recent scholarship it is worth mentioning that both the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtiṣād* are part of Ghazālī's so-called "exoteric" doctrine, a significantly large portion of which is rejected in his hidden corpus of writings known collectively as the *al-maḍnūn bihi ʿalā ghayri ahlihi*; on the *maḍnūn*-corpus see now al-Akiti, M. A. "The *Maḍnūn* of Ghazālī: A Critical Edition of the Unpublished *Major Maḍnūn* with Discussion of His Restricted, Philosophical Corpus," D. Phil. Diss. 3 Volumes. University of Oxford, 2007. In the *Major Maḍnūn*, Ghazālī endorses the Avicennan notion of a simple First principle the essence of which is identical to Its existence (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*), and thus contrary to standard Ashʿarite thought rejects the doctrine of entitative attributes superadded to the divine essence; see ibid., vol. 2, p. 180. But since, according to our methodology, we have chosen to rely only on those texts of the thinkers we discuss which have played a discernibly impactful role in the dialogical history of ideas within post-Avicennan thought, it has not been necessary for us to account for Ghazālī's *maḍnūn*-corpus, especially given the fact also that none of the other thinkers we have discussed seem to have been familiar with it, at least not in any historically discernible fashion. On Ghazālī's relationship to the Ashʿarite school of theology, see Frank, R. (1992).

[67] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, pp. 87–89.

[68] Cf. Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.6, pp. 284–5.

[69] Cf. Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, p. 277^{4-6}: "The First also has no genus. This is because the First has no quiddity. That which has no quiddity has no genus, since genus is spoken of in answer to the question, "What is it?"; and genus from one perspective is a *part* of a thing, yet it has been ascertained that the First is not a composite."

[70] Cf. Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, p. 277^{10-11}: "[T]he First does not have a differentia, and since It has neither genus nor differentia It has no definition."

(5) The First cannot possess a quiddity, for a quiddity is that thing to which existence is additionally related and would thus imply that the First has an efficient cause for Its existence.[71]

In this list only the first is a quantitative division; (2) to (5) are referred to as qualitative divisions. According to the *falāsifa* neither type of division is possible for the Necessary Existent. By and large everything Ghazālī mentions in this part of the *Tahāfut* is an accurate report and portrayal of the corresponding sections in Avicenna's *Shifā'*. An essence affected by one or more of the aforementioned categories of multiplicity will be composited in nature (*murakkab al-dhāt*). So given the metaphysical principle outlined by Avicenna in his *Najāt*, anything characterized by mereological distinctions so as to be composed of parts will necessarily be rendered subsistent by them, and shall therefore be something whose existence is caused. For this reason, the *falāsifa* judge that each of the five methods by which multiplicity enters into the essences of things must be denied of the Necessary Existent; for His existence is "self-subsistent" (*qā'imun bi-nafsihi*) and therefore independent of anything else that might render It an existent.

From each specific negation there follows important corollaries, however. For example, from (1) the Necessary Existent is denied being a body; from (2) It is denied relation to matter, which is why It must be an Intellect; from (3) It is denied being characterized by positive attributes; from (4) It is denied the possibility of being defined; and from (5) It is denied an efficient cause for Its existence. And given that all of these in the end point to the single conclusion that the existence of the Necessary Existent cannot be rendered subsistent by anything apart from Itself, the Necessary Existent in Avicenna's metaphysics is oft-characterized as a being of "sheer existence" (*mujarrad al-wujūd*),[72] "absolute oneness" (*al-wāḥid al-muṭlaq*),[73] "pure goodness" (*khayr maḥḍ*)[74] and "truth" (*ḥaqq*)[75]. Or, in the terms controversially used by Avicenna, a being "the essence of which is its individual existence" (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*), the principle whence everything else follows.[76] Each of these is a characterization which arises as a consequence

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[71] Cf. Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, p. 276[13–17]: "[E]verything that possesses a quiddity is caused. All things apart from the Necessary Existent therefore have a quiddity, and it is these quiddities that are in themselves possible of existence, existence occurring to them from outside [of themselves]. Hence the First does not have a quiddity, while things possessing quiddities have existence emanate on them from It. It is sheer existence […]"

[72] See Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, p. 276[16–18].

[73] See Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, p. 273[13], 273[16–17].

[74] See Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.6, p. 283[15–18].

[75] See Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.6, p. 284[10–11].

[76] See Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, p. 274[3], 276[1–2].

of the First Principle's primary attribute which is that It is 'necessary of existence in itself'. 'Necessity' (*wujūb*) in fact plays such a crucial role in Avicenna's thought that its influence permeates nearly all aspects of his "onto-theology" and metaphysics broadly construed, to such an extent even that its importance, it could be argued, has been under-appreciated by modern scholarship.

It is in this regard that Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* reveals its perspicacious assessment of Avicennan philosophy. Ghazālī was the first post-Avicennan thinker to realize that the notion of 'necessity' was the single most important idea driving the Avicennan metaphysic. After all, it is because the Necessary Existent is 'necessary of existence' that It allegedly emanates existence by compulsion (*bi-l-ījāb*) and does not create by volition (*bi-l-irāda*); that It knows things but not by a knowledge and has power over them but not by a power; that Its knowledge of things is only universal and is only incidentally related to particulars; that It directly causes the existence of only one thing (the Universal Intellect) and nothing else besides, least of all the happenings that occur in the world down here below.[77] Even in that renowned chapter (*Tahāfut*, Discussion XVII) in which he formulates his so-called "occasionalist" response to the philosophers' denial of miracles and the notion of secondary causation in particular, Ghazālī opens the Discussion by remarking that "[T]he connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not *necessary* according to us".[78]

Like so many other examples in Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* there is enough cumulative evidence to show that the notion of 'necessity' is what preoccupies Ghazālī the most throughout the majority if not all of the subsidiary Discussions of the *Tahāfut*. As the rest of Discussion XVII betrays, the particular issue that agitates Ghazālī is Avicenna's claim in the *Physics* that the natures of things (*ṭabīʿat al-ashyāʾ*) are what regulate the characteristic effects and properties of natural substances. In other words, following Aristotle (*Physics* 2.1, 192^{b}20–23), Avicenna holds that the immanent nature (*ṭabīʿa*) of a thing is the intrinsic principle which governs and regulates its motion and being at rest, its capacity to affect another and be affected. In short, it is due to the interaction of *natures* that causal relationships among natural substances can be accounted for without needing to appeal to anything "meta"-physical. For this reason, nothing is possible for a thing that is not already possible for it in its nature; hence miracles, which according to the Ashʿarites supposedly contravene the ordinary rules of nature, are impossible.

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[77] For Ghazālī's criticisms of the modal term 'necessary' in Avicenna, see Bargeron, C. (2007).

[78] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 166.

The interaction of immanent natures among natural things thus forms a "closed loop" wherein the processes of acting (*fiʿl*) and being acted upon (*infiʿāl*) can be explained within the natural order itself. This is sometimes referred to as "secondary causality" to reflect the fact that one doesn't need to appeal to an agent beyond the natural substance itself in order to explain its "behaviour" and interactions with other natural substances. For example, the capacity of fire to cause burning arises because it is in the *nature* of fire to burn, and the capacity of cotton to be burned arises because it is in the *nature* of cotton to be burned. In other words, no agent *beyond the fire itself* causes fire to burn. It achieves that all by itself *because of its nature*. Such interactions as burning and being burned are philosophically described as a type of motion given that it is characteristic of things transitioning between states of potentiality and actuality to be said to have undergone "change". Nature is thus the immanent principle of natural occurrences, which in turn serves as the basis for a scientific understanding (*epistēmē*) of natural causation.

However, in Avicenna's robust system of philosophy nothing in the natural world can be entirely cut off from metaphysical considerations, not even causal interactions in the natural order, so that even though nature as an immanent principle can sufficiently account for the causal interactions of natural substances, the capacity of nature to act according to a regular pattern is itself derived from a principle (or principles) that transcend the natural order. The question, then, is what is it that causes the "active potential" of these natures; what is it that makes the nature of fire, for instance, something that burns? The immediate response to this question would be to appeal directly to the hylemorphic substantiation of bodies such that in combination with matter it is the so-called 'substantial form' (*ṣūra jawhariyya*) of fire that gives fire the capacity to burn, thus keeping the epistemic loop confined to natural existence itself. A body which has the substantial form of fire will therefore be said to be in the state of its 'first perfection' (*kamāl awwal*) when it has the "active potential" to burn, even though it has not yet come into contact with another substance and is not therefore actually causing anything to burn. It will however have actualized its 'second perfection' (*kamāl thānī*) and realized its "active potential" (a kind of second potentiality, so to speak) when it does eventually come into contact with another substance, one whose *nature* has the capacity to be burned.

Notwithstanding the importance of hylemorphism and its associated themes, an appeal to just the forms of things will not be sufficient to account for the *metaphysical* understanding of why such natures *per se* exist. Firstly, the *form* of a natural body is just another sense of the meaning of *nature*: a nature *is* the 'natural form' (*ṣūra tabīʿiyya*) of a material substance. It is therefore somewhat tautological to suggest that the interaction of natures is due to their forms since this would be merely begging the question. Secondly,

the interaction of natures and substitution of forms in natural bodies is seen as a way of explaining natural *processes* rather than providing an explanation of what causes natures *per se* to have whatever capacities and potentialities they do *ab initio*. So while the natures of things can sometimes be appealed to in order to explain *processes of change*, whether in substance, quality, quantity, or place, nature itself cannot explain *why* natures exist and *why* they have the capacities or "active potentials" they possess. For this an explanation must ultimately be sought from beyond nature itself.

The "transcendent" principle of nature in Avicenna's metaphysics is the Active Intellect, the so-called "Giver of Forms" (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*), which emanates the natures or natural forms of things onto their matters and in so doing provides the cosmological linkage that sublunary natural substances like the primary elements earth, air, water and fire have with the transcendental orders of being.[79] Yet even the Active Intellect has a principle for its existence and this principle a further principle still, until eventually the chain of causes reaches all the way back to the Supreme Intelligence and First Principle Itself, *viz.* the Necessary Existent. When all of the necessary connections between natural causes and effects in the sublunary realm are related back to their principles and so on and so forth through the metaphysical orders of being, the essence of every natural being shall ultimately reduce to the metaphysical fixity of natures (or forms) "in" God's knowledge, that is, "in" the Necessary of Existence. The operative capacities and regulatory pattern of interaction between natures in the natural world can only therefore be explained by the *necessity* of God's knowledge. Indeed, one could argue that the nature itself is a sublunary manifestation of the fixity of God's knowledge inasmuch that Avicenna is oft-considered to be an outright determinist. Likewise it is also for this reason that God's knowledge "of things" in Avicenna's thought is regarded merely an instance of His own self-intellection. He knows Himself and therefore all the things *necessitated* by His Self, and as a consequence knows all things even "before" those things actually exist. All this because He is 'Necessary of Existence' in Himself.

'Necessity', then, is without question the most operative principle and *conditio sine qua non* of Avicenna's entire philosophy, a fact which had been astutely recognized by Ghazālī and to which the greater part of his attack in the *Tahāfut* was directed albeit through subsidiary questions. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that the metaphysical concept of 'necessity' is the single most important principle of Avicenna's philosophy that Ghazālī specifically regards as the most pernicious aspect of his predecessor's thought, which, if not properly dealt with, causes the heretical infamies that cause the abandonment of the

[79] On Avicenna's 'Giver of Forms', see Janssens, J. (2006).

core beliefs of Islam. If, therefore, it was possible to identify a single theme which preoccupies the theological response of Ghazālī in the *Tahāfut* more than any other, the prime candidate would have to be metaphysical 'necessity'.

Breaking the connection that 'necessity' has with existence, and in particular the existence of God, would therefore create exactly the kind of opening that Ghazālī needs in order to avoid what he regards as the infamies of Avicennan philosophy and its related Neo-Platonic principles and corollaries, thus paving the way for successful endorsement of the "orthodox" Muslim (Ashʿarite) creed. One argument in particular appears in Discussion III and which focusses on doing just this is the claim that *it is possible to know the **existence** of the Necessary Existent without knowing Its **necessity***, which Ghazālī seems to think is the "essence" (*māhiyya*) of the Necessary Being in Avicenna's metaphysics. Hence, as Ghazālī says, "let necessity be other than Him".[80] As we shall see, this single line of Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* will turn out to be the harbinger to a major preoccupation of Rāzī's engagement with Avicenna's philosophy, namely, his unflinching endeavour across the entire range of his scholarly corpus to prove that the existence (*wujūd*) of God is *additional* to His essence (*māhiyya*). As previously noted, this is a type of composition in the Necessary Existent which Avicenna and the *falāsifa* reject, but which the Ashʿarites must however accept.

While Ghazālī portrays each of the five forms by which multiplicity enters into an essence accurately he does not actually proffer any critique of these claims in the Fifth Discussion, the remainder of which has the ostensible appearance of a book of definitions in which the aim is simply to regurgitate the meaning of certain key terms in the *falāsifa*'s theological lexicon, all of which appear to be taken from a combination of Avicennan texts. The Discussion ends with a foreboding promise: "These things divide into matters in which belief is possible […] and those in which belief is not correct […]".[81]Lest there be any confusion or doubt, Ghazālī is preparing his readers for the coherence of Ashʿarite theology and the incoherence of the *falāsifa*'s doctrines by pointing which forms of composition are not only legitimate but *must be affirmed* of the Necessary Being. Each of the remaining Discussions (VI–IX) thus treats of a different form of composition and whether or not it is applicable to the Necessary Existent. These are as follows:

Discussion VI	On the Divine Attributes

[80] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 69.

[81] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 95.

Discussion VII	On the Impossibility of the First being Divisible in terms of Genus and Differentia
Discussion VIII	On the Impossibility of the First having a Quiddity related to Existence
Discussion IX	On the Impossibility of the First not being a Body

Since it is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider all of these Discussions, I am going to focus on just three, two of which can be combined given that Discussions VII and VIII are really just two different ways of considering the question whether or not the First can have a quiddity (*māhiyya*). By considering these topics and their abiding influence on later thinkers, I will argue that there is little prospect of there being an "Avicennan" philosophy of Ashʿarism, both of which I assume are positivistic philosophies each one having a sufficient number of certain core principles which make it incompatible with the other. Indeed, the two systems are so diametrically opposed when it comes to their conception of a being that is Necessary of Existence that representatives of the post-Avicennan Ashʿarite community could not help but challenge the very foundations upon which Avicenna's metaphysical thought is based. Such points of contention need to be identified, carefully articulated and assessed one by one as we proceed in this thesis. It is of no use to anyone anymore to simply state that because Avicenna rejects God's knowledge of particular as particulars that *ipso facto* the Ashʿarite community are opposed to him. Rather, what needs to be done is to engage in a process that identifies the *metaphysical principles* on which this conclusion of Avicenna's thought is based and then assess to what extent post-Avicennan thinkers engaged and responded to these same principles of his thought. Only once the core principles at which the two systems are at loggerheads with one another are identified will it then become possible for us to apprise and gain an understanding of the history of post-classical thought in Islam. It is at the level of principle, therefore, that our study is going to be conducted. For once a principle is determined, the rest is just a matter of its systematic application.

On the Attributes of God (*Tahāfut*, Discussion VI)

The explicit aim of the Sixth Discussion of Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* is to expose the non-demonstrative character of the arguments which the *falāsifa* claim supposedly establish the unicity—that is, simplicity—of the Necessary Existent. In a fashion typical of *kalām* methodology it is not incumbent on Ghazālī to actually provide demonstrations that support the contention that God really possesses the attributes which are traditionally posited alongside His essence in classical Ashʿarism; no specific arguments need be advanced in support of this "positive" goal. Rather, it suffices for him to simply refute those specious arguments which

the *falāsifa* claim establish the simplicity of the First principle, and in doing so advocate the logical plausibility of the divine attributes of God. The aim of Ghazālī's critique is thus to uproot the philosophers' principles ('necessity' being one of the most crucial), not to establish the roots *per se* of Ash'arite theology, though ultimately this is the direction in which the text is heading.[82]

The Discussion (VI) commences with a juxtaposition of opinions on the particular issue being treated in a fashion typical of an author with heresiographical motives. Ghazālī thus starts by noting that the position of the *falāsifa* is precisely the same as that of the Mu'tazila, who are "all agreed on the denial of the attributes".[83] Both groups concede that if God were characterized by eternal attributes He would be composed (*murakkab*) and could not then be 'the Necessary'. From Avicenna's perspective it is easy to see why this is the case. As previously expounded, the principle here is that the Necessary is "Self-Subsistent". If, then, the Necessary Existent were reliant on the attribute Knowledge "to be" a Knower, It would not "be" a Knower because of Its Self (*bi-dhātihi*) but because of something other than Itself. Its "being" would therefore have been caused by that other thing. From an Ash'arite perspective, Ghazālī has no hesitation in confirming this as the correct interpretation of God's Knowledge: God is Knowing *because* He has the attribute of Knowledge. Yet given that the Discussion appears in connection with the unicity of God and not any specific attribute of the divine essence as such, Ghazālī needs to address the issue of simplicity head-on and decide whether or not the positing of eternal attributes beside the essence of the Necessary Existent would constitute a mode of *illegitimate* composition.

The topic can thus be appraised from two separate directions. Against the criticisms of the *falāsifa* Ghazālī must discuss whether or not the affirmation of eternal attributes is a contravention of the rule of simplicity, and if so whether or not this implies that the First is not Self-Subsistent in Itself but dependent on some other thing for the perfection of Its being. Against other theological factions, such as the Mu'tazila and their Shi'a-Imāmī counterparts, he must face the accusation often made of various Christian denominations that the multiplication of eternal things (*ta'addud al-qudamā'*) is tantamount to committing the gravest sin of all in Islam: namely, the sin of associating partners to God (*shirk*). As for the claims of the *falāsifa*, Ghazālī simply rejects the abhorrence of the Necessary Existent being composed by way of entitative attributes. He goes so far as to state that the Necessary Existent *must* be composed in this

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[82] Ghazālī (*Tahāfut*, p. 107) is quite explicit on this point: "We did not plunge into this book in the manner of those who introduce [what is constructive], but in the manner of those who are destroyers and objectors. For this reason, we have named the book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, not *The Introduction to Truth.*"

[83] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 96.

fashion or else It would not be the Necessary Existent. This is because, in his view, rejecting this so-called form of composition would be tantamount to a rejection of God's knowledge and power and will and creation, etc. But this has obviously opened Ghazālī to all kinds of further criticisms, and he himself anticipates what some of these might typically be.

Two such counter-rebuttals are considered in the Sixth Discussion. The first is that if the divine essence exists alongside the divine attributes and each of them is a reality distinct from the other, then either (1) none of the essence nor the attributes requires the other for its existence, or (2) each of them will be dependent on the other, or (3) one of the two will be in need of the other but not in reverse. From an Avicennan perspective all three options are odious because of the fact that there will be *need* at the level of principle, which cannot be true of a being that is called the First Principle since It is Necessary of Existence, and hence completely without need. The first option implies there are two beings that are necessary of existence given that the meaning of 'the Necessary', as Ghazālī prefers to think, is *that which has no cause for its existence*. But this entails that each of the essence and the attributes is something pre-eternal (*qadīm*) according to traditional Ash'arism; for as we have seen *that which has no cause for its existence* did not "begin to exist". But if neither the essence nor the attributes of the Necessary Existent is dependent on the other or on anything else for Its existence then the number of Necessary Existents is presumably considerably more than one, and that according to the Mu'tazila contradicts the core tenet of the Islamic faith which insists upon the absolute numerical unity (*tawḥīd*) of the one eternal being, *viz.* God.

The second option would be just as dumbfounding as the first. It implies that neither the essence nor the attributes of the "Necessary Existent" is necessary of existence *in itself* given that each of them would be dependent on the other for its existence. Yet whatever is 'necessary of existence' is *per definiens* self-subsistent and therefore without need whatsoever. The third option, which from the standpoint of Avicenna's philosophy and the doctrinal beliefs of the Mu'tazila and Shi'a-Imāmī avoids each of the previous two heretical conclusions in favour of a third, is that only the essence of the Necessary Existent is necessary of existence in itself, while the attributes—since they are dependent on the essence for their existence—are not necessary of existence in themselves. To this it would be retorted that whatever is not necessary of existence in itself is only *possible of existence*, which as result would mean that the so-called attributes of the Necessary Existent must therefore have a cause, either the essence itself or something else, wherefore the thing you have called a "Necessary Existent"—namely, the essence and attributes in combination with one another—is connected to a cause; a contradiction given that the definition of 'the Necessary' is *that which has no cause* whatsoever. According to the *falāsifa*, all of the options are invalid

and hence the reason why the Necessary Existent cannot be an essence related to eternal entitative attributes distinct from the essence (*quod erat demonstrandum*).

For Ghazālī, one of the options is not impossible. The correct opinion, in fact, is the third: that "the essence in its subsistence does not need the attributes, but the attribute […] is in *need* of that to which it is ascribed."[84] Before continuing it is important that we are clear on this point: that even though he states that the essence of God is *not dependent* on the attributes for its subsistence this does not mean that it exists independently of them nor that it could ever be possible to imagine a situation where a separation (*infikāk*) between them occurs. On the contrary, the essence of God exists alongside the divine attributes eternally and for all times, and neither of them by themselves exhausts the reality of the being that later Ashʿarite thinkers (*al-muta'akhkhirūn*) call "the Necessary Existent": a name which in their theology denotes the essence *and* co-eternal attributes of God, not merely the former by itself.[85] So while the Ashʿarite Schoolmen do not claim the *essence* of the Necessary Existent to be composited—a position that would fall foul of the arguments of the philosophers—they do unabashedly submit that the Necessary Existent is a composite reality consisting of an eternal essence (*dhāt*) beside which there are eternal entitative attributes (*ṣifāt or maʿānī*). This, the Ashʿarite scholar would argue, is not culpable to the accusation of associating partners to God (*shirk*) because to do so would involve positing two or more divine *essences*, which they say they have not done. In this way, the Ashʿarites also deflect accusations comparing their endorsement of eternal attributes with the Christian affirmation of a triune God having eternal hypostases. So while on the one hand an author like Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī can make the unabashed claim that: " " "The Christians who posit [an essence] and three [eternal] attributes [adhere to a position] that cannot be rejected, for we [the Ashʿarites] also claim that there is no god besides God, the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Knowing, the Living, the Powerful, the Willing—each of which has a meaning other than that which is signified by the others; and this is precisely what is meant by the enumeration of attributes (*taʿaddud al-ṣifāt*). Indeed, if the enumeration of God's attributes was tantamount to disbelief then we may as well reject the whole of the Qur'an and dispense with reason which knows with certainty that the meaning of God being a Knower is necessarily different from God being Powerful or Alive […]" [86] he can still nonetheless claim thatthe two

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[84] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 97 (emphasis added).

[85] As Ghazālī himself explains, "that being which we call 'God' denotes both His essence *and* His attributes" (*Iqtiṣād*, p. 59).

[86] Rāzī, *Tafsīr*,, vol. 11, p. 116.

communities are significantly different in that the Ashʿarites only posit *one* essence with eternal attributes whereas the Christians posit *three* distinct essences.[87] Ashʿarite theology thus subscribes to the unity of God (there is only one divine *essence*) but unlike the philosophers, the Muʿtazilites and their Shīʿī counterparts, they do not claim that God is a simple (*basīṭ*) reality.

Because of these considerations, Ashʿarite thinkers are oft-characterized as saying that the "attributes of God are neither identical to God nor other than Him" (*lā huwa wa lā ghayruhu*), and despite first appearances this is not a contravention of the laws of non-contradiction. They are not identical because the individual parts of a whole can never be identical to the whole itself, yet neither are they other than Him since the whole without one of its parts cannot exist. Mereological considerations of this sort are crucial to the Ashʿarite *weltanschauung*. And whilst precise interpretations of the relation between God's essence and attributes may differ all Ashʿarite thinkers are unanimously agreed on affirming extensionally real distinctions *in divinis*, as opposed to merely intensional distinctions of a conceptual nature arising from the consideration of a being which, *vis-à-vis* "the thing itself" (*nafs al-amr*), is a simple reality. Hence God's power is really something different to His knowledge, and both His knowledge and His power are really distinct from His essence, and all of them together—His essence and His attributes—constitute the reality of the one being that is Necessary of Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*). Thus within the Ashʿarite theological tradition a certain degree of composition in the Necessary Existent is deemed admissible and even necessary, which explains why some forms of composition are religiously speaking legitimate according to Ghazālī.[88]

But the aim of the *Tahāfut* is not to construct a systematic presentation of Ashʿarite theology, but rather to defend it by attacking those counter-principles that would pose a serious challenge to it. Typically, the procedural method by which this defensive strategy is manifested in the *Tahāfut* is that Ghazālī will usually cast doubt on the so-called demonstrative nature of the *falāsifa*'s arguments on any particular issue in order to leave open the possibility of an alternative position on whatever question happens to be the focus in the discussion. The impossibility of multiplicity thus entering into either the concept (*mafhūm*) or reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of the Necessary Being is one such counter-principle which, if demonstratively proven, would undermine the Ashʿarite theological doctrine of God's attributes. So given that Ghazālī has already declared

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[87] Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 11, p. 116.

[88] Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 135: "For if we say 'God, the Exalted,' then we have referred to the divine essence together with the divine attributes, and not to the essence alone." Thus, according to Ghazālī, there is a distinction between the essence of God and His attributes.

the feasibility of certain legitimate forms of composition in the Necessary Existent, he is burdened with the task of treating the following Avicennan counter-claim: namely, that whichever thing is subject to multiplicity (*kathra*) will have an essence which is composed (*murakkab*), and wherever there is composition (*tarkīb*) there will necessarily be a need for a composer (*murakkib*). For Avicenna, *tarkīb* without a *murakkib* is incoherent.

Furthermore, there are two other reasons according to Avicenna why the Necessary Existent cannot be composed. First, any form of composition depends for its existence on the *prior* existence of its parts. According to Avicenna this implies that the composition itself has an existence which is *posterior* to something else, *viz.* the existence of its parts, and must therefore be caused to a lesser or greater extent by that previous existence. Second, the parts by themselves cannot sufficiently explain why the resulting composition has the particular *form* it has. In other words, just as matter by itself cannot explain the complete essence of a material substance (one would need to include the form also), likewise the parts of composite reality cannot by themselves explain that reality. Therefore, since every composition has a form of one particular sort or another, i.e. an arrangement that characterizes the distribution and inter-relationality of its parts, the structural form of the composition *per se* must have an *efficient* cause beyond the parts themselves in order that these may then be arranged according to a particular configuration (*hay'a*). Every composite is therefore possible of existence and must for this reason have an efficient cause which is neither itself nor one of its internal parts.

It is interesting to note that Ghazālī did not confront this challenge as it is presented in these terms anywhere in the *Tahāfut*, and as we are going to see in later parts of this chapter this is a problem that even Ashʿarite theologians themselves cannot agree on. Ultimately, the point of departure is whether one agrees with Abū Ḥāmid Ghazālī or Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, particularly it seems as regards the attribute 'existence'. Nevertheless, Ghazālī initiates the debate by asking whether the cause which is denied of the Necessary Existent is an efficient cause (*ʿilla fāʿiliyya*) or receptive cause (*ʿilla qābiliyya*).[89] Everyone agrees that the essence of God is a self-subsistent reality (*qā'imun bi-nafsihi*) having neither an efficient nor receptive cause for its existence. In traditional *kalām* this means that the essence (*dhāt*) of God (1) did not *begin to exist* and is therefore pre-eternal; and (2) it itself is not the attribute (*ṣifa*) of some prior subject (*mawṣūf*).

Of course, from Avicenna's perspective this question is meaningless. For him it makes no sense to affirm type of cause for a being that is necessary of existence it itself, and thus every cause, whatever its quiddity, must be denied of the Necessary Being.

Furthermore, since every attribute in traditional Ash'arite semantics must have a subject which it qualifies, they all agree on the essence of God being the "receptive cause" of the divine attributes. The problem occurs when one asks the question whether or not the essence of God is an "efficient cause" of the divine attributes. This is controversial: If the essence of God is what *causes the existence* of the divine attributes, then for those Ash'arite theologians who think of efficient causality in terms of temporal origination (*ḥudūth*), of something existing after non-existence, then by this understanding the divine attributes could not be regarded as pre-eternal, which seems contrary to what most Ash'arites consider to be the "orthodox" position which insists on the eternality of God's essence *and* attributes.

It seems, then, that the attributes have no *efficient* cause, and this for Ghazālī is precisely the meaning of the expression 'the Necessary'. But this leads to further problems. If *both* the divine essence and the divine attributes are necessary of existence, then surely this implies there are two are Necessary Beings and not one. Needless to say, such a position can never be Islamic since it would be tantamount to a rejection of the numerical unity of the First principle. For Ghazālī, the solution to this perilous conundrum is to hold the view that the divine attributes are 'necessary' insofar as they have no *efficient* cause for their existence, which therefore implies they are "uncaused" and pre-eternal. However, because the divine attributes are differentiated from the divine essence insofar as they are the attributes *of* a subject, the divine attributes do have a receptive cause (*viz.* the divine essence) and thus their existence is "caused". Ghazālī explains:

> If by 'the necessary of existence' you mean that which has no *efficient* cause, why do you say this? Why is it impossible to say that just as the essence of the Necessary Existent is eternal and without an efficient cause, His attribute is co-eternal with Him, it too having no efficient cause? If what you mean by 'the Necessary Existent' is that which has no *receptive* cause, then according to this interpretation [the divine attribute] is not Necessary of Existence. Nevertheless, it is still pre-eternal and without an efficient cause. What renders this impossible?[90]

According to Ghazālī, then, both God's essence (*dhāt*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*) are eternal *a parte ante* and *a parte post* given that neither His essence nor His attributes has an *efficient cause* for their existence. Yet there is only *one* Necessary Existent because the divine attributes are not separate essences, but particular entities which are forever and eternally joined to a *single* essence: God's essence.

While Ghazālī's response to the original dilemma offers a halfway house between associationism (*shirk*) and the complete "stripping away" (*ta'ṭīl*) of the divine attributes from the divine essence, from another perspective it only plunges Ghazālī further into the depths of Avicenna's aetiology and metaphysics

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[90] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 98.

of causation, and begs the question at the heart of this debate and that is whether or not the divine attributes make the divine essence in itself something *dependent* (*muḥāj*) and therefore *deficient* (*nāqiṣ*) in itself. Accordingly, from an Avicennan perspective, even if one ignored the problems of mereology that occur due to composition, the Ashʿarite position is ostensibly one that makes the divine essence *needy* and *dependent* on the divine attributes for its completion and perfection. In Avicenna's metaphysics, anything which depends on something else for its existence or secondary perfections is by definition a being possible of existence. From Avicenna's point of view, therefore, the Ashʿarite conception of God cannot be the Necessary of Existence.

Ghazālī's first response to this argument is a reversion to his earlier claim that the expression 'necessary of existence' is a vague expression, whose only meaningful significance is that *there is a first cause that lacks an efficient cause*. Accordingly, what demonstration has shown is merely the fact that there must be a First cause to which all causes considered in regress must terminate, and that this First cause must be the Necessary Existent since there is nothing before It that causes its existence—that is, It, unlike all of the other causes, has no efficient cause. In his own words, Ghazālī writes that "[t]he termination of the regress is possible by one [existent] that has eternal attributes that lack an efficient cause for [their existence], just as there is no efficient cause for [the existence of] His essence". According to this explanation then the divine attributes do not have an *efficient* cause, but they do have a receptive cause. Now, what Ghazālī has to say next is rather significant. Referring to the divine attributes, he writes: "These, however, are established in His Essence (*mutaqarriratan fī dhātihi*)".[91] The question that immediately strikes the reader here is why Ghazālī has all of a sudden, seemingly, placed the attributes of God "in" His essence, which to me appears to be the very antithesis of the position he wants to defend, namely, that the attributes of God are *additional* to His essence (*zā'idun ʿalā dhātihi*) as stated at the top of the Discussion. One possibility is that the expression "in His essence" (*fī dhātihi*) refers not to the essence *per se* but to the Necessary Existent. And though this would be imprecise usage of the word '*dhāt*' it may nevertheless be construed in this signification. However, the context of what immediately follows rules this out as the correct interpretation, for as Ghazālī portends, "the attribute is in His essence but His essence does not subsist in another".[92] The word "in" here cannot be an equivocal term, and thus when Ghazālī says "His essence does not subsist *in* another" he is speaking of God's essence literally not being in another.

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[91] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 98.

[92] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 98 (Marmura modified).

Be this as it may, Ghazālī adds little more besides to explain why the divine attributes do not undermine the 'necessity' of the Necessary Existent beyond the fact that they do not have an efficient cause. His response is simply that this situation is not impossible, for demonstration merely requires that causes and effects terminate in a being(s) that has no efficient cause for its existence, and neither the essence nor attributes has an efficient cause for their existence. However, as I have alluded, Ghazālī appears to be toying with the philosophers' notion of a 'Necessary Being' by deliberately equivocating the potential ambiguities of this term. If asked whether now, given that neither the divine essence nor the divine attributes has an efficient cause, there is more than one Necessary Existent, his reply would simply be that since the divine essence by itself is the only thing that lacks both an efficient and receptive cause for its existence, that it is the *only* Necessary Existent. Hence there is only *one* Necessary Being. But if then he is asked whether the attributes are also Necessary of Existence, his reply is in the affirmative and something along the lines of: "Yes, they are, since 'the Necessary' is that which has no efficient cause." If pressed further and asked which of these two is the precise meaning of 'the Necessary', the reply he gives is that the term is of your invention, not mine, so "let the term 'necessity of existence' be cast aside, for one can be misled by it".[93] Clearly, the notion of 'necessity' is a problematic one for Ghazālī.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that all of this was true and there is some genuine ambiguity in Avicenna's notion of 'necessity'. But surely the question whether or not the divine essence *needs* the divine attributes in order to be completed is a legitimate one that cannot be ignored as simply a problem of semantics. Not according to Ghazālī, for whom the question as we have posed it is "rhetorical prattle feeble in the extreme" (*kalām waʿẓī fī ghāyat al-rakāka*).[94] Such accusations, he argues, cannot be taken seriously because they represent deceptive forms of wordplay which falsely conjure meanings that have no basis in reality but instead try to mislead and cause confusion (*talbīs*). If, by definition, as Ghazālī states, the Perfect being is the one being which has the attributes of perfection for all eternity, how can the Perfect be deficient by possessing the very things that constitute its perfection? In other words, to dispossess the Necessary Being of those attributes which make It the Perfect being is precisely what would cause Him to be deficient, not the other way round.

The Perfect being must therefore possess the attributes of perfection, and that according to Ghazālī is a perfectly legitimate form of composition (*tarkīb*) in God religiously speaking. While Ghazālī's remarks

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[93] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 98 (Marmura modified).

[94] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 100.

therefore reaffirm his theological position they do not address the *metaphysical* problem at hand. Regardless of the fact that Ashʿarite theology makes it incumbent on all duty-bound adherents of that religious creed (*mukallafīn*) to accept and affirm God's eternal attributes, the question regarding whether or not something composed (*murakkab*) requires a cause for its existence *as a composed reality* and not merely in terms of its individual components still remains. Suppose, therefore, for the sake of argument, that neither the divine essence nor the divine attributes have an efficient cause for their *individual* existences, and further still let us suppose that an essence which has eternal attributes added to it is not rendered 'needy' by the addition of said attributes. Nevertheless, having granted that all of this is possible for a being which is necessary of existence in itself, Ghazālī must conclude that God is a composite reality and therefore must reject the unicity of the First principle. All of this Ghazālī assents to in the *Tahāfut.* But now comes the fundamental question: Since anything which is composed (*murakkab*) must have a composer (*murakkib*), the Ashʿarite conception of a Necessary Existent must *perforce* also have a composer. So even if, for the sake of argument, one accepted the eternal and uncaused existence of the parts comprising the Necessary Existent, still one would have to provide an explanation as to why—as ʿAllāma Ḥillī expounds[95]—the parts are conjoined and combined in the precise way they are and not just separated in existence. Logically speaking this can only be fulfilled by a cause which is beyond the individual members of the reality which is composed, and must therefore be an *external* cause. Alternatively, one could argue that the divine essence itself is what causes the divine attributes, in which case the divine attributes have an efficient cause and are therefore temporally originated according to the rules set out by the *mutakallimūn*. As discussed, Ghazālī rejects this option. Perhaps the claim of later Ashʿarites such as ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Ṭūsī that the "whole" is merely the existence of the parts themselves is one way of getting round this objection, but that takes beyond the purpose of this study.

On the "Essence" of the Necessary Existent (*Tahāfut*, Discussion VII–VIII)

In this section I want to consider two of the other ways in which multiplicity is said to enter into the essence of things from the original list presented by Ghazālī in the Fifth Discussion of the *Tahāfut.* Specifically, I

[95] For a detailed discussion of the unique properties of a Necessary Being including the absence of any composition, see Ḥillī, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, pp. 99–108.

want to look at (1) division into genus and specific difference and (2) division into essence (*māhiyya*) and existence (*wujūd*).

According to Avicenna, one of the reasons why the "essence" of the Necessary Existent cannot be divided into a genus and specific difference is because to do so would entail composition by way of intellectual parts. In Avicenna's philosophy the First principle commands the purest and most noble form of simplicity. This means that not only is the Necessary Existent indivisible into quantitative parts (i.e. extramentally) but qualitative parts (i.e. mentally) also. In short, the Necessary Existent cannot be divisible in any sense of the term. As a consequence, the Necessary Existent cannot be defined—It has no *essential* definition (*ḥadd*)—since every definition is a type of division (*qisma*) which divides a concept into its proximate genus and specific difference. But since the First is a simple reality It cannot be divided into a genus or specific difference, which is why It cannot be defined. Furthermore, given the way he interprets the metaphysics of causation Avicenna reasons that anything possessed of an "essence" (*māhiyya*) must necessarily be something caused. This is because, according to his lexicon, "to possess an essence" means "to have an essence *distinct* from existence". As previously mentioned, this implies that the so-called essence-existence distinction only applies to contingent realities whose individual existences are contained within the comprehension of their quiddities. And since, therefore, existence is removed from the concept of a thing's essence, this necessarily implies a *cause* for its existence if it is an existent (*mawjūd*). On this understanding, anything which has a true quiddity (*māhiyya*) does so because its existence is distinct from it and *additionally* related to it. Such a being (*mawjūd*) must be possible of existence since its existence must have been emanated onto that thing's quiddity, and thus it is something caused (*maʿlūl*).

Avicenna encapsulated this idea in the epigrammatically formulaic remark '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*', which loosely speaking can for now be translated as saying that, *vis-à-vis* the Necessary Existent, "Its essence is Its existence". This is a historically poignant remark and no doubt the single most important idea in Avicenna's metaphysics, but unfortunately it has been subjected to all manner of confusions both in mediaeval and modern times. As a reference to the "being" of the Necessary Existent it literally means that Its *māhiyya*, "essence" or quiddity, is the fact of Its *inniyya*, "existence" loosely speaking. However, as I will show, not only is the term *māhiyya* problematic as a concept in Arabic philosophy, it is further compounded by the general tendency among Western scholars to translate it as "essence". This is unfortunate given that the term "essence", from the Latin *essentia*, truly speaking is a translation of the Arabic term *dhāt* not *māhiyya*. Strictly speaking, therefore, there is no *essence*-existence distinction in Avicenna. In contrast to much of modern scholarship, therefore, which predominantly

focusses on the term *inniyya* (or *anniyya*) and what it means, I will argue that the precise connotation of both terms including *māhiyya* need to be carefully understood in order to avoid the same historical and modern confusions of what Avicenna actually means when he says that the Necessary Existent has no "essence" (*māhiyya*) or that It has an "essence" (*māhiyya*) which is Its existence (*inniyya*). Since a being the "essence" of which is Its existence cannot be the same as a being that has no "essence" whatsoever—both of which are positions that Avicenna explicitly mentions are true of the Necessary Existent—the term "essence" (*māhiyya*) is as significant as the term "existence" (*inniyya*) if not more important. The question whether or not the Necessary Existent has an "essence" (*māhiyya*) is one of the most important questions in Avicenna's metaphysics albeit that has also perplexed many of his readers both in the subsequent Islamic and Latin traditions. In modern Thomistic scholarship, authors like Gilson and Macierowsky characterise Avicenna's position as an ambivalent one and sometimes even paradoxical.[96] Our answer to this quandary will be given in full when we come round to considering the writings and thought of Avicenna's prime commentator in the Islamic world, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī.

That Avicenna endorses both interpretations can easily be seen in the fact that whenever he characterizes the Necessary Existent as a being whose "essence" is identical to Its "existence" he often glosses this as also meaning that It is a being of "sheer existence" (*mujarrad al-wujūd*), thereby conveying the idea of an existence which is unrelated to an "essence" or anything else besides. Clearly, unless there be a contradiction, Avicenna reckons that the Necessary Existent is at one and the same time a being of "sheer existence" and a being whose "essence" is Its "existence" (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*). For now, it suffices to mention that although Avicenna portrays the identity of the Necessary Existent in terms of "sheer existence", it needs to be stressed that this does not refer to being *simpliciter* or 'absolute existence' (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). For "sheer existence" in Avicenna's own words is a qualified form of existence albeit one which is qualified by a negative condition (*bi-sharṭ lā*), whereas '*absolute* existence' or being *simpliciter* is, as these expressions imply, existence *without any condition whatsoever* (*lā bi-sharṭ*).[97]

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[96] Macierowsky, E. M. (1988)

[97] "He is sheer existence *with the condition* of negating privation and all other descriptions of Him… The meaning of my statement: "He is sheer existence with the condition of negating privation and all additional [attributes] of Him" is *not that this is absolute existence* [i.e. being *simpliciter*] which is something shared in common [by all existents]. If there is a being with this description then it would not be the sheer existent with the condition of negation, but rather the existent *without the condition* of affirmation. I mean, regarding the First, that He is the existent *with the condition* of no added composition, whereas this other is the existent without the condition of addition. For this reason, the universal is predicated of all things [because it has no condition attached], whereas that [existence which is sheer

Ghazālī's treatment of these topics in Discussions VII–VIII of the *Tahāfut* are properly connected to the themes we have just mentioned in Avicenna's thought. Discussion VII addresses the question of intellectual division, a type of qualitative division, in terms of genus and specific difference. By contrast, Discussion VIII deals with the simple reality of the Necessary Existent, *i.e.*, Avicenna's description of It being "sheer existence". As we have seen, each of these topics is part of a single train of thought in Avicenna's metaphysics which begins with the premise that the Necessary Existent cannot be composed (*lā tarkīb lahu*) and results in the conclusion that It has no "essence" (*lā māhiyya lahu*). Thus for Avicenna the lack of composition dovetails into the idea that the First principle lacks an "essence".

As Ghazālī states at the top of the Seventh Discussion, "He has no definition, since definition is formed in terms of genus and differentia. And that which has no composition has no definition…".[98] Ghazālī also recognizes a second reason after composition why the so-called "essence" of the Necessary Existent cannot be defined. This relates to the peculiarity of the property 'existence' which particularizes the existence of the Necessary Existent. If the Necessary Existent were to be defined in terms of genus and differentia, its generic part would have to be 'existence' and 'necessity' the differentia. However, as Ghazālī correctly observes, "existence is not a genus" according to Avicenna, and cannot therefore "enter into the 'essences' of things".[99] So while all true genera are deemed to be essential universals and therefore constitutive parts of the essences of the things they define, Avicenna's so-called "essence"-existence makes existence a non-essential or extra-concomitant factor of essences. Accordingly, since "participation in existence is not participation in a genus",[100] the only possible genus that could have been postulated as a genus for the Necessary Existent turns out not to be a genus at all; hence another reason why the Necessary Existent cannot be defined. As Ghazālī paraphrases, the conclusion from all this is that:

> There is no *māhiyya* for the First apart from 'the necessity of existence'. Thus 'the 'necessity of existence' in itself is a true nature and a *māhiyya*, belonging to Him and none other beside Himself. If, then, 'the necessity of existence' belongs only to Him, He does not share [in it] with another. So

existence] cannot be predicated of anything that has addition" (Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, pp. 276–277; Marmura modified).

[98] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 110.

[99] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 111.

[100] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 111. As expounded below, Ṭūsī explains this as referring to the generic notion of existence, *al-wujūd al-ʿāmm*, not the individual existence (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*) of the Necessary Existent which, according to Ṭūsī, explains why Ghazālī and later Ashʿarites failed to accurately understand Avicenna's '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle.

> He is not differentiated from [the other] by a specific difference and consequently He has no definition.[101]

Ghazālī's rebuttal to this argument is in many ways typical of what has already been stated in previous sections of the *Tahāfut*. He first rules out the impossibility of this mode of composition and accuses Avicenna and the philosophers of failing to provide a positive demonstration to this effect. He also repeats his claim that demonstration only proves the finitude of causes and that the division of a thing in terms of genus and difference is not equivalent to a thing's division into its essence and its attributes. If, then, by appeal to the notion of 'the necessary of existence' the philosophers conjecture that a being which is composed of intellectual parts is made subsistent by them, thus making it a 'contingent' reality, then this is a problem that only the philosophers need deal with because the term 'the necessary of existence' is "obscure". For Ghazālī, the confusion that arises and leads the *falāsifa* to reject legitimate forms of composition in the Necessary Existent occurs because of the imprecision of their modal concepts, and for this reason he recommends—not for the first time—that "the expression 'necessary of existence' should be abandoned".[102]

The Seventh Discussion pursues a second but nonetheless similarly related line of argument which Ghazālī's thinks points to a further contradiction in the philosophers' assertion that the First cannot be composed in terms of genus and specific difference, because of which they think It cannot possess an "essence". Namely: If the Necessary Existent is an Intellect[103] then It will share the quality of 'being denuded from matter' (*mujarrad ʿan al-mādda*) with the other so-called Intellects in the emanationist scheme inherited from Plotinus. This being the case, either the principle of the Necessary Existent's uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) is denied (since there are now a multiple number of intellects all having the property of 'being denuded from matter') or the Necessary Existent must be composed of an uncommon factor that differentiates It from the other Intellects in the genus (or quasi-genus) 'being denuded from matter'. The philosophers, if they are to continue maintaining their belief in a First Principle, apparently have no way of

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[101] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 112 (Marmura modified).

[102] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 114.

[103] The First cannot be divided into quantitative parts. The reason for this is twofold: that It is an Intellect and because of the fact that such divisions are possible only when a thing has matter. By definition, since an intellect is 'a being denuded of matter' (*mujarrad ʿan al-mādda*), the First cannot be characterized by the divisions that accrue as a result of being associated with matter.

escaping the implication that the Necessary Existent must therefore be composed.[104] The contrast of options that Ghazālī presents is therefore stark: the philosophers must either accept the composition of the *one* Necessary Existent or else confess to the numerical multiplication of Necessary Existents. Implicitly the *falāsifa* must therefore either concede to the creed of Ashʿarism or else brace themselves for the wrath of divine chastisement which their polytheism (*shirk*) deserves.

Arguably the highest point of the *Tahāfut*'s treatment of the underlying metaphysical principles of Avicenna's thought occurs in the Eighth Discussion wherein Ghazālī begins to treat his doctrine of the Necessary Existent being "sheer existence". The entire Discussion here may be construed as Ghazālī's "commentary" on Avicenna's formulaic principle '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*'. One of the reasons which we have noted why Avicenna denied the Necessary Existent has an "essence" was because of the general principle that all things possessed of an "essence" have existence emanated onto them and are therefore caused. This result comes as a natural consequence of the aetiological precepts upon which Avicenna's "essence-existence" distinction is based. Things that have an "essence" apart from "existence" must have existence emanated onto them, existence being an accident which is additionally related to the essence of contingent beings. But the Necessary Existent has no cause, least of all an efficient cause, and cannot therefore have existence additionally related to Its "essence", but must rather be an existent "the essence of which is Its existence" (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*).

For an Ashʿarite this statement is purely nonsensical. Semantically, every 'existent' (*mawjūd*) for them is some independent entity (*dhāt*) possessing the attribute or property of 'existence' (*dhū l-wujūd*). By itself, existence cannot exist. It is not a 'thing' (*shay'*) *per se* but the attribute or property (*ṣifa*) which an existent thing has, just as 'knowledge' is the attribute or property which a knowing thing has. In the same way therefore that nothing can be a 'knower' without having the entitative property of 'knowledge', likewise nothing can be an 'existent' without having the property of 'existence', God included. As long as one remains cognizant of the fact that His existence has no efficient cause, there is nothing disrespectful or untoward in referring to the existence of the Necessary Existent as a "consequent" or "necessary concomitant" of His essence according to Ghazālī.[105] If Avicenna or anyone else is distressed by this and

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[104] As later thinkers point out, this argument is horribly weak. The property of 'being denuded of matter' is a privation (*min al-salb*) and cannot therefore impinge on the essence of the Necessary Being. Indeed, according to Avicenna, the Necessary Existent can be described by negative (*salbiyyāt*) and relational (*iḍāfāt*) terms, and the reason for this, as Ṭūsī shall explain, is because each of these is a 'being of reason' (*iʿtibār ʿaqlī*) which do not refer in extension.

[105] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 116.

thinks the semantics of Ashʿarite theology implies that 'the Necessary' would not be 'necessary of existence', then that as Ghazālī says "is a return to the source of confusion in using the expression 'necessary existence'."[106] Indeed, the significance of what Ghazālī says next could not have been mistaken by his successors in the Ashʿarite tradition.

> We say that He has a reality and an "essence" and that this reality exists in the sense of not being nonexistent or negated, and *its existence is related to it*.[107]

There is no doubt that this is a historically speaking remarkable statement. The first thing that ought to be highlighted is that the kind of ontological presumptions which undergird Ghazālī's statement run against the grain of Avicennan metaphysics entirely. If, as Ghazālī states, the essence *qua* itself "exists in the sense of not being nonexistent and negated", then surely the question arises as to why it needs yet a further existence to be related to it. Put differently, if the essence exists because existence is related to *it*, this itself begs the question whether the essence considered *by itself* is an existent or not. There are only two possibilities here: Either 'existence' is an equivocal concept (*mushtarak lafẓī*) or 'being' (*thubūt*) is not identical to 'existence' (*wujūd*). As we shall see, these ideas are going to be seized upon by thinkers like Ibn 'Arabī and Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, the latter of whom proffers lengthy arguments to show why 'existence'—whatever that means—is 'superadded' onto the essence of the Necessary Existent. It will be left to our philosopher Ṭūsī to then expose from an Avicennan perspective the kind of metaphysical fallacies upon which this sort of Ashʿarite led thinking is based. Here, I simply want to highlight that *every* being according to Ghazālī (and Rāzī) has existence superadded to it, including God.

The second corresponding point Ghazālī mentions is that the Necessary Existent must have a 'reality' or 'true nature' (*ḥaqīqa*) which, like every other existent thing, is a reality to which existence is related or superadded. Hence the reason why the "essence" of the Necessary cannot be identical to Its existence, since a being (*mawjūd*) which does not have an "essence" is *no* being (*mawjūd*) at all, period. For as Ghazālī explains, "there is never an existent without a reality" (*lā mawjūd illā wa lahu ḥaqīqa*).[108] From an exegetical perspective it is therefore clear that Ghazālī ostensibly equates Avicenna's denial of a *māhiyya* with the denial of a *ḥaqīqa vis-à-vis* the Necessary Existent. Later on, Ṭūsī is going to point out why this is a false reading and misinterpretation of Avicenna. In the meantime, it is due to the traditional Ashʿarite

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[106] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 116.

[107] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 116. (Marmura modified.)

[108] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 117.

method of understanding the relation between subject and predicate-terms that Ghazālī forbids Avicenna's formulaic identification of God's essence and existence (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*), adding that "existence without a quiddity *and a reality* is unintelligible"[109]. As Frank shows in his marvellous study of the primary entities within the classical ontological theories of Ashʿarite theology, this way of understanding what existent things (*mawjūdāt*) are is typically characteristic of the earlier Ashʿarite Schoolmen.[110]

Indeed, lest it be retorted that Ghazālī does not equate *māhiyya* with *ḥaqīqa*, the following remark suffices to quash such doubts:

> The negation of "essence" (*māhiyya*) *is a negation of reality* (*ḥaqīqa*); and if the *reality* of an existent thing is negated existence becomes incomprehensible. It as though [Avicenna] has said, "There is existence without there being an existent thing" and that is contradictory.[111]

The logical conclusion of Ghazālī's inference can be shown as follows:

All existent things have a *māhiyya* and a *ḥaqīqa*
Avicenna says that the Necessary Existent has no *māhiyya* and no *ḥaqīqa*
Therefore: Avicenna says that the Necessary Existence is not an existent thing

Explicitly, this reads that Avicenna's so-called Necessary Existent is not a *real* existent thing. Implicitly, it invites the inference that Avicenna is an infidel (*kāfir*). For Ghazālī, there are simply no existent things or beings that do not possess a *māhiyya* and a *ḥaqīqa*, terms which he has obviously (though uncritically) assumed are synonymous according to Avicenna. Discussion VIII ends with a recapitulation of Avicenna's suggestion that 'necessity' itself is the "essence" of the Necessary Existent. But, as noted on several occasions now, Ghazālī is acutely averse to this concept.

> There is no meaning to the term 'necessary' other than the denial of an [efficient] cause, and that is a negation by which the reality of an essence cannot be made subsistent […] However, if necessity is [something] additional to existence, then multiplicity [in the divine] would ensue; and, if not additional, how can it be the quiddity when existence is not a quiddity? Such is the case with whatever is not additional to the existence.[112]

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[109] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 117. (Marmura modified.)

[110] Frank, R. (1982)

[111] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 118; idem., *Tahāfut*, p. 118, "For the denial of quiddity *is the denial of reality*. Nothing remains with the denial of reality save the verbal utterance 'existence', having basically no referent when not related to a quiddity."

[112] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 118.

The argument contained in this passage is purposely designed to confute Avicenna's metaphysics of Necessary Existence and point out its paradoxes. If Avicenna believes that 'necessity' is the "essence" of the Necessary Existent, then in itself this would lead to the antithetical result of First principle being composed given that 'necessity' and "existence" are two things not one. On the other hand, given that 'necessity', according to Ghazālī, means "the denial of an [efficient] cause", 'necessity' would be a privation and not a positive meaning. But nothing which has an essence can be characterized by a negative meaning. Hence 'necessity' cannot be the "essence" of the First principle. So it follows that if existence by itself cannot be the "essence" of anything, 'necessity', the modal *qualification of* existence, cannot be the "essence" of anything either. Avicenna's assertion that 'necessity' is the "essence" of the Necessary Existent can only be true therefore if 'necessity' is added to the existence of the Necessary Existent in the form of a non-privative meaning, which perforce introduces multiplicity in the Necessary Existent. Whichever way one looks at it the Ghazālian concept of a Necessary Existent cannot be simple.

CHAPTER 2

SHAHRASTĀNĪ'S ATTACK ON AVICENNA'S NOTIONS OF EXISTENCE (*WUJŪD*), NECESSITY (*WUJŪB*) AND THE NECESSARY OF EXISTENCE (*WĀJIB AL-WUJŪD*)

Introduction

Abū l-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm Shahrastānī is a renowned figure in the history of mediaeval Islamic thought and a personality whose reputation as a high-ranking scholar of the twelfth century common era rests for the majority part on two main works: a critically detailed account and heresiographical survey of "the doctrinal opinions of all the world's people" entitled *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, and a textbook of dialectical theology written predominantly with the seeming aim and purpose of supporting the Ashʿarite School of *kalām* entitled *Nihāyat al-aqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*. This latter work bears close connection to a third work entitled *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa* dedicated to Majd al-Dīn Abū l-Qāsim ʿAlī b. Jaʿfar al-Mūsawī, chief (*naqīb*) of the Twelver-Shīʿī community at Tirmidh in modern day Uzbekistan.[1] The *Muṣāraʿa* is a stylistically distilled version of the much lengthier *Nihāya*, extracting from it some of the attacks which are specifically targeted on Avicenna's philosophy into the form of a standalone work.[2] As such, the *Muṣāraʿa* was the next major work to be authored in the *Tahāfut* genre of texts which, like its Ghazālian antecedent, aimed at refuting the major philosophical suppositions of Avicennan thought and those aspects of Avicenna's metaphysics

[1] All references to this work are based on the critically edited Arabic text in Madelung, W. and Toby Mayer (2001). This work is henceforth cited as Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, and all page references refer to the Arabic part of the text. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[2] In their translation of Shahrastānī's *Muṣāraʿa*, Madelung and Mayer do not seem to be aware that the *Muṣāraʿa* is a much loosely condensed version of Shahrastānī's *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*. A number of the criticisms against Avicenna which Shahrastānī mentions in this work are repeated, sometimes verbatim, in the *Muṣāraʿa*. Though the *Muṣāraʿa* is a much lengthier and more focussed critique of Avicenna's philosophy, the basis of the text is nevertheless coming out of the *Nihāyat*. Of course the major difference between the two texts is that the *Muṣāraʿa* has a distinctively Ismaʿili sub-text, as Ṭūsī and Madelung/Mayer point out.

which Shahrastānī believed constituted its foremost heterodoxies.[3] Duly responding to the challenge it posed against the now predominant form of philosophy in the Islamic East, the *Muṣāraʿa* of Shahrastānī provoked two major thinkers of the *philosophical* Avicennan School to write refutations against it, one by ʿUmar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī and another by our philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, both of which were given the title *Maṣāriʿ al-muṣāriʿ* by their respective authors.

In case of Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* the main procedural principle had been to show that the philosophers' arguments were non-demonstrative, that their claims did not follow the strict epistemological yardstick which the philosophers claimed for them. In Shahrastānī's case the *Muṣāraʿa* makes a much bolder claim: not only did the arguments of the philosophers not live up to the heights of demonstration (*burhān*), they are actually *self-contradictory*. If Ghazālī's aim was *tahāfut*, Shahrastānī's is *tanāquḍ*. Shahrastānī thus highlights six problematic areas of Avicenna's which he claims are self-contradictory in nature. These are discussed under the following general headings:

Issue I:	On Enumerating the Divisions of Being
Issue II:	On the Existence of the Necessary Being
Issue III:	On the Unity of the Necessary Being
Issue IV:	On the Necessary Being's Knowledge
Issue V:	On the Origination of the World
Issue VI:	Other *Problemata*

In this chapter I consider some of the criticisms levelled at Avicenna's thought by Shahrastānī in Issues II and III, saying something of the criticisms he mentions in Issue I for the next chapter on Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī. My aim here is twofold. Not only do I want to consider the criticisms in and of themselves, I also want to point out the continuity of themes, presumptions, and objectives which Ashʿarite and non-Ashʿarite critics of Avicenna's thought shared in common since the time of al-Junayd and Ghazālī. In doing this I will then show how Ṭūsī's "defence" of Avicenna's metaphysics

[3] As Madelung and Mayer (2001: 8ff) point out, the two responses to Avicenna's philosophy have distinctly different motives.

is mindful of each of these earlier criticisms, and wonderfully his solution to them reinvigorates the importance of Avicenna's general metaphysics in subsequent Islamic thought.

On Avicenna's inability to prove the existence of a Necessary Being (*Muṣāraʿa*, Issue II)

Issue II consists of four contradictions (sing. *tanāquḍ*) which according to Shahrastānī undermine Avicenna's attempts to prove the existence of a Necessary Being. In fact it is perhaps more accurate to say that Shahrastānī's primary goal in this Issue is not so much focused on the proof itself, but the precise understanding of the object of proof, *viz.* the Necessary Existent. So rather than being a critique in the primary instance of the proof of such a being, Shahrastānī attacks Avicenna on the notion of there even being such an existent as the one whose existence Avicenna supposedly claims he has proven. Strictly speaking, therefore, Shahrastānī's criticisms are levelled at Avicenna's understanding of what the Necessary Being is and not the proof itself.

First Contradiction

Shahrastānī begins by first citing some of Avicenna's key statements about the existence of a being which is necessary of existence in itself. The majority of these are points which we have already discussed in the previous chapter, and as Ṭūsī points out are mainly derived from the metaphysical part of Avicenna's *Najāt*.[4] Quoting Avicenna, Shahrastānī reports that there can be no doubt that some form of existence necessarily exists, and that existence *per se* may either be necessary of existence in itself or necessary of existence by another and only possible of existence in itself. Continuing with the words of Avicenna, Shahrastānī then cites the passage of the *Najāt* which previously I said is crucial because it is the one in which Avicenna explains why a being which is necessary of existence in itself cannot be comprised of elements (*mabādiʾ*) that combine to make the Necessary Existent, the reason being that the Necessary Existent—by definition—is a self-subsistent being and not dependent therefore on anything else for its existence. By contrast, a being which compartmented of combined elements can only become existent by having its existence grounded on their *prior* existence, as previously discussed. Hence the reason why, according to Avicenna, a

[4] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 46[2].

being consisting of combined elements cannot be self-subsistent but must instead be something which is necessarily caused by something else.

Shahrastānī's ensuing discussion about the existence of the Necessary Existent seems therefore to be focussed on the aspect of divine unicity which results from divine aseity; and as Shahrastānī points out, Avicenna maintains that the expression 'Necessary of Existence' (*wājib al-wujūd*) does not denote any form of real distinction *in divinis*. Put another way this means that "the Necessary Existent is necessary of existence from all Its aspects" (*huwa wājib al-wujūd min jamīʿ jihātihi*). Next, Shahrastānī gives a series of Avicennan arguments for why the species (*nawʿ*) 'the necessary of existence' can only have one referent, and why even if hypothesized as a species there can only be one Necessary Existent. Finally, he ends by regurgitating Avicenna remarks on the so-called "essence"-existence distinction and its implications insofar as the metaphysics of causation is concerned, remarking that every being which is possible of existence (*mumkin al-wujūd*) has an equal relation to being and non-being. By the end of his report (*ḥikāya*), Shahrastānī concludes by saying that "the cause which preponderates all possible things [into existence] must be something non-possible in respect of itself and therefore Necessary in Itself and extraneous to the chain of possible beings".[5]

From this point forwards begins Shahrastānī's attack on all of that which has just been reported on Avicenna's behalf from the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Najāt*. According to Shahrastānī there are four contradictory statements, the first of which he explains is as follows:

> His statement [p_1] "The 'necessity of existence' may either be due to itself or due to another" asserts the generality of the 'necessity of existence' for both divisions, and his statement [p_2] "It is not possible that two Necessary Existents share the 'necessity of existence' such that the 'necessity of existence' is something general for each of them as either a genus or inseparable accident" are *two contradictory statements*. For as long as a meaning does not become general it cannot divide, and if it is divided then it would have been made general. It is for this reason that he may be excused for making one of the two necessities a necessity due to itself and the other necessity due to something self. In this case [necessity] is either an essential differentia or an inseparable accident; and were it not for their generality he could not have been excused.[6]

In other words, Avicenna believes that each of the following propositions is true:

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[5] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 25[5-7].

[6] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 25[10-15].

p_1: The 'necessity of existence' may either be due to itself or due to another.

p_2: The 'necessity of existence' is neither a genus nor an inseparable accident.

Now, in Avicenna's metaphysics the first proposition (p_1) says that being *qua* being divides into two modal classes of being, namely, the Necessary (*al-wājib*) and the contingent (*al-mumkin*), and as such is the ontological bedrock of Avicenna's metaphysical scheme without which there is no Avicennan philosophy. By contrast, the second proposition (p_2) guarantees that neither 'existence' nor 'necessity' is the real part of the Necessary Existent or for that matter any other existent thing (*mawjūd*). But according to Shahrastānī at least one of these propositions must be false since they are seemingly contradictory (*mutanāqiḍayn*). The reason for this is that in the case of the first proposition 'necessity' is taken as a term of division (*maqsam*, literally "a place of division"), i.e. something that can be logically divided, and therefore is a genus or quasi-genus term; but the second proposition says that 'necessity' is *not* a genus or quasi-genus term. This according to Shahrastānī is a clear contradiction. The consequence of this would be tragic for Avicenna's metaphysics: either being (*wujūd*) cannot be divided into the two modal categories which are the Necessary and the contingent, or the Necessary Being is *perforce* composed and not simple,just as Ghazālī had argued before in the *Tahāfut*.

Avicenna could not have made such a basic error, however, and as Ṭūsī explains the two propositions would only be contradictory truly speaking if their subject and predicate-terms were exactly one and the same. This however is not the case since in the first proposition the subject-term (*viz.* 'the necessity of existence') is unqualified (*ghayr muqayyad*), whereas the same subject in the second proposition has been qualified with the condition that it is "not capable of being predicated of two entities". In more technical terms this means that the subject-term of one of the propositions is *considered* without any condition (*lā bi-sharṭ*) but with a negative condition (*bi-sharṭ lā*) in the other, and hence the same subject-term is not being predicated with the same consideration (*iʿtibār*). Furthermore, as Ṭūsī explains, a true contradiction also requires that the condition (*sharṭ*) of the subject-term in each of the propositions be identical; but since the subject-term of p_2 has the negative condition ofnon-predicability while $p1$ has the non-conditioned possibility of being predicable albeit unequally, , p_1 and p_2 cannot be contradictory statements. Furthermore, as Ṭūsī states, the 'necessity of existence' in the first proposition is "not equally predicated of that which is necessary in itself and that which is necessary by another", thus implying that 'necessity', like 'existence', is predicated by

analogy (*bi-l-tashkīk*), i.e. unequally of its subjects.[7] As this study proceeds it will become clear that the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) is the *sine qua non* of Avicenna's metaphysics of being and is therefore, accordingly perhaps, the single most emphasized point in Ṭūsī refutations of Avicenna's critics.

The underlying assumption of Shahrastānī's critique then is his belief that only species and genus-terms are capable of division, and as Ṭūsī shows this is false. His clarification is the straightforward idea that even though all divisions require terms which are generalized, not all generalized terms are divided *equally* into their divisions.

> The generalization [of a term] may either be *with* equality or *without* equality. If [in his rebuttal] he [Shahrastānī] intends the first meaning then that cannot be granted; for a meaning may be divided without it being generalized *with* equality but instead by way of analogy [*bi-l-tashkīk*]. For example, if the meaning of 'blackness' is divided into [blackness] which is present in crows and [blackness] which is present in ash, then in that case the connotations [of blackness] will be [slightly] different according to the consideration of their meanings. Hence not every division requires the generalization of a meaning *with* equality.[8]

Ṭūsī's remarks here point to an important rule of term-logic concerning the comprehension (*mafhūm*) and predication (*ḥaml*) of terms, but I will postpone its discussion for later. All that need be taken from this for the time-being is that since the 'necessity of existence' is not predicated *equally* of its subjects it cannot be a genus or quasi-genus term, and is not a part therefore of the things of which it is predicated; for genus and species must be predicated with uniformity and as a result equally distributed in each of their individual referents. Hence the 'necessity of existence' is not a species just as it was maintained by Avicenna.

As Ṭūsī says: "He is astonished [by Avicenna's statements] because of his belief that every time something is divided into two divisions, the place of its division will become a part of the quiddity of each of [the parent's] daughters; and his belief also that whatever distinguishes one daughter part from another must itself be another part other than the first".[9] Of course, now that we have understood from Ṭūsī's detailed explanation that an analogical term is always divided *unequally* into its divisions, we can see why Shahrastānī falsely accuses Avicenna of unknowingly introducing

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[7] See Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. $46^{10\text{-}18}$.

[8] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, pp. 46^{20}–47^{4}.

[9] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. $50^{3\text{–}6}$.

composition within the Necessary Being; for as Ṭūsī previously states analogical terms are never included within the concept of a thing's essence or quiddity (*māhiyya*), but are instead necessary accidents (sing. *ʿaraḍ lāzim*) of the essences they predicate We shall elucidate the importance of this point, i.e. the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), in far greater depth in our discussion of Rāzī's claim of the univocity of existence and Ṭūsī's rebuttals thereof in the forthcoming chapters.

Second Contradiction

The second "contradiction" which Shahrastānī identifies in Avicenna's metaphysics is arguably even more incredible than the one preceding it. Here, Shahrastānī states that because Avicenna describes the First principle as the 'Necessary of Existence in Itself' he contradicts his previous assertion of the First's *simplicity*. What leads Shahrastānī to this conclusion is the simple belief of his that *whenever something is distinguishable in the mind it must also ipso facto be distinguishable in reality*. As he himself avers, the expression 'necessary of existence in itself' has three independent meanings: 'necessity', 'existence' and 'itself'. And these perforce implicate a tripartite form of composition *in* the First principle.

In the propositional terms the two so-called "contradictory" statements which Shahrastānī claims undermine Avicenna's notion of a Necessary Being are as follows:

p_1: The expression 'necessary of existence in itself' has three individual terms: 'necessity', 'existence' and 'itself'; and none of them has a meaning which is the same as the others.

p_2: None of the parts of the *oratio explicans* 'the necessary of existence in itself' of His name refers *in existence* to something other than what is referred to by the other parts. Hence the Necessary Being is simple.

Although in principle Shahrastānī also *agrees* with Avicenna that the First cannot be a composite being (unlike the Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn*), he nonetheless reckons there to be a contradiction in Avicenna's statements. How can a single expression (i.e. "the necessity of existence in it-self") having three disparate terms (i.e. 'necessity', 'existence', and 'self') not have one-to-one correspondence in the thing itself which they describe? So either the First principle is 'necessary of existence in itself' and composed, and therefore not the First principle, or It is simple and therefore not 'necessary of existence in itself'. In other words, it is a contradiction (*tanāquḍ*) to say that the First principle is both 'necessary of existence in itself' *and* simple (or "one" from every aspect of its being).

In principle, Shahrastānī is not championing the idea that the First principle must be caused as Ghazālī had done in *Tahāfut*. On the contrary, Shahrastānī's aim is quite the opposite, and that is that instead of allowing our language to be somehow mapped onto the reality of God's nature (this being of course the standard Ashʿarite position according to their theory of semantics and correspondence), Shahrastānī wants to say that *nothing we say can be truly predicated of the First principle*. In other words, Shahrastānī wishes to advocate an entirely different approach to the problem of language in theology, and that is that all speech is ultimately inadmissible *vis-à-vis* "God" who, by definition, is "beyond being".[10] All of this is conspicuously reminiscent of Ismaʿili thought and their theology of extreme apophaticism.

The immediate goal of Shahrastānī's critique, then, is what is referred to in *kalām* dialectical theory as *ilzām*, the technique of showing how one's opponent is forced to admit a position which is contrary to their own; and in Shahrastānī's case this means showing the inconsistency or "contradiction" (*tanāquḍ*) within Avicenna's system of thought. To fulfil this task Shahrastānī amasses a wide range of examples in which he contends that every time a certain concept or meaning is divided and then further sub-divided there will be, at every point of division, a new form of composition. In all of these examples there is an underlying presumption in Shahrastānī's thought regarding the precise nature of the mind's correspondence with reality, namely, the idea that every time a concept in the mind is considered and divided according to different aspectual considerations (*ḥaythiyya*) that a new representation of those differences must be represented in the thing itself outside the mind.

This principle is false and negates, as Ṭūsī demonstrates, the necessity of mental constructs (*al-iʿtibār al-ʿaqlī*), the lack of which would imply that every time there is a purely intensional distinction (*mafhūman*) within concepts there must be a necessary extensional (*miṣdāqan*) distinction corresponding with things themselves. As we shall, the whole issue revolves around the distinction between 'extramental existence' (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*) and 'mental existence' (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), and the proper interpretation of mental existence entails. Indeed, in Ṭūsī's philosophy, there are many valid forms of mental distinction which *cannot* be represented by a one-to-one correspondence in things themselves, and knowing precisely which kinds of distinctions and

[10] One of the definitions of being (*mawjūd*) is "anything that can be expressed in language" (*kull mā yumkin an yuʿabbar ʿanhu*).

concepts fall in this category is, in my view, the essence of what Ṭūsī's philosophy is all about. I call it the *intensionalist* approach to Avicenna's metaphysics—"conceptualism"[11] for short—and much of this dissertation is about defending this aspect of Ṭūsī's thought.[12] As I shall hope to demonstrate, it is this intensionalist aspect of Ṭūsī's philosophy that is arguably his most important legacy.

The response Ṭūsī gives to Shahrastānī's rejoinder could not therefore have been any clearer:

> May God have mercy on a man who understands and fathoms the desired goal of Avicenna's statement that "the essence of the Necessary Being cannot be something combined from elements that make it—the essence of God—a subsistent entity." For when he says that "the parts of an *oratio explicans* used for the purpose of clarifying His name do not each signify something which *in existence* is something essentially distinct from the others", what he means is that His "definition" [as "Necessary of Existence in Itself"] corresponding to His extramental essence is not composed of meanings which one by one indicate existents that are in themselves essentially different [from one another].[13]

Ṭūsī has taken the discussion back to first principles and reminded us that in Avicenna's metaphysics a being which is necessary of existence in itself must be one that is "sheer oneness"; It cannot be composed in any way whatsoever. Recall that Shahrastānī's aim is to force a contradiction upon Avicenna by pointing out that 'necessity', as a meaning, is something *additional* to existence, and therefore causes the *existence* of the Necessary Existent to be composited in the way that 'rationality' causes the nature 'animal' to be 'human'. Ghazālī had also similarly arrived at this conclusion but interestingly went on to argue that 'necessity' is a negative term and therefore not itself something *in divinis*. Be this as it may, the Ashʿarite Schoolmen are clearly arguing *against* Avicenna's conception

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[11] Conceptualism, like realism and nominalism, is normally discussed in the context of the problem of universals, whether or not, that is, universals like 'horse', 'man', 'apple' *qua* universals exist. Avicenna, as Marmura, M. (1979; 1992) demonstrates, is a conceptualist. He believes that universals *qua* universals (*al-kullī al-ʿaqlī*) exist only in the mind. In other words, Avicenna commits fully to a mental ontology in addition to the existence of real objects. The 'intensionalist' turn within the metaphysics of Avicenna's interpreters spoken of in this dissertation thus represents an expansion of his 'conceptualist' framework, that is to say, his mental ontology. Objects of mind-dependent existence are not all equivalent, however, there being a graded ranking of beings (*tashkīk*) within mental existence (*al-wūjūd al-dhihnī*) itself just as there is for objects outside of the mind. Traditionally, these differences are highlighted through the labels 'primary intelligible' (*maʿqūl awwal*) and 'secondary intelligible' (*maʿqūl thānī*). The 'intuitionalist' turn is thus one that regards Avicenna's essence-existence distinction as a distinction between secondary intelligibles not primary intelligibles.

[12] This aspect of Khʷāja Naṣīr al-Dīn's thought has also been noted by Mayer, T. (2007) in his assessment of Ṭūsī's interpretation of Avicenna's claim of time not having a beginning. In this thesis I try to establish the ubiquitous nature of Ṭūsī's conceptualism, and show how it is an essential focus of his so-called 'defence' of Avicenna.

[13] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 48^{7-11}.

of 'necessity' in their criticisms of that all important principle of his theology, namely, the '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle, which seems to suggest therefore (going by what the Ash'arites say) that he himself thought of 'necessity' as a positive existential (*amr ījābī*). Hence the reason why in Shahrastānī view there is a "contradiction" at the root of Avicenna's metaphysics.

Whatever the case (and we will say more about 'necessity' later), Ṭūsī helpfully explains what he thinks is the correct interpretation of Avicenna's "definition" of the First principle as a being which is 'necessary of existence in itself':

> If an explanatory phrase is not a true definitional statement—or [suppose] it is a true definitional statement but its parts do not signify different things *in existence*, or [suppose even] it is a true definitional statement and its parts signify different things but do not do so by way of their essences—then such kinds of statement would not fall in the category of things which he [Avicenna] does not consider possible for Him. For he states: "The Creator – Sublime is He! – possesses innumerable attributes that are either relational (*iḍāfiyya*), negative (*salbiyya*), or a combination of these". And there is no doubt that while their meanings are different they are each predicated of something that is essentially one. Hence although the expression 'necessary of existence in itself' consists of [different] parts each one having its own meaning, the parts themselves are non-distinguishable in the essence [of God]. For what is intended by this statement ['necessity of existence in itself'] is: "Existence the negation of which is impossible not by something other than itself". And this statement consists of negations of that existence.[14]

This is a theme which is going to be spoken of repeatedly as this dissertation progresses, and it concerns the massive difference between talking about something *in intension* and talking about it *in extension*. The expression 'necessary of existence in itself' as an expression has parts of different intension (*mafhūm*): 'necessity' does not *mean* the same thing as 'existence' and neither 'necessity' nor 'existence' mean the same thing as 'self'. Furthermore, taken as a whole the expression 'necessary of existence in itself' has reference: it "refers" or "picks out" one unique individual existent that is God Himself. However, each term in the expression does *not* have an extension (*miṣdāq*): there is no one thing called 'necessity' in God that is different *in re* to His 'existence' or 'self'.

Ṭūsī's purpose in all of this, therefore, is that there are certain 'considerations' (*i'tibārāt*) or 'mental constructions' which do not require actual reference in things themselves, and yet are

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[14] Ṭūsī himself accuses Avicenna of violating the principle of God's simplicity in the *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* where he criticizes Avicenna for his views on the modality of the First's knowledge. According to Ṭūsī, Avicenna holds that God's knowledge is facilitated by *forms* and that He is therefore the recipient-locus (*maḥall*) for their inherence in Him. This necessarily would mean that God's being is composed of an essence (*dhāt*) and accidental knowledge forms. See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.17, p. 304^{7-14}.

nevertheless still valid and correct judgments of things in reason. As we will see in the discussion on mental existence, such 'considerations' take the ontological form of 'beings of reason' (*al-umūr al-iʿtibāriyya*), as Ṭūsī himself explains, of this special type of being (*mawjūd*) there are two which have been mentioned in the aforementioned passed: namely, (1) relations and (2) negations. In this thesis, I characterize them as *intensional terms* or *concepts* because of the very fact that have no extension in things themselves but are of purely mind-dependent character.

In sum: There is no contradiction here in Avicenna's description of the First principle as being 'necessary of existence in itself' since none of the terms in this description refers to anything which is itself an existent outside of the mind. If Shahrastānī thinks the solution to this conundrum is to countenance the idea that "He is some reality without a name" (*ḥaqīqatun mā ʿadamiyyatu l-ism*) then, as Ṭūsī points out, "This prattle of his also comprises four things: '*ḥaqīqa*', '*munakkira*', '*ʿadīma*' and '*ism*', all of which are disparate meanings".[15] So, by Shahrastānī's own rule of thumb, he would be forced to posit four composited meanings in the First principle, thus denying Its simplicity. In other words, "he falls into the [very same contradiction] that he has condemned others [of falling into]".[16]

Third Contradiction

By now the attentive reader will have noticed that much of what Shahrastānī says about Avicenna's thought and its supposed contradictions has been predominantly focussed on the semantic nature of terms like 'necessity' and 'existence', which are obviously important terms in Avicenna's metaphysics. This approach continues in the Third Contradiction which concerns Avicenna's statement "The Necessary Existent is necessary of existence *from all Its aspects*". According to Shahrastānī this statement is self-defeating. If, on the one hand, the Necessary Existent is a simple reality having *no* aspects, then *considering* It as a being which is necessary of existence from *all* aspects would be a contradiction since "no" and "all" are contradictory quantifiers. Similarly, Avicenna also contradicts himself when he says—hypothetically of course—that "every" (or "all", *kull*) Necessary Existent is a being of "sheer goodness", even though in his view there is in principle only "one" Necessary Existent. So just as before, since "every" and "one" are contradictory quantifiers one of

[15] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 50^{14-15}.

[16] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 50^{14-15}.

these propositions must be false. And in light of previous contradictions Shahrastānī has further reason to impugn Avicenna for using the quantifier "every" since this requires that the quantified-term be a genus or quasi-genus in status, but 'the necessary of existence'—as previously shown—individuates itself and therefore cannot be like a genus.

Even by the lowest standards these are terrible arguments, however, and it is of little surprise perhaps that Ṭūsī does not hold back in mocking Shahrastānī for admitting that he does not understand the meaning of "every" (*kull*) in this context.[17] If the tone of Ṭūsī's response appears to be unduly harsh then it should be remembered that in the mediaeval context of such dialectical exchanges individual sympathies were rarely distributed to thinkers bold enough to make accusations of others' ideas when they themselves admitted to not having properly understood and verified (*taḥqīq*) their opponent's position. Generally speaking mediaeval Islamic scholars rejected criticism for criticism sake, always maintaining wherever possible clear guidelines on the rules of proper conduct when engaging in polemics and disputation (*ādāb al-baḥth wa-l-munāẓara*).

To this apparent contradiction in Avicenna's language Ṭūsī responds as follows:

> By God he has spoken truly, for had he understood what they [the philosophers] state in the beginning sections of their books on logic—nay, even [if he only understood] what is stated at the beginning of [Avicenna's] discourse in the *Najāt*—[he would have realized] that if the *meaning of a term* does not prevent it from being predicated of more than one thing that it then is a 'universal' term according to the logician and a 'generic name' according to the grammarian. From the aspect of its *meaning* it would be correct, then, to predicate it of a multiple number of things. Introducing the quantifier-term "every" in the sense of "each one" would, therefore, be correct. If, however, its meaning prevents it from this [and it cannot be predicated of more than one thing] then it is a 'particular' [in logic] and a 'personal name' [in grammar]. The expression 'necessary of existence' is not a particular, its meaning does not prevent it from being shared, nor is it a personal name, or else it would not have needed a demonstration establishing its unity.[18] Moreover, not everything into which the quantifier-term "every" enters is a genus or species as he has claimed, given that it would be valid for one

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[17] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāriʿ*, p. 28[1-2]: "What is more astonishing than this is his statement "every Necessary Existent is sheer goodness", and we do not know the meaning of this "every". If what he means is "each one" (*kullu wāḥidin*) thing that is a Necessary Existent is sheer goodness then it is a genus or species-term. Or, if by *kull* he means "whole" as if to say "His *whole* essence is sheer goodness", then it would have been imagined that He is a whole having parts. What kind of monotheism is this even expression, and what about this multiplicity even in meaning?"

[18] This is a crucial point by Ṭūsī. Avicenna's proof for the existence of a Necessary Being is not a proof of Its numerical unity. In Avicenna's philosophy, a further proof is needed to show why there can be only one Necessary Existent.

to say "every sun" or "every moon" or "every world" even though each of these in and of themselves has only singular instances in existence itself.[19]

There are several important points here that touch on some basic themes of term-logic. We need only summarize Ṭūsī's already clear exposition by simply remarking that quantifier-terms like "some" or "every" or "no" apply to the *concepts* of things and not of the things themselves nor their semantic terms (*alfāẓ*). So even if there only happens to one of a certain type of thing, so long as "what" that thing is does not confine it to just a single instance so as to prevent it from being multiplied, then it would be characterized as a 'universal' term which, by definition, could then be predicated of many. Hence it is permissible to enter the quantifier-term "every" before it in a prepositional statement. There is no contradiction, therefore, in beginning a statement like "Every Necessary Existent…" with the word "every" since the *meaning* of Necessary Existence can in theory at least be predicated of more than one being. This is why Ṭūsī has made the excellent point that a proof still needs to be given for the numerical unity of the First Principle, for a proof establishing the existence of a Necessary Being does *not* suffice as a proof of the fact there is only *one* such being. Had the expression 'Necessary Existent' been a proper name and already therefore a particular, then offering a proof to show there is only one Necessary Existent would have been superfluous.[20]

Fourth Contradiction

Aside from his earlier criticisms, those which are mentioned in Fourth Contradiction contain Shahrastānī's most powerful objections to the metaphysics of Avicennan theology, and, in particular, the notion that whatever being is necessary of existence in itself is a simple reality which is unaffected by any one of the five different types of composition (*tarkīb*). The aim of Shahrastānī's criticism here is that if such a being really exists then it cannot be described through any means whatsoever, not even by the means which Avicenna suggests do not lead to composition, such as 'negations' (*al-salbiyyāt*) and 'relations' (*al-iḍāfāt*). According to Shahrastānī, therefore, the True One cannot, for example, be described as "not being a body" (a negation) or "being the Creator" (a relation), whereas according to Avicenna descriptions such as these—because they are posited of the Necessary Existent

[19] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, pp. 52^{11}–53^{2}.

[20] See Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. $80^{6–10}$.

from outside (*min khārij*) of Its "Self" (or "essence", *dhāt*)—do not affect the simplicity of the First principle. Hence His essence cannot be composited through them.

Importantly, it is worth mentioning that this is also Avicenna's route out of a complete "theology" of silence, the kind of silence that would place God insurmountably out of reach as an object of philosophical inquiry and thus functioning as the subject of any science whatsoever. If, in the most extreme case, God is not even a being (*mawjūd*), then He cannot be treated in a science of being *qua* being (*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd*). Avicenna's theology is a negative theology, however, but one which is nevertheless tempered through the possibility of non-quidditative characterizations of the Necessary Existent by dint of never actually saying anything about *what* the First principle is like in its "essence". This is made possible for Avicenna by the fecundity of predicates that take the form of relations and negations, the ontological nature of which shall be considered in a later chapter.

Shahrastānī begins his critique by focussing on the disjunctive premise of Avicenna's prime argument for the unity of the First principle in which it is said that either the species 'the necessity of existence' belongs to the Necessary Existent and *only* the Necessary Existent, or it belongs to the Necessary Existent and *other* beings as well beside. As we saw previously, this is the same as asking whether or not the individuation (*taʿayyun*) of the 'the necessity of existence' is due to itself or due to something other than itself, and, as noted in our discussion of Ghazālī's Fifth Discussion in the *Tahāfut*, Shahrastānī also attacks Avicenna at the level of the disjunction itself. He therefore rejects Avicenna's claim that the species 'the necessity of existence' cannot belong to "other" than one Necessary Existent because there is no "other" in which this so-called "species" can be instantiated. In short: If there is only one Necessary Existent, how then did Avicenna postulate the 'the necessity of existence' as a species?[21]

[21] Shahrastānī repeats his criticisms of Avicenna's proof of divine unity in greater detail at Issue III (see Madelung and Mayer 2001: 44ff.) In Issue III, First Contradiction, Shahrastānī remarks: "Species can only be said of many things. How, then, did he apply the term 'species' to 'the necessity of existence'?" (*Muṣāraʿa*, p. 46). Again, the recurring presumption, as Ṭūsī points out in his rebuttal, is that " 'species' can only be said of many things", which is false (*qawl bāṭil*). The correct definition of species is " 'that which from the aspect of what is comprehended by its meaning is capable of being said of many things', and there is a difference between the two statements" (Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 80^{3-5}). In other words, there is a difference between "is said" (*yuqāl*) and "is capable of being said" (*yaṣlaḥu an yuqāl*) (ibid., p. 85^{1}).

Recapitulating some of his earlier remarks, Ṭūsī explains that a meaning can always be *hypothesized* as a species so long as what is comprehended (*mafhūm*) by its meaning does not prevent it from being said of a *theoretical* many.[22] That a particular meaning happens to be instantiated and limited to only one actual referent makes the slightest difference in the least given that the notion of a species is not what is *actually* predicable of many but what is, at the level of supposition, *hypothetically* capable of being predicated of many. A meaning is thus a genuine species (*naw'ḥaqīqī*) if one is able "to *suppose* a multiple number of individuals for it" (*mimmā yufraḍ ashkhāṣṣān lahu*) regardless of whatever happens to be the case actually speaking.[23] Shahrastānī twice reproaches Avicenna for contemplating the idea that the supposed species 'the necessity of existence' could belong to any individual existent aside from the First principle, since "the act of denying multiple deficiencies of the True-Reality is itself a deficiency for Him!"[24] And again, "Negating deficiencies is positing deficiencies!"[25]

Now, apart from anything else, one of the problems Shahrastānī has with Avicenna's method of doing philosophy is the particular order in which he deals with certain topics, especially so in this regard since "Avicenna writes lengthy chapters in his books denying characterisations such as these from the Necessary Existent in Itself *before* proving Its existence". Why—in other words—does Avicenna bother to deny so many different characterisations of the Necessary Existent when he has not yet proven the existence of such a being?

The answer is that a true metaphysician working on the Aristotelian basis of what a demonstrative science is could not have acted any differently, since doing as Shahrastānī suggests would result in working backwards from the existence of things to their principles, from the effect of a cause to the cause itself, which is an inferior method of demonstration given that proceeding from principle to particulars, or from cause to effect, is much the superior method.[26] As Ṭūsī says, "this is an excellent type of ordering because Avicenna first wanted to clarify that the comprehension of this expression, i.e. 'the necessity of existence' (*wujūb al-wujūd*), itself negates many kinds of deficiencies

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[22] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāri'*, p. 53^{10-11}.

[23] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāri'*, p. 53^{11}.

[24] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāra'a*s, p. 28^{9-10}.

[25] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāra'a*s, p. 30^{1-2}.

[26] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāra'a*s, p. 29^{3-4}.

from it, before indicating their meaning. He did this in order to remove the need of having to mention 'the necessity of existence' when denying these deficiencies from it".[27]

However, according to Shahrastānī, this is the *inferior* method. If, in order to prove the unity of God, for example, one has to offer an argument which supposes a partner for Him alongside His existence, then this itself is attributes a type of deficiency in Him, namely, the *possibility* of supposing that He has a partner. At this point Ṭūsī avails himself of a dialectical argument in keeping with Shahrastānī's style, and that is that no lesser figure than God Himself deemed it permissible to suppose more than one divinity (*ilāh*) *for the very purpose of denying multiple divinities*.[28] Hence if, according to Shahrastānī, Avicenna's method of proving the unity of God's existence, and the language employed to do so, is unbefitting for God, then he would also be indicting the author of the Qur'an himself for implementing that method and language in his own descriptions of himself. Ṭūsī thus settles the argument by simply observing that "there is no greater deficiency beyond the positing of a partner for Him, the Sublime, and yet Revelation is filled with denying God a partner, and no one has dared say that this is a 'defect' unworthy of Him".[29]

Shahrastānī devotes the remainder of the Fourth Contradiction to an exposition of what he claims are ineffective proofs for the existence of a Necessary Being. In particular, he contends that some of the arguments which al-Fārābī and Avicenna put forward as proofs for the existence of a First principle *contradict* their claim that God is a simple being (*basīṭ*). Firstly, by dividing 'existence' into 'necessary of existence in itself' and 'possible of existence in itself', Avicenna creates "a logical counterpart for the Necessary Existent", and one of the consequences of doing this is that "existence comprises two divisions each of which is *equally* included in the concept of existence from the aspect of existence-status [*mawjūdiyya*]".[30] However, as Shahrastānī explains, this threatens the very notion of divine simplicity because it attributes 'existence' with the status of being a genus or quasi-genus term, which in turn implies that the Necessary Existent is differentiated from contingent beings (*al-mumkināt*) by 'necessity' itself acting in the capacity of the specific difference. As such 'necessity'

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[27] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 54^{9-11}.

[28] The particular verse Ṭūsī cites to support his case is Qurʾan 21:22, "If there were therein *divinities besides* God then verily both [the heavens and the earth] would have been destroyed".

[29] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 56^{1-2}.

[30] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 30^{6-8}.

must be a positive existential (*amr thubūtī*), therefore implying that the so-called Necessary Existent is composed and not simple, and therefore caused.

Shahrastānī appears to be following the same line of argument as Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*. Later scholars refer to the underlying principle of this argument as "the rule of differentiation" (*qāʿidat al-iftirāq*). Accordingly, in order for two individuals within a single species to be really distinct (*mutamayyiz*) and separate from one another, each of them must have, in addition to what they already have in common as a consequence of being subsumed under that species, something uncommon which makes them unique and which is therefore the cause of their individuation (*taʿayyun*). This applies both at the level of species and their differentiation from one another (e.g. humans and horses) and at the level of individuals within a single species and their differentiation from one another (e.g. Zayd and ʿAmr). For illustrative purposes it is better to start with the differentiation of species even though metaphysics *qua* science of being is concerned with existent things, i.e. the individual existent.

What two species have in common, then, is the *form* of their common genus, such as, for example, the form of animality which both humans and horses share. But in order for humans *to be* humans and horses *to be* horses, individual humans must have something which individual horses lack, and vice-versa. It is this uncommon factor, known as the *differentia* or specific difference, which *individuates* the genus 'animal' *to be* the species 'human' and 'horse'. 'Human' is thus a "differentiated form" of the genus 'animal', just as 'horse' is another "differentiated form" of 'animal' as well. It is important to note here that individual humans and individual horses have only one form, the form of humanity and the form of equinity respectively, which is the same as their *nature*, and is referred to as "the nature of the species" (*al-ṭabīʿat al-nawʿiyya*) and "the form of the species" (*al-ṭabīʿat al-nawʿiyya*).

While natures (sing. *ṭabīʿa*) are thus differentiated by *differentia*, the same cannot be true of individuals within a single species. For example, Zayd cannot be differentiated from ʿAmr by that same factor which differentiates both of them from, say, this horse. What differentiates them from this horse is their common humanity, but by virtue of being common to both of them Zayd and ʿAmr cannot be differentiated from one another by nature of humanity itself. Hence they must be differentiated by something else which is uncommon to them both, and that (in this particular example) is their individual matters. The rule of differentiation therefore states that whenever there are two (or more) individuals in the same species which are really *distinct* from another, they must

in some sense be united (*jihat al-ittiḥād*) but in another sense differentiated (*jihat al-imtiyāz*), and this can only happen, according to the Peripatetics, if "that by which they are united is other than that by which they are differentiated" (*mā bihi l-ittiḥād ghayru mā bihi l-imtiyāz*).

In the context of our discussion this means that if 'existence' is a genus or quasi-genus term and 'the Necessary' and 'the possible' two of its species, then the Necessary and the possible are united through community in the *nature* of existence but differentiated through their own specific differences (sing. *faṣl*). In other words, if existence is something they have in common, then they must have something *else* which individuates general existence as either 'necessary of existence in itself' or 'possible of existence in itself'. However, this implies that the Necessary is compounded of one qualitative part It has in common with every other existent thing and another qualitative part which only It has and which therefore is the *cause* of Its individuation. But if a thing's individuation is caused then it, the thing itself, according to Avicenna must also be caused.[31]

For the time-being it is interesting to note that Shahrastānī *accuses* Avicenna of making 'existence' a univocal term, and therefore charges him with the contradiction—contrary to his own principles—that the First principle is not a simple being. Shahrastānī's criticism is thus seemingly also an objection to Ashʿarite theology since for him the only way of ensuring that there is no composition whatsoever *in divinis* is if 'existence' is polysemic (*mushtarak lafẓī*) and therefore equivocal, not univocal. As he explains, if 'existence' is a genus or quasi-genus term (and therefore a meaning which is univocally predicated), then "the essence of the Necessary Existent becomes composited of a genus and *differentia* or something else which resembles their nature […] and that *contradicts* both 'oneness' and 'absolute self-sufficiency' (*al-istighnā' al-muṭlaq*); for that which is composed of two meanings or two considerations differing in terms of generality and particularity is 'impoverished' (*faqīr*). Firstly, this is because it is 'needy' (*muḥtāj*) of the things which constitute it

[31] In the next chapter I am going to show how the rule of differentiation is a core principle of Rāzī's thought and how for him it guarantees the univocity of being that is needed to ensure the separation of God's existence (and attributes) from His essence, which of course is crucial in most Ashʿarite theology. In other words, because 'existence' is univocally predicated of its subjects, the formulaic principle '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' must be false. One of the ways of ensuring the "legitimate" kind of composition *in divinis* spoken of by Ghazālī in the *Tahāfut* is to endorse the *univocity of being*.

and cause its true-nature to become actually realized, and secondly because it requires a composer to give existence to its 'essence'".[32]

In principle, I have shown that the charge of composition is not *per se* a problem for Ash'arite thinkers like Ghazālī. Though in his *Tahāfut* he conspicuously by-passed the whole issue of whether every composition has the need for a composer, the composition itself in the Necessary Being was not for him such a problem. This is not the case for Shahrastānī, however, who appears to reject vehemently any type of composition whatsoever in the First principle, whether it be of the quantitative or qualitative types outlined by Avicenna and Ghazālī in his *Tahāfut*. By extension, therefore, Shahrastānī must also be appalled by the Ash'arite conception of entitative attributes since these would also deny the "absolute self-sufficiency" of the essence of the First principle.

Furthermore, unlike Ghazālī, who altogether ignored the subtleties of how the term 'existence' is predicated (at least in the *Tahāfut*), Shahrastānī makes the crucial observation that Avicenna avoided the undesired consequences of composition by characterizing 'existence' as an analogous term (*ism mushakkik*) and not one of univocity (*ism mutawāṭi'*).[33] Since, on the one hand, 'existence' can be said *more* deservingly and with priority of a being that is Necessary of Existence in Itself than those beings which are only possible of existence in themselves; and given, on the other hand, that no essence or nature or quiddity can admit of more or less,[34] 'existence' according to Avicenna cannot belong to the category of univocal terms. This, however, does this imply that the term 'existence' is a pure homonym (*mushtarak lafẓī*), a term of sheer equivocation, but rather that it must occupy a place somewhere between equivocity and univocity, which is known as 'the analogous'. For Shahrastānī, however, even though he acknowledges that Avicenna does not hold to 'existence' being a univocal term and thus grants that it cannot be *equally* predicated of existent things, he nonetheless stipulates that if a term is capable of being predicated of *many things*—and Avicenna for sure does think that the term 'existence' (*wujūd*) can be predicated of all existent things—then it must *ipso facto* be characterized as a genus or quasi-genus term.

As Shahrastānī explains:

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[32] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāra'a*, pp. 30^{8}-31^{2}.

[33] On the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) in Avicenna, see Treiger, A.(2012).

[34] This, a key component of Aristotle's theory of substance, holds that there can be no modulation in essence.

> You beg the question in two ways. First, the division of 'existence' into 'necessary of existence in itself' and 'possible of existence in itself' is per *se* a division of 'existence' into 'that which is more deserving of it and for which it is prior' [and 'that which is less deserving of it and for which it is posterior']. 'Existence', therefore, from the aspect of it being 'existence', includes both divisions with an *equal* inclusion. Hence 'existence' is something *essential* for both of the divisions particularized by it.[35]

Now, in order to support the argument that 'existence', as Avicenna characterizes it, must be, or at least have some resemblance to, a genus, Shahrastānī contends that 'necessity' by itself cannot be conceived *unless* one first conceptualizes the notion of 'existence', and that supposedly is a sufficient indication that 'existence' is an essential constituent of 'necessity'. Presumably the same state of affairs applies to 'possibility', which therefore entails that the concept of existence is common to both divisions of 'existence' and their essential constituent. As Shahrastānī says, "if you remove existence then necessity will be removed by its removal".[36]

Shahrastānī's point here is that in order to conceptualize the notion of Necessary Existence one must first conceptualize the notion of 'existence', for one cannot conceptualize the notion of what 'necessity' is *without* at least first having the conception of 'existence'. Shahrastānī does not complete the argument but it can easily be inferred: inasmuch as 'necessity' cannot be conceived without 'existence', neither can 'possibility'. Hence the reason why 'existence' must be something which is essential to both categories of being and therefore (like) a genus.

In his response, Ṭūsī is quick to point out that Shahrastānī seems to always think that any notion, no matter what, that can be divided must as a rule always be divided *equally* and is therefore a genus. Such a position negates the category of analogous terms altogether since any division into *unequal* subdivisions can always be reconfigured as an *equal* division of some subject (x) into 'that which is more deserving of x' and 'that which is not more deserving of x'. Besides, Shahrastānī even goes as far as to suggest that because so many meanings can be predicated by relations of more or less, for example, 'one', 'true', 'cause' and 'principle', if analogy were a genuine category then "no term whatsoever comprises a meaning with equality", which, according to Shahrastānī, "negates the category of univocal terms".[37] His point is simply that given the fact that so many *univocal* terms are

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[35] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, pp. 31^{8}-32^{3}.

[36] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, pp. 32^{9}-33^{1}.

[37] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 34^{1-2}.

unequally predicable of things anyway, there is no need for a further category known as the 'analogical'. Indeed, according to Shahrastānī, "such a category is nowhere to be found in the logic of the ancients";[38] and even if it were, "it does not satiate him [referring to Avicenna] from hunger", a proverbial expression in the Arabic language which is used to convey the idea of something being useless or futile.

At this point in the dialogue it is perhaps fair to say that Ṭūsī's supply of patience is starting to run low. Shahrastānī's arguments are amateurish. As Ṭūsī says: "From all this talk of his it is apparent that he did not understand in the slightest the meaning of analogy (*tashkīk*), nor even for that matter the meaning of univocity (*tawāṭu'*)".[39] This is a polite way of saying that Shahrastānī's views are "drivel". Ṭūsī's initial remark is followed by a lengthy exposition of the meaning of analogous terms as well as supporting proofs gathered from the writings of Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, and al-Fārābī, to show that the category of analogous terms was not invented by Avicenna.[40] Since I discuss Ṭūsī's views on analogy in his rebuttals of Rāzī in the coming chapters, I will not go into the topic here. Suffice it to say, "the truth is that had he understood the meaning of analogy he would have recognized that the analogous term is a type of accident (*min qabīl al-ʿawāriḍ*), and its inclusion of divisions does not imply that the divisions themselves are composed. This is because simple realities are not composed when they share in accidental predicates".[41] In the context of our discussion this means that 'existence' (*wujūd*) is a general accident (*ʿaraḍ ʿāmm*) shared by members belonging to more than one species.

According to Shahrastānī, the second reason why Avicenna's views on 'existence' supposedly beg the question is as follows:

> Let us grant to him that 'existence' is an analogous term and that this is another division [in the division of terms]. Is it not still the case that 'existence' comprises them [the subdivisions 'the Necessary' and 'the possible'] in some manner of generality and that 'necessity' particularizes [the Necessary of Existence] through a certain manner of particularization, and that whatever comprises is different to whatever particularizes? It will be composed in both

[38] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 34[2-3].

[39] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 63[5-6].

[40] Treiger (2012).

[41] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 63[14–16].

respects by two terms one of which does not signify what is signified by the second, and that negates sheer oneness (*al-waḥdat al-maḥda*).[42]

In the previous chapter I showed that Ghazālī characterized 'necessity' as a negative term and a privation, and used this fact to argue *against* Avicenna for whom 'necessity' is apparently a positive meaning *in divinis*. According to Shahrastānī, however, it is more likely that 'necessity' is a negative term according to Avicenna also. As he writes, it may be that Avicenna thinks "the meaning of 'necessity' is something negative not positive, or that it is a considerational (*iʿtibārī*) meaning and not an existential (*wujūdī*) one".[43] Therefore, since 'necessity' is a negation it cannot cause the First principle to be a composite. In my opinion, what Shahrastānī says next is hugely significant and greatly substantiates some of the claims I am going to make later in this dissertation.

In counteracting the claim that 'necessity' is a negative meaning, Shahrastānī writes:

> I say: Our discourse is first with respect to 'existence' and after that 'necessity'. What do you say then concerning 'existence' and its comprehension in the mind? Is it or is it not a generic precept and a meaning inclusive of 'the Necessary' and 'the possible' with some kind of inclusion? If it does include [them] then the specification of a further meaning is needed so that 'the Necessary' is distinguished from 'the possible'. You cannot say "the meaning which includes [them] is something negative" since ***how can 'existence' not be existential***? 'Necessity' is the assurance of existence (*ta'kīd al-wujūd*), that is, 'existence' belongs essentially to the Necessary of Existence in Itself, and the result of this is that Its existence is not derived from something else. How did he consider the consequent but leave out what is essential to it? Yet even if 'necessity' were [as Avicenna might claim] something negative, then whatever is the opposite of it—namely, 'possibility'—would have been something existential. We know that you know that the Necessary is more worthy of existence and affirmation and that the possible is more worthy of non-existence and negation. How, then, given that you yourself have confirmed existence to be more worthy and prior of the Necessary and not more worthy nor prior of the possible, did you forget the analogous term which you invented? And even if we grant that its meaning is something negative it is not an absolute negation, but rather a negation of something whose nature permits it being something actual and which is suited to distinction, and through it multiplicity occurs. Put aside therefore what is said [when he says] "negations and relations do not induce multiplicity in the essence", a proposition which they have taken to be one that is admitted, but the truth of the matter is that this is not so […].[44]

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[42] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 34^{3-6}.

[43] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 34^{7-8}.

[44] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, 34^{7}-35^{10}.

For historical reasons this is a fascinatingly intriguing statement. Firstly, it shows that 'existence' was already being characterized as a so-called 'reflective' (*iʿtibārī*[45]) term *before* Suhrawardī gave prominence to this idea given the fact that Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) died before Suhrawardī was even born (circa 549/1154). Suhrawardī, therefore, did *not* independently invent *ex nihilo* the notion that 'existence' is *iʿtibārī* despite claims to the contrary by personalities like al-Abharī,[46] Ibn Turka[47] and Mullā Ṣadrā, the latter's comments in particular tinting the way modern scholars in Iran have reconstructed the history of Islamic philosophy.

Secondly, because Shahrastānī thinks Avicenna may himself have characterized 'necessity' and therefore 'existence' as being *iʿtibārī*, not only must we question Ghazālī's reading of Avicenna's philosophy but we must also now put to bed the idea that Suhrawardī's so-called characterization of 'existence' being *iʿtibārī* was directed as a criticism of Avicenna's metaphysics. By characterizing 'existence' as *iʿtibārī*, Suhrawardī seems to be expounding what Avicenna himself believed (or might have believed) in order to counteract, as Wisnovsky surmises,[48] an *alternative* interpretation of Avicenna's metaphysic, one according to which Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence was seen as a real distinction in things themselves. Yet Suhrawardī himself did not endorse Avicenna's belief that 'existence' is *iʿtibārī*, for this according to Suhrawardī would mean that the entire Peripatetic philosophy was founded on a mental construct of purely mind-dependent status, and which is, therefore, properly speaking an unreality that has no actual subsistence of itself independently of human conceptualization. For this reason, Suhrawardī bases his criticisms of Avicenna's metaphysics on the fact that in the latter's philosophy 'existence' is *iʿtibārī*, meaning there is nothing in the external world that corresponds to concept of existence (*mafhūm al-wujūd*) in our minds. Suhrawardī thus appears to be speaking on Avicenna's behalf when he says that being *qua* being or 'absolute existence' (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) has no extramental referent. By contrast, true reality itself must be something subsisting of its own accord and cannot therefore be a construct of the mind (*iʿtibārī*), since every mental construct only becomes subsistent through a mental act of reflection (*al-iʿtibār*).

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[45] I discuss the meaning of this term below so will not comment on it here.

[46] See Eichner, H (2012).

[47] Ibn Turka, *Tamhīd al-Qawāʿid*, p. 187.

[48] Wisnovsky, R. (2012)

It is, I do not disagree, somewhat contentious to suggest that 'existence' is a reflective term (*iʿtibārī*) for Avicenna, but there are other historical precedents besides Shahrastānī and Suhrawardī in the later commentary tradition which give support to this idea. For example, 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī does not hesitate in directly attributing the idea of 'existence' being *iʿtibārī* to Avicenna himself, identifying some of his remarks in the *Shifā'* as explicitly endorsing the view that 'existence' is a secondary intelligible (*min al-maʿqūlāt al-thāniyya*). But unless al-Ījī had access to some variant manuscript to the ones upon which the modern editions of Avicenna's *Shifā'* are based, the current published editions contain no trace to the best of my knowledge of any explicit remark by Avicenna which states that 'existence' is either *iʿtibārī* or a secondary intelligible.[49] The idea can, however, be traced as far back as al-Fārābī. There is no doubt in my mind that al-Ījī derived the notion of 'existence' being a secondary intelligible from Ṭūsī's *Tajrīd*,[50] which he then, knowing of Ṭūsī's keen admiration for Avicenna's philosophy, uncritically attributed back to Avicenna himself.[51]

Be this as it may, Shahrastānī raises some important philosophical criticisms of Avicenna's thought in the aforementioned passage which do need to be considered. In particular, there are two criticisms connected with the metaphysical nature of 'necessity' that are especially important because of their historical persistence in the works of both Ghazālī and Rāzī. What Shahrastānī has to say is, from a chronological perspective, therefore, sandwiched in time between two important heads of the Ashʿarite community, though for Shahrastānī the correct solution to these problems is distinctively Ismaʿili.[52]

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[49] For al-Ījī's view, see al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, vol. 2, pp. 154^{10}–155^{4}.

[50] The *Tajrīd*, the most important work of higher theology within Ṭūsī's *oeuvre*, is possibly the most commented work of theology in the entire post-classical period. For generations it has been used as a standard *summa* of systematic theology in Sunni and Shiʿa *madrasas*, and continues to be widely read in the contemporary Muslim world. On this work and its legacy, see Abdel-Latif, H. M. (1977). For an inventory of commentaries written on this work, see Khūyī, ʿA. (2003).

[51] Al-Ījī is part of a generation of scholars who lived in the midst of the Maragha period and therefore directly affected by the thought of its scholars, Ṭūsī of course being the primary figure. Al-Ījī refers to a number of Ṭūsī's writings in his *Mawāqif*, the most regularly cited being his *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, *Tajrīd* and *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*.

[52] In the next chapter I will show that Rāzī himself cannot avoid reaching some of the same conclusions as Shahrastānī. If, therefore, the latter's thinking contains explicit overtones of the Ismaili theology, then the former also has similar inclinations. In certain respects, therefore, as Rāzī admits, the theology of Ashʿarism overlaps with the theology of Ismaili Shiʿism.

According to Shahrastānī, therefore, whichever way one interprets the property 'necessity' Avicenna's metaphysics of Necessary Existence cannot be sustained. If, on the one hand, 'necessity' means the "assuredness of existence" as Avicenna repeatedly claims, then 'necessity' cannot be a negative existential since 'existence' itself cannot be negative existential; that is, 'existence' cannot be *iʿtibārī*. Therefore, since 'necessity' always follows 'existence', whatever happens to be the ontological status of the latter term it will also be the ontological status of the former. Said otherwise, since "existence exists" (*al-wujūd mawjūd*) the "assuredness of existence" (*taʿakkud al-wujūd*) must also exist. This, however, forces a contradiction on Avicenna since 'necessity' and 'existence' are two things not one, and as such leads to a form of composition within the Necessary Being. Hence the contradiction in Avicenna's thought between the First's characterization as 'Necessary of Existence in Itself' on the one hand, and 'sheer oneness', that is, divine simplicity, on the other.

Yet, even supposing that 'necessity' is a negation, this, says Shahrastānī, would still be of no benefit to Avicenna since what is properly understood by negation here is the "negation of something whose nature […] is suited to distinction, and through it multiplicity occurs". In other words, negations of this type—the non-absolute type—requires that the two things are distinct in order that the one can then be denied or negated of the other, and that causes multiplicity to occur and therefore composition *in divinis*. Additionally, if 'necessity' is a negation then its opposite, 'possibility', must be positive. Put differently, what Shahrastānī is saying is that if 'existence' does not exist then non-existence, the opposite of existence, must exist, which is clearly a contradiction.

This brings us to the final part of the Fourth Contradiction which is aimed at showing that negations and relations do not rescue Avicenna from preventing the First principle from being composed. The argument which Shahrastānī puts forwards contains a number of steps. The first is a criticism of Avicenna's hypothetical rejoinder, namely, that "the distinction between existence and necessity, as an opposition of generality and particularity, is something relational (*iʿtibārī*) in the mind not in existence".[53] Shahrastānī's counter-argument of this type of distinction between existence and necessity is based on a rigid interpretation of the correspondence theory of truth: "Concepts (*mafhūmāt*) in the mind", he writes, "are only correct because of their correspondence with what is outside the mind".[54] However, this leads to the conclusion that every true concept in the

[53] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 35^{11-12}.

[54] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 37^{2-3}.

mind has a real referent in being (*wujūd*), and thus holds that every distinction in the mind must be represented at the level of things themselves. As we shall see in the chapters on 'mental existence' (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), Rāzī adheres to the same principle and uses it to affirm a distinctively Platonic form of ontological realism. By contrast, we will also see that for Ṭūsī not every mental distinction must be matched onto an equivalent and symmetrical mereological distinction in things themselves; and yet despite the fact that certain true judgments do not—in the sense that they cannot—correspond to extramental things, *objective* truth can still nonetheless be achieved since not every true statement requires an entitative "truthmaker" in the physical world.

In the second stage, therefore, Shahrastānī forces Avicenna into a form of ontological commitment: if the expression 'necessity of existence' is a correct expression, then both 'necessity' and 'existence' must exist outside the mind, which obviously then implies that "general existence includes the Necessary and the possible with some manner of inclusion" since necessity and existence will now be functioning as individual parts of some greater whole. Regardless of whether this inclusion is by way of equality or not, 'existence', according to Shahrastānī, would still be a genus or quasi-genus, which entails that each individual beneath it is composed by particular individuations. Hence the Necessary Existent is composed.

Alternatively, in the third stage Shahrastānī argues that even if we granted to Avicenna that such relations and negations are only mental distinctions, and therefore properly speaking 'intensional' in character, nevertheless, since 'existence' now is at least a "mental" genus it would still require that each individual existent beneath it to be "mentally" composited by way of unique individuations. Hence even if, for the sake of argument, the Necessary Existent were not actually composed *in re* it would still be composed *in intellectu* and that, as Avicenna himself agrees, is a form of composition.

So, by each of these arguments, even if 'necessity' were negatively characterized as an *iʿtibārī* term this still does not rescue Avicenna from composition entering into the so-called Necessary Existent. Hence, as Shahrastānī has explained, either it is impossible for 'necessity' to be a negative term because of the rule of correspondence—that is, 'necessity' must refer *in divinis* if the statement "God is Necessary of Existence" is a true statement; or at the least it would lead to an intellectual composition of the Necessary Existent *in intellectu*. Characterizing 'necessity' as a 'relative' (*iʿtibārī*) or negative term (*amr salbī*) does not, therefore, according to Shahrastānī, rescue Avicenna from the last of these implications, since he himself states that 'existence' and 'necessity' have a relation of

generality and specificity. If that is the case, then things which are related by the opposition of generality and specificity (*taqābul al-ʿumūm wa-l-khuṣūṣ*) are *distinct* from one another, and this requires that 'existence' and 'necessity' must be *two* ideas which are different to one another. As Shahrastānī says referring to the Necessary Existent, "If Its generality is Its very specificity, and Its specificity is Its very generality, then there would be *no* generality or specificity whatsoever".[55]

To clarify, what Shahrastānī is saying is that if the Necessary Existent's *existence* is the same as Its *necessity*, and if Its *necessity* is the same as Its *existence*, then there would be *no existence or necessity*. As he correctly goes on to observe, if this were the case then the science of metaphysics would be destroyed![56] The argument will be deconstructed and thoroughly rejected by Ṭūsī, as I shall explain in Chapter 4.

Equivocity of Existence

Having shown by the method of *ilzām* how all of the ways of interpreting Avicenna's metaphysics produce conclusions which are contradictory to his own claims *vis-à-vis* the Necessary Existent, Shahrastānī begins a new and final section called "The Choice" (*al-mukhtār*) in which he proffers his own solution to the problems encountered in Avicennan thought. Whereas in the previous generation Ghazālī maintained a certain degree of necessary composition (*tarkīb*) *in divinis* for the religiously "correct" interpretation of God's essence and attributes, Shahrastānī advances a view which is at the extreme opposite end of the spectrum. Unlike Ghazālī, Shahrastānī denies *tout court* any and every type of composition in the First principle, and therefore agrees, in principle at least, with Avicenna's conclusions—albeit unsubstantiated ones—about the Necessary Existent. Shahrastānī is correct in saying that all of the arguments Avicenna used to prove the existence of a being which is necessary of existence in itself relied on 'existence' being an analogous term. But analogy as we have seen cannot, according to Shahrastānī, prevent multiplicity entering into the essence of the Necessary Being. Likewise, interpreting 'existence' as a univocal term only compounds

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[55] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 38[1-2].

[56] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 38. There would be no science of being *qua* being if being were not the most general concept. If all of the divisions of being (*wujūd*) were not less general than being itself, then being would not divide into those divisions and each one would have an equal entitlement to be the subject-matter of "metaphysics". A science cannot have more than one subject-matter, so if there are a multiple number of "most" general concepts there could not have been a single "most general" general science.

the problem even further since 'existence' would then have to be a genus and individual existents differentiated by intrinsic individuations. The only way to prevent the First principle being afflicted by composition then would be to cling staunchly to the Neo-Platonic and Ismaʿili doctrine of the One that is "beyond being", which in the context of these debates just means adhering to the view that 'existence' is a purely equivocal term.

As Shahrastānī says, the "correct choice" is that:

> These contradictions and question-begging fallacies were met by Avicenna and his partners in philosophy only because they posited 'existence' as a general thing having the generality of a genus or the generality of the inseparable accidents. By putting it among the analogous terms and removing it out from the category of univocals, they surmised they had been successfully freed from these self-contradictions. But nothing shall save them from those contradictions except the putting of 'existence' and every other attribute and term which is predicated of Him, the most Sublime and Holy, such as 'one', 'true', 'good', 'intellect', 'intellector', 'intellected', etc., among the category of equivocal terms, not the univocal nor the analogous.[57]

The passage destroys the prospect of an Aristotelian philosophy in Islam. By making 'existence' a purely equivocal concept Shahrastānī obliterates the prospects of metaphysical science[58] and instead advocates a radical philosophy of transcendence in which the First principle is beyond the grasp of any form intellectual appraisal or engagement. In short, it closes every pathway to a discourse about God.

Although we shall be considering Ṭūsī's refutation of these points in greater detail below, it is worth highlighting one of his remarks in the *Maṣāriʿ* which comes directly after the following statement by Shahrastānī in the Fourth Contradiction of Issue III. As a conclusion to his criticisms of Avicenna's proofs for the unity of the Necessary Existent, Shahrastānī writes:

> One of the sages has said: The greatest self-sufficiency belongs to Him who possesses the creation and the command. Our Lord – Majestic is He! – is exalted above being characterized by perfection, never mind characterization by deficiency! He is the one who makes every perfect thing perfect and every deficient thing complete. If by "perfection" what is meant is that He is the perfecter of every perfect thing, then this is correct. But this formula (*qaḍiyya*) must be applied to every attribute even the attribute 'existence', so that he says: He is an 'existent' in the sense that he existentiates every existent thing, He is 'Necessary of Existence' in the sense that He necessitates every necessary existent thing, He is a 'knower' in the sense that He bequeaths knowledge to every knowing thing, He is 'powerful' in the sense that He empowers every powerful thing. But this is not the way of the man [i.e. Avicenna]. Were it so,

[57] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. $41^{1\text{-}7}$.

[58] See Aristotle, *Met*. XI 1060b20–25.

> he would not have endorsed the generality of existence and its inclusion. Instead he would have judged that 'existence' is one of the purely equivocal terms as we have explained before.[59]

Commenting on this, Ṭūsī writes:

> What he has described is the doctrine of the Ismaʿilis (*madhhab al-Taʿlīmiyyīn*) who say that He (the most Sublime) is *neither an existent nor a non-existent*, but that He is the principle of existence and non-existence, and likewise every other pair of opposites and ranks, both of which He transcends. Rather, for each of them He is the judge and the bestower, and that His most particular attribute is 'generosity' (*al-jūd*). To them it shall be said: The bestower and the bestowed are two things in the same rank, as are the judge of two opposites and their non-judge two opposite things. In short, the like of that resembles the talk of poets and preachers and is not suitable for debate or [intellectual] wrestling. As for the judgment that existence belongs to the purely equivocal terms, it is the doctrine of the dross among the *mutakallimūn*, such as the Ashʿarites and the followers of Abū l-Ḥusayn [al-Baṣrī] among the Muʿtazilites. Sound reason shows [their doctrine] to be false.[60]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have considered what I think are some of the more contentious aspects of Shahrastānī's criticisms of Avicenna's metaphysics of Necessary Existence. I have shown how 'existence' according to Shahrastānī is a purely equivocal term, and explained why in his view Avicenna's confidence in analogy fails to protect him against the charge of composition in the First principle. Furthermore, I have also shown why, according to Shahrastānī, 'necessity' cannot be either a 'positive' or 'negative' term, and is thus a completely redundant concept in Avicenna's metaphysics more or less akin to what Ghazālī said in the *Tahāfut*. It cannot be a 'positive' term since this entails an actual composition *in divinis*, but it cannot be a 'negative' term either since that would imply a composition of the First principle *in intellectu*. As a consequence, the First principle cannot at all be described in terms of the modal concept of 'necessity' whatsoever. The conclusion, then, is just the same as Ghazālī's albeit for entirely different reasons and motives. However, perhaps the most striking aspect of Shahrastānī's *Muṣāraʿa* is his claim that the First principle is "beyond being", the result of which would be that It eludes every description and cannot therefore be said to be even existent (*mawjūd*) or non-existent (*maʿdūm*). Though in the past this has normally been associated with the philosophical thought of the Ismaʿilis and subsequently condemned by virtually every other

[59] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, pp. 50^{12}–51^{7}.

[60] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, pp. 87^{19}–88^{7}

group in Islam, in the next chapter I am going to show that it may even in fact be a logical consequence of certain principles within Ash'arite theology itself. In particular, I will show how elements of both Ghazālī's and Shahrastānī's criticisms resurface within the writings Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, whose objections to Avicenna's philosophy permeated every dimension of the post-classical reception of Avicenna's thought in later thinkers.

CHAPTER 3

RĀZĪ ON EXISTENCE AND THE AVICENNAN IDENTITY-THESIS

Introduction

Having considered in the previous chapters the opinions of two of Avicenna's foremost critics our attention now turns to the thought of Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 606/1210), one of the most important figures of the entire post-classical period.[1] Rāzī's role in shaping the development of post-classical thought cannot be exaggerated; indeed, more so than Ghazālī, there is hardly an aspect of Avicenna's philosophy the reception of which was not influenced by Rāzī and his critical engagement of his predecessor's thought, to such an extent even that one could easily surmise that after Rāzī any engagement with Avicenna's thought is by default an engagement with Rāzī also. In fact, so much is the measure of his influence that while for more than five decades western scholarship has obsessed over the so-called impact of Ghazālī's thought on the future prospects of philosophy in Islam that it has entirely failed to realise that the key to understanding many of the debates (the majority of which are still unknown) in the post-classical period lies with Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī.

The full extent and measure of Rāzī's impact is therefore only now beginning to be fully realized as modern scholarship comes to terms with the fact that much of what constitutes the real history of philosophy in Islam ironically begins *after* Ghazālī. Thus, according to Endress, Rāzī ought to be credited with inaugurating the practice of reading Avicenna in the *madrasa*—though this cannot be entirely accurate because, as Michot points out, there was it seems already a '*pandémie avicennienne*' in Niẓamiyya colleges in Merv in the mid-twelfth century according to what Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī says in the introduction of his book on the temporal incipience of the world.[2] More recently, Eichner has argued that the structural pattern of Rāzī's *Mulakhkhaṣ* can be singled out as having inspired later thinkers with a basic structural template of how to compose their own

[1] On Rāzī's biography, see Griffel, F (2007); Street, T. (1997); Shihadeh, A. (2006)

[2] Michot, Y. (1993)

theological and philosophical *summae*, though it should be stressed that this is probably as far as that influence stretches (Eichner does not engage with the contents of any of the works she has consulted).[3] A more in-depth analysis is van Ess's meticulous study of the opening section of al-Ījī's *Mawāqif* in which he points out the direct influence of Rāzī's *Muḥaṣṣal* on debates surrounding epistemological theory in the opening sections of later theological *summae*.[4] More recently, scholars such as Gregor Shwarb have shown certain aspects Rāzī's influence on 13th century Arabic and Syriac Christian personalities.[5] Yet, despite these initial studies, there is a noticeable dearth in technical scholarship on Rāzī's thought which not only affects our ability to make categorical assessments of any kind about his own positions but also, as I have pointed out, the thought of every subsequent thinker living in the shadow of Rāzī's influence from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, which by the way is pretty much everyone else of any notable significance in the history of post-classical thought.

For the most part, however, later thinkers frequently mention Rāzī in their works because of their seeming desire to criticise his opinions rather than endorse them. Every work of any significant historical value that was ever written in the form of a commentary on one or other of Rāzī's texts was done so either for the purpose of criticising or correcting his opinions. From a methodological perspective also, Rāzī can be a frustrating thinker. His thought is not always consistent across the range of texts he authored, and in some cases, as Ṭūsī and other figures point out, he can even contradict himself in different parts of the same work. What he says in one place can never, therefore, be taken as a conclusive statement about what Rāzī thinks on any particular issue given that it is more than likely that a contradictory statement can be found elsewhere in a different part of either the same or another work. This not only makes any final assessment of Rāzī's thought always tentative, but heightens the importance of engaging with his corpus of writings in their proper chronology such that their diachronic nature can be factored into account. Unfortunately, it so happens that there is still no agreement among scholars as to the proper order and chronology of Rāzī's works.

In this chapter I examine Rāzī's attack on Avicenna's metaphysics by focussing in particular on his criticisms of the Avicennan thesis that essence and existence are identical in the First principle.

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[3] Eichner, H. (2013).

[4] Van Ess (1966).

[5] See Schwarb, G. (2014).

In other words, this chapter provides an in-depth study of Rāzī's response to the '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle, which in previous chapters I claimed is the summit toward which the entirety of Avicenna's metaphysics is headed and from which the rest of that system flows. Given the aforementioned methodological challenge which confronts scholars when dealing with Rāzian texts all of the relevant works will be considered, albeit that for heuristic purposes only I follow his detailed presentation of the topic in the *Maṭālib* which begins at Part 3, Section 1 and consists of six Issues as follows:

Issue I:	On the Meaning of 'Necessary Existence in Itself'
Issue II:	On Whether or Not the Expression 'Necessary of Existence' is a Positively Affirmed Meaning
Issue III:	On Whether the Existence of God is Identical to His Essence or an Attribute Superadded to It
Issue IV:	On Whether the Essence of God is Something Existent
Issue V:	On Whether the Essence of God is a Unique Essence Distinct from the Essences of Possible Beings
Issue VI:	On the Eternality of God

For the purpose of this chapter, Issues V–VI will not be treated.

On What it Means to Say that He is 'Necessary of Existence'
(*Maṭālib* III.I.3, Issue I)

The modal concept 'necessity' which features at the heart of Avicenna's metaphysics was subjected to intense scrutiny by scholars of successive generations. As shown above, Ghazālī and Shahrastānī both forbad the essence of the First principle being characterized as necessary of existence (*wājib al-wujūd*) albeit for motives that were radically different. The former's protestations are based on the contention that Avicenna makes 'necessity' into a seemingly positive meaning (*amr thubūtī*) which he then subsequently characterises as the essence of the First principle. According to Ghazālī this is false: 'necessity' is at best a negation signifying the denial of efficient causes and cannot therefore be taken in the positive sense of constituting the essence anything, least of all the essence of God. Moreover, Ghazālī also insists that any being which does not have an "essence" (*māhiyya*) and reality (*ḥaqīqa*) is in fact no being at all, and cannot therefore be an existent, never mind a First principle of existence. Thus he rejects the Avicennan principle which equates the essence of the Necessary Existent with Its existence (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*) by claiming that nothing of such a nature

could ever exist. Likewise, this same principle of Avicenna's metaphysics was subjected to further prolonged criticism by Shahrastānī in his *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa*, in which he argued that it did not matter in the slightest whether 'necessity' was a positive or negative existential since the "essence" of the Necessary Existent would still nonetheless end up being composed. According to Shahrastānī, therefore, Avicenna's identity-thesis ('*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*') contradicted other parts of his theology, such as his insistence on the unicity and "sheer oneness" of the First principle. Both Ghazālī and Shahrastānī thus reject—albeit for radically different purposes—Avicenna's identity-thesis, for reasons they claim implicate Avicenna into a contradiction.

In the *Maṭālib*, Rāzī begins his lengthy discussion of Avicenna's metaphysics by first considering what it means exactly to say that a particular being is 'necessary of existence in itself'. There is a temptation to see Rāzī's discussion here as a direct response to Ghazālī who, as shown previously, cast doubt over the utility of the concept of 'necessity' and described it as an "obfuscation" and of "bad postulation". As Bertolacci shows in his investigative study, however, the expression 'necessary of existence' can mean a variety of things depending on context for Avicenna,[6] and Rāzī it seems also concurs by listing three different ways in which 'necessity' can be interpreted:[7]

(1) It is that being which deserves existence *qua* itself (*annahu lladhī yastaḥiqqu l-wujūd min dhātihi*).

(2) It is that being which *qua* itself is insusceptible to nonexistence (*annahu lladhī la yaqbalu l-ʿadam min ḥaythu huwa huwa*).

(3) It is that being whose existence does not depend on a detached cause (*annahu lladhī lā yatawaqqafu wujūduhu ʿalā sababin munfaṣalin*)

Now, as Rāzī explains, not all of these definitions are compatible. In the first definition 'necessity' is an affirmation and hence a positive determination of any being which is characterised by intrinsic necessity; [8] whereas in the second and third definitions 'necessity' is a negation and hence a qualification which is extrinsic to essence.[9] Confronted by these conflicting options Rāzī stipulates

[6] Bertolacci, A. (2008)

[7] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 281[4-8].

[8] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 281[9].

[9] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 281[10-11].

that 'necessity' must either be a positive (*amr thubūtī*) or negative (*amr salbī*) existential, and for this reason at least one of Avicenna's so-called "definitions" of 'necessity' must be false.

The question, then, as to which of these existential categories—positive or negative—'necessity' belongs is a problem which Rāzī had to struggle with continuously throughout his lifetime, and as a result different works give us different answers. The *Maṭālib*, for instance, promotes the idea that 'necessity' is an intrinsic determination of essence and is thus an example of one of the works in which Rāzī decidedly opts to characterise it as a positive existential (*amr thubūtī*). Unlike Ghazālī, therefore, for whom 'necessity' is a negation, Rāzī specifies it as a positive meaning with reference *in extensio*, which for obvious reasons shall have important consequences further down the line *vis-à-vis* the existence of a being that is necessary of existence in itself. But this, though itself hugely important, is not half as significant as the conspicuously deliberate manner in which Rāzī expounds the precise meaning of 'necessity'; for according to our thinker a being which is 'necessary of existence in itself' is first and foremost "a being which deserves existence of itself" (*alladhī yastaḥiqqu l-wujūd min dhātihi*), and a being which deserves existence of itself is, says Rāzī, "a being whose essence is the *cause* of its own existence" (*kawnu dhātihi ʿillatun li-wujūdi nafsihi*).[10] A Necessary Being—in other words—is a being that *causes* Its own existence. The reader in her astonishment must not put these words down to an occasional slip of the author's pen; they are in fact very deliberately chosen by Rāzī for a purpose that shall surface later in the discussion. As we shall see, they prefigure a counter-Avicennan stance on the nature of the First principle and the essence-existence distinction.

In the meantime, having now (deliberately) chosen the first option Rāzī must show why the other two meanings in which 'necessity' is characterised as a negation are inaccurate. Against the second definition his objection appears to be that even though it is correct to say that "the necessary of existence in itself does not receive nonexistence" (p1), by itself such a definition of what 'the necessary' is shall not suffice given that it is also true to say that "being *qua* being does not receive nonexistence" (p2). So, despite the fact that both p1 and p2 have the same predicate, they do not have the same subject-term, for the subject of the first proposition ('the necessary of existence in itself') means something entirely different to the meaning conveyed by subject of the second proposition ('being *qua* being'). If, therefore, the expression "does not receive nonexistence" can be truly

[10] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 281[10-11].

predicated of more than one subject, it cannot *per se* be the *definiens* of either 'the necessary of existence in itself' or 'being *qua* being'.[11]

Rāzī's objection to the third definition is clearly the more interesting one given that it too appears to be connected with Ghazālī's objections to Avicenna's method of dividing existents. The argument begins with a classification of the different types of beings, according to which every existent (*mawjūd*) no matter what may be classified into one of the following three categories.

Either its existence, Rāzī says, is

(1) due to itself (*mawjūdan li-dhātihi*),

(2) due to another (*mawjūdan li-ghayrihi*), or

(3) due neither to itself nor to another (*mawjūdan lā li-dhātihi wa lā li-ghayrihi*).

The third category, which is nowhere to be found in Avicenna, was introduced by Ghazālī in his *Tahāfut* as a way of rebutting Avicenna's disjunctive argument for proving the unity of God's existence. As Rāzī explains, what is meant by it is that "a thing obtains existence without any cause whatsoever (*aṣlan*), neither itself nor another",[12] and though he himself describes it as ontologically false, it is nonetheless a valid option logically speaking; that is, as far as the logical division itself is concerned.

The argument which we are about to encounter is a critical part of Rāzī's thought, and before presenting it I should point out that his manner of dividing existents is rather crude. For according to the rules of Aristotle's logic an exhaustive division (*taqsīm ḥāṣir*) comes to fruition as and when each of the subdivisions are paired through dichotomous pairings, and this only happens when the aspect through which a division occurs (*jihat al-taqsīm*) is applied through systematic affirmations and negations at each and every one of the levels in the division. Rāzī's division ought therefore to begin with the following disjunctive paring: existent things (*al-mawjūdāt*) either (1) have a cause (*sabab*) for their existence, or (2) they do not; if (1), then the cause of the existent thing is either (1a) itself (*dhātuhu*) or (1b) something other than itself (*ghayru dhātihi*). Now, according to the fallacy of priority, nothing can precede itself in order to be the cause its own existence, which is why according to Avicenna (1a) is assuredly false, i.e. no *dhāt* causes its own *wujūd*. In Avicenna's metaphysics,

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[11] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 281[12–14].

[12] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 282[3-4].

therefore, there are only two true options: either a being has no cause whatsoever for its existence and is therefore absolutely uncaused (nr. 2), or its existence is caused by something *else* (nr. 1b). In Avicenna's metaphysics, (1a) has therefore been ruled out.

Astonishingly, Rāzī believes it is option (2)—not option (1a)—that needs to be omitted, which is quite remarkable because the only options that remain in this case are those according to which every being has an existence which is caused, either by itself or by something else. In other words, *there are no existent things whose existences are not caused*, and therefore no beings which are absolutely self-sufficient. At first glance this seems rather preposterous. It suggests, on the one hand, that there is no being which is Necessary of Existence in Itself, while on the other hand it claims that every existent thing is merely possible of existence. Rāzī does not disapprove of this conclusion and in fact emphatically reaffirms his belief that *every* being is in some sense of the word "caused", except—and this is the crucial point—some are caused by a "detached cause" (*sabab munfaṣil*) while other are not. Therefore, according to Rāzī, if what is meant by 'the Necessary Being' (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihi*) is that being which Avicenna understands as not having any cause whatsoever for Its existence, then such a being does not and cannot exist. But if what is meant by 'the Necessary Being' is that being which *causes its own existence*, then such a being does exist and It is the First principle since It is the one that has no "detached cause". In other words, the difference between a Necessary and possible being is simply down to this: the former has an *intrinsic* cause for its existence, whereas the latter can only have existence due to an *extrinsic* cause.[13]

To complete the argument Rāzī provides a fairly substantial rejoinder to Avicenna's notion of a Necessary Being and his proof of Its existence. First, there is the report (*ḥikāya*):

> There is a person [Avicenna] who did not understand the finer aspects [of this issue] but instead argued that: "A being is either such that it has no cause for its existence (*ghaniyyan ʿan al-sabab*), or its existence has a cause. Now, if it has no cause for its existence then it is the Necessary of Existence in Itself and the thing whose existence we have sought to establish. If, by contrast, however, it is not a self-sufficient being then its existence requires a cause, and the fact that it now exists indicates the existence of [that] cause. By acknowledging, therefore, that

[13] Rāzī's argument is thus identical to Ghazālī's rejoinder in the *Tahāfut* to Avicenna's theology of divine unicity, which is to say that because the *essence* of God causes His own *existence*, the identity-thesis—namely, '*māhiyyatahu inniyyatahu*'—must be false. As we shall see, this is precisely the direction in which Rāzī's argument is heading. What Rāzī refers to as a "detached cause" is therefore none other than what Ghazālī refers to as an "efficient cause", and whether we say the Necessary Being has no detached cause or efficient cause, the difference in wording amounts to same conclusion in meaning: namely, that the *essence* of the Necessary Being causes Its own existence.

> a non-selfsufficient being now exists, one must acknowledge the existence of a being which is Necessary of Existence in Itself".[14]

And then the rebuttal (*radd*):

> One may object to this argument by claiming that it is insufficient to prove your case; for it can be said: Why is not possible to say that it exists neither because of itself nor because of anything else, and that, despite occurring without any cause whatsoever, its essence (*dhāt*) and quiddity (*māhiyya*) [*qua* itself] is nonetheless a receptive cause of nonexistence. Thus, because on the one hand it has occurred without any cause whatsoever, it is a self-sufficient being; and because on the other hand its reality (*ḥaqīqa*) is a receptive cause of nonexistence, it is not a being which is necessary of existence in itself. So long as you do not prove this category to be false, the conclusion which you have sought will not be realised.[15]

In summary, Rāzī holds it is conceivable *ex hypothesi* that a particular being does not have a detached cause for its existence and yet this by itself would still not be a sufficient condition to prove that it is a Necessary Existent. The reason for this is because there is nothing to rule out the possibility that this being may in fact become a nonexistent thing at some future point in time. In other words, a being the existence of which is not caused by an efficient (or detached) cause may nonetheless be capable of receiving nonexistence when considered in and of itself. One therefore also needs to provide a proof which demonstrates that the essence of such a being—considered in itself—cannot be a receptive cause of nonexistence, which, supported by the already established fact that it has no detached cause for its existence, would then imply that it is the Necessary Existent.

On 'Necessity' (*Maṭālib* III.I.3, Issue II)

So far, our discussion of scholars' engagement with Avicenna's metaphysics has shown that the existential question surrounding the true ontological status of necessity (*wujūb*) was of genuine concern in the immediate aftermath of Avicenna's "Islamic" reception in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Since the question pertains to the most significant aspect of Avicenna's metaphysics—namely, his theology and notion of a being necessary of existence in itself—the problem of necessity

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[14] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 282[11-17]. Interestingly, it is possible that Rāzī's following rejoinder to this argument is directed against Ghazālī himself because of the fact that certain manuscripts (as pointed out in the editorial footnotes) insert the word "detached" after the word for 'cause' in Arabic in the opening line of the opponent's disjunctive argument. Thus the line could read: "A being is either such that it has no *detached* cause for its existence, or its existence has a *detached* cause". Recall, that according Ghazālī, the Necessary Being is that existent which has no efficient—i.e. "detached"—cause for its existence.

[15] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 282[17-21].

is no small matter. There are few topics, if any, of greater importance in the Avicennan metaphysic, to such an extent even that one might easily observe that many of the significant themes of Avicenna's system from his conception of 'the Necessary', the *mabdaʿ* or principle from where Avicenna's scheme descends. Perhaps it is no surprise, therefore, that traditionally trained scholars focussed their efforts on creating an aporetic tradition around Avicenna's thought, and initially this meant—at least for Ghazālī—the dialectic of *tahāfut*, of exposing inconsistencies within the *falāsifa*'s arguments in order to show that the exuberant confidence they display in their so-called demonstrative theories is in actual fact wide of the mark. This was soon to be replaced, however, by more pernicious strategies, such as the method of *shukūk* or "doubts" (which is the name al-Masʿūdī gave to his critical commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*) or the method of outright *tanāquḍ* or "contradictions", this being the strategy which Shahrastānī adopted in his *Muṣāraʿat al-falāsifa*.

Then there is Rāzī, a figure of much greater complexity and depth of thought but still for the most part critical of Avicenna's thought, and certainly a figure who adds a whole new complexion to the meaning of "critical engagement" with Avicennan philosophy. Unlike his scholarly predecessors, Rāzī succumbed to the inevitability of Avicenna's philosophy in the Islamic world, and did in fact play a direct historical role in promoting its popularity within the religious establishments and institutions of learning albeit with the necessary requisite circumscriptions. He is without question the prime instance of the term "scholastic" insofar as method and textual criticism are concerned—rigorous, in fact, to the point of hair-splitting detail. In him we find a different sort of thinker who is not merely contented with criticising Avicenna's philosophy for criticism's sake, but who tries to turn those negative criticisms into a positive reworking of Avicenna's thought. Rāzī cleverly uses the genre of commentary (*sharḥ*) to serve three distinct exegetical functions which range from explaining (*tafsīr*) Avicenna, to criticising (*radd*) and correcting (*taṣḥīḥ*) Avicenna. Now, as this study proceeds, we will see in the forthcoming chapters that Ṭūsī's defence of Avicenna's general metaphysics is always initiated at the level of principle, and is therefore concerned in the main with explaining accurately the core teachings of Avicenna's philosophy. Once Ṭūsī has established the correct teaching (this is the first exegetical stage, *tafsīr*) and shown what its core principles are, he can demonstrate the merits of that principle by using it to deflect the criticisms of Avicenna's detractors. The process is known as "verification" (*taḥqīq*) and encompasses the entire exegetical cycle—as it were—from text (*matn*) to meaning (*maʿnā*), from meaning to understanding (*tafsīr*), and then back again to the text where finally the intention (*murād*) of the author is put back into his enunciated

remarks (*ʿibārāt*).[16] So the point in saying all of this is that "solving the problems of the *Ishārāt*" (*ḥall mushkilāt al-Ishārāt*)[17] depends first and foremost on understanding and explaining Avicenna accurately, and that means going back to first principles. The problem, therefore, from Ṭūsī's perspective is that Avicenna's detractors have not understood him properly at the level of principle, that is, at the initial exegetical stage of *taḥqīq* known as *tafsīr*—and thus whatever criticisms they make of Avicenna's thought are more than likely to be wide off the mark, having no relation to what Avicenna may have actually thought. Avicenna's teaching on the modal categories, and especially the modal 'necessity', is therefore one of the areas *inter alia* in which, according to Ṭūsī, Avicenna's detractors misunderstood what he was saying.

Let us consider Rāzī's discussion in the *Maṭālib* on the ontological status of necessity in order that we may then assess at a later stage whether or not his opinion conforms to the core principles of Avicenna's thought. We must of course bear in mind that Rāzī's opinion on this question changed at different points in his career.[18] For example, he characterises necessity as a negative existential (*amr salbī*) or term of privation (*amr ʿadamī*) in his commentaries on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*[19] and *ʿUyūn al-ḥikma*.[20] Like Ghazālī, he uses the negative status of necessity to argue *against* a seemingly contrary opinion in Avicenna. The same negative status is afforded to necessity in the *Maʿālim* also. In the *Mabāḥith* he seems unsure, adding at the end of his discussion on the modal categories that "these are difficult matters (*kalimāt mushkila*), and we ask God to grant us success in verifying the truth concerning them."[21] It seems that this "success" was forthcoming toward the end of his life at the time of his writing the *Maṭālib*, in which Rāzī decidedly commits to the opinion, which is also apparently Avicenna's opinion, that necessity is, after all, a positive existential.

The discussion in the *Maṭālib* is quite a detailed one, and the points which Rāzī mentions are all worthy of our consideration. Being his final work, Rāzī's analysis of the concept of necessity is the

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[16] On *taḥqīq* and its meaning in the commentators on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, see Wisnovsky, R. (2015).

[17] This is the title of Ṭūsī's commentary on the *Ishārāt*.

[18] ʿAllāma Ḥillī (*Nihāya*, vol. 1, p. 90) also remarks that "the most noble of recent scholars (*afḍal al-mutaʿakhkhirīn*, i.e Rāzī) expressed confused opinions regarding it [necessity]. Sometimes he makes [necessity] a positive existential, while at other times he stipulates it to be a privation."

[19] See Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.18, vol. 2, pp. 364–368.

[20] See Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, vol. 3, pp. 110^{11}–111^{11}.

[21] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 208–211.

culmination of scholar's life of contemplation, and thus from our perspective a worthy platform to summarise his thinking on the subject. Keeping in style with that work, Rāzī considers both sides of the argument for necessity's positive and negative existence-status. Having premeditated his conclusion, Rāzī offers some interesting thoughts on why necessity cannot, *contra* Ghazālī, be a negation. The discussion begins with the positive thesis—why, that is, necessity must be "a positively realised and existential meaning" (*mafhūm wujūdī muḥaṣṣal*).[22]

Necessity is a Positive Affirmation

According to Rāzī there are four reasons why necessity must have a positive existence-status. These are as follows: (I) Firstly, necessity means that "an essence implies its own existence" (*kawnu tilka l-māhiyya muqtaḍiyyatan li-wujūdi nafsihā*)—which we now know means "causes" its own existence, according to Rāzī—and also that it is "deserving of existence of itself" (*kawnuhā mustaḥiqqatan li-l-wujūd min dhātihā*). Both of these, we are told, are positive meanings which are true of the essence regardless of whether the mind considers them or not.[23] Rāzī does explain that on certain occasions the mind vacillates between two possible meanings of necessity described in the previous Issue, either "nondependence on another"[24] (a negative meaning) or "the *per se* deservingness of existence" (a positive meaning), which is why it gets confused about necessity's existence-status. But having shown that the negative interpretations of necessity are open to criticism, the seeming implication is that interpreting it in a positive fashion would be the safer option.

(II) Secondly, Rāzī contests that the meaning of calling something 'necessary' (*wājib*) is that there is some essence which is qualified by two qualifications, the first being that the existence of a necessary essence is "not impossible" and the second that "its nonexistence is impossible". He then offers the following argument to explain why the first of these qualifications is an affirmation (*mafhūm thābit*), namely, that impossibility is a non-existential term (*amr ʿadamī*) and that essence qualified as "being impossible" does therefore possess an attribute or property called "impossibility". Since impossibility, then, is a negation, it follows, according to Rāzī, that "its negation is a negation

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[22] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 283[4].

[23] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 283[6-9]. The exact term he uses is that they are "determinate" (*ḥāṣil*) in the essence, and therefore established for it in a mind-independent fashion.

[24] Reading *fa-tāratan yasbaqu l-dhihnu min al-wujūb ilā ʿadami tawaqqufihi ʿalā l-ghayr* instead of *fa-tāratan yasbaqu l-dhihnu min al-wujūd ilā l-ʿadami tawaqqufihi ʿalā l-ghayr*.

of nonexistence, and the negation of a negation is an affirmation".[25] In other words, to say that the existence of a particular essence is "not impossible" is just the same as predicating it with a positively affirmed notion which, according to Rāzī, is "necessity" itself. Hence, since necessity is the opposite of impossibility and impossibility is a negation, necessity itself must be a meaning with a positively affirmed existence-status.[26]

(III) Thirdly, Avicenna frequently glosses the meaning of 'the necessity of existence' as the "assuredness of existence" (*ta'akkud al-wujūd*). Rāzī does not here question the correctness of this definition, but does remark that since existence itself is a positively affirmed notion—proof, therefore, that in Rāzī's mind 'existence' is a real predicate—then whatever is the *assurance of existence* must also be a positive existential. Therefore, since existence *exists* the qualification of existence must also exist.[27] As I have shown, this argument is the same as those which Ghazālī and Shahrastānī put forward in their respective criticisms of Avicenna's notion of "necessary existence".

(IV) Lastly, for an essence to *be*-necessary means "to deserve existence of itself", the meaning of which is contradicted by the opposing proposition "not to deserve existence" (*al-lāistiḥqāq*). Since, however, this latter expression can be correctly predicated of an essence characterised by impossibility it cannot, according to Rāzī, be itself an existential property (*ṣifa mawjūda*), or else the nonexistent thing would have a real predicate, which is absurd. To qualify an essence as not being worthy of existence is therefore a negative characterization (*waṣf salbī*), the *opposite* of which must therefore be a positive existential (*waṣf thubūtī*).[28] The argument here is identical to the second albeit with an initially different perspective on nonexistence instead of existence. Nevertheless, the principle, which is henceforth referred to as the 'rule of opposites', is the same: "two contradictory

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[25] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 284[7-9]. This, by the way, is one of Rāzī's most popular forms of reasoning which he employs in all of his writings. Henceforth I shall refer to it as "the rule of opposites". Later on in our discussion we shall see, in accordance with Ṭūsī remarks, why this is an invalid form of reasoning. Cf. Mayer, T. (2003).

[26] The argument that Rāzī presents here is a catastrophic misunderstanding of Avicenna's modal categories. According to Avicenna, the opposite of "the not impossible" is "the possible", not "the necessary" as Rāzī seems to think. In fact, Rāzī has erroneously conflated two distinct conceptions of the notion of possibility (*imkān*) in Avicenna's modal ontology: (*a*) essential (individual) possibility (*al-imkān al-dhātī*, *al-imkān al-khāṣṣ*) and (*b*) general possibility (*al-imkān al-ʿāmm*). The error, both in Rāzī's method and in his views on the "not impossible", is noted by Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 95[9-18].

[27] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 284[12–14]; cf. idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 209[22]–210[6].

[28] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 284[15]–285[15]; cf. idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 208[10–16].

propositions must differ in terms of affirmation and negation" (*anna l-naqīḍayn yajib an yakhtalifā bi-l-salbī wa-l-ījāb*).[29] Accordingly, Rāzī holds that if in the proposition "this nonexistent thing (essence) is impossible of existence" the predicate-term is a negative existential because an impossible subject-term cannot be positively qualified, then logical speaking the predicate-term of the proposition "this existent thing (essence) is necessary of existence" must be a positive existential given that existence is the opposite of nonexistence. Later on, Ṭūsī will show why in certain cases this line of reasoning cannot always be true.

Necessity is a Negative Affirmation

In the *Maṭālib*, following an initial statement on why 'necessity' must be afforded a positive existence-status, Rāzī considers six different arguments—nearly all of which incidentally are taken from his earlier writings— as to why 'necessity' may also be characterised as a negative existential. (I) The first argument is a *reductio* and shows that if 'necessity' were a positive existential (as supposedly Avicenna claims) then the supra-existence of 'necessity' in necessary things would cause an infinite regress of existences and that is impossible—'necessity', therefore, must have a negative existence-status. The argument is quite straight-forward: If 'necessity' exists, then it too *qua* existent thing must be either 'possible of existence in itself' or 'necessary of existence in itself'. Now the former option contravenes the law of contradiction by making the necessity of an essence only possible of existence in itself, which is why this option must be rejected. But the second option—that 'necessity' is *qua* existent 'necessary'—would imply *ex hypothesi* that each necessary thing is 'necessary' because of yet a further necessary-making-property which is 'necessity' itself. Obviously, this situation continues for the second, third and fourth forms of 'necessity' *ad infinitum*, and given the impossibility of this situation ever occurring must therefore urge the conclusion that 'necessity' has a negative existence-status.[30]

(II) The second reason why 'necessity' must itself be a negative existential is because were it to have been an existent meaning in 'the Necessary' it would have had to be either (*a*) the complete essence of 'the Necessary' (*tamām al-māhiyya*), (*b*) a constituent part of the essence of 'the

[29] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 284^{20}.

[30] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 285^{17}–286^{5}; cf. idem., *Mabāḥith*, p. 210^{7-15} (The argument is defended in Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 111^{22-25}).

Necessary' (*juz' min tilka l-māhiyya*), or (*c*) a non-essential and non-constituent property of 'the Necessary' (*amr khārij 'an tilka l-māhiyya*).[31] All three possibilities, says Rāzī, are false. In Rāzī's estimation the first option is the least likely because it implies that the thing attributed (*mawṣūf*)—namely, the essence of 'the Necessary'—is identical to its own attribute (*ṣifa*); and as a general rule nothing according to Rāzī can be predicated of itself. As Rāzī says, if 'necessity' were identical to the essence of 'the Necessary', then predicating the 'necessity of existence' of the Necessary Being would be a pointless exercise since the proposition "The Necessary Being is the Necessary Being" is—or so he claims—an "uninformative statement" (*ghayr mufīd*). This argument presumes however that every meaningful statement must consist of differing subject and predicate-terms. By contrast, if someone were to saying something in the form "A is A" then they will merely have repeated what was already known, which is therefore tautological.[32] Since, however, the statement "God is Necessary of Existence in Himself" is meaningful—that is, the predicate adds new information about the subject—'necessity' cannot be the complete essence of the Necessary Existent.[33]

Correspondingly, another reason why 'necessity' cannot be completely identified with the essence of 'the Necessary' is because the essence of the Necessary Existent is unknown, whereas Its property 'being necessary of existence' is known. So given that there are now two non-identical aspects *vis-à-vis* the Necessary Existent, each of them must be distinct from the other; hence the

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[31] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 286[6-7].

[32] This argument is a crucial part of Ash'arite semantics and is frequently applied in the context of debates surrounding the nature of God's attributes. Against the Mu'tazilites, the Ash'arite theologians thus argue that any identification of God's attributes with His essence would lead to what I shall call 'the fallacy of uninformative speech'. For example, if God's knowledge (*'ilm*) is identical to His essence, then the statement "God is knowing" would simply reduce to the statement "God is God". Likewise, if God's power (*qudra*) were identical to His essence, the proposition "God is powerful" would simply reduce to the proposition "God is God", which then also implies that knowledge (*'ilm*) and power (*qudra*) themselves are one and the same thing. But since none of the three terms 'God', 'power' and 'knowledge' is identical, the original presumption (that all predicates reduce to the essence) must be false. Hence God's attributes are distinct to His essence, and each of the divine attributes must also be something distinct. The lack of an intensionalist logic clearly appears to force Ash'arite thinkers to reject the law of identity. In the seventeenth-century, Mullā Ṣadrā showed that the law of identity is a defensible logical axiom, pointing out that the reason why Ash'arite thinkers mistakenly characterize statements such as "A is A" as meaningless speech is down to a failure on their part to distinguish between two different modes of predication, namely, primary essential predication (*al-ḥaml al-dhātī al-awwalī*) and popular technical predication (*al-ḥaml al-shā'ī al-ṣinā'ī*). This development is a crucial part of Ṣadrā's philosophy and an essential axiom through which Imāmī scholars maintain Avicenna's identity-thesis *vis-à-vis* God's essence and existence (*māhiyyatahu inniyyatahu*). The topic deserves a focussed study.

[33] As we shall see, this is also the reason why according to Rāzī the essence and existence of God cannot be identical.

reason why God's essence (the unknown aspect) cannot be identical to its necessity (the known aspect).[34]

The second option (that 'necessity' is a part of the essence of 'the Necessary') also cannot be true since it implies that the essence of the Necessary Existent is an aggregate composed of intrinsic parts. If this were true it would imply that 'necessity' is a cause of 'the Necessary', and yet whatever is Necessary of Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*)cannot by definition have any cause. Hence the reason why 'necessity' must be a negative existential. For the same reason the third option (that 'necessity' is an extra-concomitant accident of the essence of the NE) must also be false since it too implies that the NE is caused. This is because every accident is the effect of a prior cause, either the essence to which it is attached or something else (a detached cause). But if the NE's own necessity is the *effect* of a cause then *ipso facto* It's existence is also caused. Hence the reason why 'necessity' cannot be a positive existential.[35]

(III) Likewise, another reason why 'necessity' may be thought of as a negative existential is because of the rule of differentiation. In Avicenna's ontology, anything worthy of being called an 'existent' (*mawjūd*) only exists because it is in some sense 'necessary of existence'. Accordingly, the ontological map is filled with two fundamental classes of being: (1) a class in which every being is necessary of existence 'in itself' and (2) a class in which every being is necessary of existence 'by another' or, said differently, simply possible of existence in itself. As such all beings regardless of the class they belong to would each share in the property of *being*-necessary, albeit that beings in different classes are differentiated from one another by their added qualifications 'in itself' and 'by another'. In other words, each existent thing whether it is possible or necessary would be composed of a common part called 'necessity' and a differentiating part called its individuation (*taʿayyun*). But this in turn entails that the NE has an individuation besides 'necessity' leading to composition, and hence for the same reasons given above 'necessity' cannot be a positive affirmation.[36]

(IV) Fourth, 'necessity' is can be predicated of sheer nonexistence inasmuch as sheer nonexistence (*al-ʿadam al-maḥḍ*) "cannot possibly exist"; and whatever by definition "cannot

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[34] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 286^{12-13}.

[35] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 286^{6}–287^{6}; cf. idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 210^{18}–211^{4} (The argument is defended in Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 111^{6-18}).

[36] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 287^{7}–288^{4} (The argument is defended in Rāzī *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 112^{1-5}).

possibly exist" must be "*necessary* of nonexistence". Now, since any predication of nonexistence must itself be qualified with nonexistence, 'necessity' thence must be a negative existential.[37] Obviously this is the same argument as the one previously based on the rule of opposites.

(V) The fifth argument—an important one—appeals to an aspect of Avicenna's metaphysics of causation which states that a thing (essence) will not become existent unless it first becomes 'necessary' (*mā lam yajib lam yūjad*).[38] According to Rāzī, this implies that "a thing's necessity is *prior* to its existence".[39] But if *ex hypothesi* 'necessity' is a positive attribute of an essence, and every existential attribute only occurs to something already existent, then this would imply that 'necessity' is *posterior* to the subject's existence and not prior. Accordingly, Avicenna's metaphysics demands that the existence of the subject is both simultaneously prior and posterior to its own 'necessity', which is obviously impossible. Hence the reason why 'necessity' cannot be an existential affirmation.[40]

(VI) In the sixth and final argument the proponent of necessity's negative existence-status maintains that 'necessity' is "a relational attribute" (*ṣifatun min ṣifāt al-nisba*), and as such can only come into existence by the facility of the mind conceptualising the logical relation between a thing's existence and its essence. The opinion is squarely dependent on the mental representation of quiddities and the intellectual juxtaposition of different meanings, which, as I shall discuss below, cannot be Rāzī's own true opinion. For now, however, the conclusion at arrived at by this argument is that "the relation is one of the attributes of the subject", whose existence therefore *depends* on the existence of the subject. This implies that 'necessity', if it were an existential, is actually only possible of existence, and given the contradiction this entails in the definition of 'the Necessary', Its necessity cannot be a positive existential.[41]

Rāzī concludes the section by noting that each of the arguments for and against 'necessity' being a positive existential can also be made in almost identical fashion for 'essential contingency' (*al-imkān al-dhātī*). Rāzī is alluding here to Avicenna's proofs for the eternality of matter which gives

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[37] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 288[5–12]. (The argument is defended in Rāzī *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 111[19–21].)

[38] On this principle, see Avicenna, *Najāt: Ilāhiyyāt* II.3, pp. 548-549.

[39] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 288[14].

[40] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 288[13–18].

[41] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 288[19]–289[7]; cf. idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 210[15–18].

contingent beings the possibility of their existence prior to their actual existence. In other words, as Ḥillī confirms, Avicenna must hold the 'essential contingency' of possible beings to be a positively affirmed meaning or else he would have no way of proving the priority of an eternal substrate for possible beings in which their existence could be actualised. Whatever his views on necessity, therefore, there seems to be no doubt among Avicenna's different interpreters that the prior possibility of contingent beings is a positive meaning in the philosopher's thought. For Rāzī, therefore, the conclusive proof that 'necessity' must be a positively affirmed meaning is that the same arguments which affirm the positive existence-status of 'essential contingency' can be made for 'necessity' itself. Hence despite there being a number of arguments to the contrary, 'necessity' must be a positive existential according to Avicenna.

On Divine Simplicity (*Maṭālib* I.3, Issue III)

Being the most important aspect his philosophy, Avicenna's theology claims that a being which is necessary of existence in itself must have an essence (*māhiyya*) and existence (*inniyya*) which are themselves identical, a principle which we have called the "identity-thesis" within Avicenna's thought. There is no other idea more fundamental and noteworthy in Avicenna's system than the idea which he expressed in the formula '*māhiyyatahu inniyatahu*': "His essence *is* His existence". Indeed, the meaning of saying there is a Necessary Being is that there is a being for which Its existence is identical to Its essence. Everything else is merely possible of existence since its essence and existence are distinct, and therefore caused given that every essence *qua* itself needs a cause to preponderate it into existence. As I have shown, Avicennan theology is opposed to the Ashʿarite conception of God at its very core, and the attacks which were levelled by Ghazālī in the *Tahāfut* are the best token examples of why that is the case.

Rāzī's aim now in the Third Issue of the *Maṭālib* is to show precisely why the essence of the First principle cannot be identical to Its existence—why, in other words, Avicenna's identity-thesis must be false. The endeavour and energy with which Rāzī carries out this undertaking in all his writings can only be interpreted as an attempt on his part to defend the core Ashʿarite dogma of God's essence and attributes, according to which the attributes of God have an entitative existence apart from His essence. Ghazālī, it will be recalled, had previously attacked Avicenna on precisely this point remarking that "existence is additional to His essence", which I have claimed is the harbinger to one of Rāzī's major preoccupations in his writings against Avicenna. It is this aspect of Rāzī's thought

that we are now going to examine, and there is an easy temptation here to think of his multifarious "proofs" of the superadded nature of God's existence in virtually every one of his writings as a protracted "commentary" on the aforementioned line of Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*. As in the case of his predecessor, Rāzī's motive for attacking this principle of Avicenna's philosophy is therefore of a seemingly clear Ashʿarite inspiration, done so on the belief that existence is an *attribute* of the essence of God and which cannot therefore be its equivalent.

Rāzī's discussion is a lengthy one but nevertheless follows a logical sequence that can be broken down in two main steps. In the first step Rāzī adduces several arguments to show why 'existence' (*wujūd*) is one meaning equally predicated in a non-homonymous fashion of all existent things (*mawjūdāt*). In other words, Rāzī endeavours in typically non-Avicennan terms to show why 'existence' is a univocal term. Once the univocity of existence is established, Rāzī then commences in the second stage of the argument his onslaught on Avicenna's identity-thesis, namely, why the existence of the First principle cannot be identical to Its essence.

The Univocity of Existence

Rāzī's argument for the univocity of existence begins with him asking readers to consider the following pair of propositions:

p1: A being necessary of existence in itself exists

p2: A being possible of existence in itself exists

Then, posing the question how the word 'exists' (*mawjūd*) is predicated of each of the subject-terms in either one of these propositions, Rāzī points out that there are only two options: either the connotation of the term 'existence' in the mind is one comprehended meaning (*mafhūm*), or there are two different connotations of the term. In the first instance 'existence' is a term predicated of existent things with "the community of the semantic meaning" (*mushtarak maʿnawī*), whereas by contrast in the second instance the predicate 'existence' has only "the community of the semantic term" (*mushtarak lafẓī*).[42]Rāzī also observes that if 'exists' (or 'existence') is a monosemic term, then this itself will have two further divisions depending on whether or not the meaning of 'existence' is

[42] From this point forth, I will refer to each of these categories as 'polysemic' and 'monosemic' respectively.

joined to an "essence" (*māhiyya*) in the being which is Necessary of Existence. To illustrate these points we can say that 'existence' therefore is either a polysemic or monosemic term at the first level of consideration, and then assuming it is monosemic either attached to an essence in the form of an attribute or not. And only in the latter case would it be true to say that the so-called "essence" of the Necessary Existent is Its own existence.[43]

Summarizing these points, Rāzī says:

> It has been established that only one of three possibilities can be true concerning the existence of God. The first opinion holds that the term 'exists' conjures more than one meaning whenever it is predicated of the Necessary Existent and possible beings, and is not therefore a term common to both divisions but rather a polysemic term. The second opinion is the one whose proponent says the term 'exists' conjures one meaning albeit that in the case of the Necessary Existent it is "sheer existence", by which he means an 'existence' which is conditioned by not being something which occurs to any essence whatsoever, thus being in and of itself an existence which is self-sufficient. On the basis of this opinion the existence of God would be identical to His essence (*ḥaqīqatuhu*). The third opinion is that of the person who claims that existence in one of the attributes of God's reality and one of the descriptions of His essence. Accordingly, on this basis God's existence would not be identical to His essence.[44]

Importantly, Rāzī points out that:

> Each of these opinions has been followed by a learned scholar. The first is the opinion of a mighty group among the *mutakallimūn*, such as Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī and Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī. The second is the opinion which was chosen by Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā [*viz*. Avicenna] in all of his books. The third is the opinion of another mighty group among the *mutakallimūn*, it being the opinion which we have defended in the majority[45] of our books.[46]

It should be noted that there is a slight ambiguity in the way Rāzī classifies these opinions which has to do the fact that he ignores the added complexity of the question whether or not existence is something superadded (*zāʿid*) to essence. So while it is true to a certain extent that both al-Ashʿarī and Abū l-Ḥusayn consider 'existence' to be a polysemic term, this nonetheless hides the fact Abū l-Ḥusayn's views are an exception to the majority opinion among the Bahshamiyya-Muʿtazila who differ considerably in their opinions on the way existence *per se* relates to different types of beings.

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[43] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 290^{5-14}.

[44] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 290^{15}–291^{6}.

[45] A good indication, perhaps, of the fact that Rāzī holds different opinions in different works.

[46] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 291^{6-10}; cf. idem, *Arbaʿīn*, p. 143^{5-19}.

According to many reports, al-Ashʿarī is purported with having endorsed the view that each individual thing's existence is identical to its essence (*wujūdu kulli shayʿ ʿaynu ḥaqīqatihi*).[47] In other words, whether in the case of God's existence or this body's existence, each individual thing has an existence identical to its essence. In propositional terms this means that a statement like "God exists" simply reduces to the meaning that "God is God". Likewise, "body exists" means just that "body is a body", in effect implying there is no distinction between essence and existence (*contra* Avicenna). Thus 'existence' is polysemic, a pure homonym (*mushtarak lafẓī*), because different essences are not identical—there being as many meanings of 'existence' as there are different essences.[48]

By contrast, as Ibn al-Malāḥimī—himself a Muʿtazilite—explains, the followers of Abū Hāshim, with the exception of Abu l-Ḥusayn, embraced the view that existence is a common attribute (*waṣf mushtarak*)—that is, monosemic—"superadded (*zāʿid*) to a thing's essence (*dhāt*) and reality (*ḥaqīqa*)"—except, that is, in the case of God where both God's essence (*māhiyya*) and existence (*wujūd*) are "one thing" (*amr wāḥid*).[49] This sounds almost identical, as Ibn al-Malāḥimī goes on to explain, to the Avicennan doctrine that existence in contingent beings is "an accidental property of essences and superadded to them", unlike the case of God where "His existence is not something other than His essence; but rather, to the contrary, His existence (*inniyya*) and essence (*māhiyya*) are united".[50] Ibn al-Malāḥimī does however clarify that the two positions are not exactly the same given that Abū Hāshim and his followers regard existence to be a state (*ḥāl*) of the existent thing itself, whereas for Avicenna and his followers existence is a one-place predicate which merely points to the fact that something "is out there" in the external world.[51]

After Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, therefore, the Bahshamiyya appear to have split into two camps *vis-à-vis* the essence-existence distinction. Abū Hāshim's original followers claim that 'existence' is

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[47] See al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. 1, p. 307^{9}; the editor's (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmayra) decision to change the wording from *anna wujūda kullī shayʿin ʿaynu dhātihi* to *ghayru dhātihi* is incorrect.

[48] He accepts this in Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $74^{11\text{-}14}$.

[49] Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn*, pp. 61^{19}-62^{3}. The entire section in which Ibn al-Malāḥimī discusses the different schools of thought on the essence-existence distinction (namely, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn*, pp. 61-67) is a crucial witness of twelfth-century developments within the Bahshamiyya branch of Muʿtazilite theology, and especially how these differences within the Muʿtazilite community compare with Avicenna's philosophy.

[50] Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn*, p. $61^{40\text{-}41}$.

[51] Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn*, p. $62^{4\text{-}6}$.

a monosemic term whose single meaning is shared across all existents, and that each individual thing's existence is superadded to its essence—apart, that is, from the case of God whose individual existence is identical to His essence. In nominal terms this is more or less the same as Avicenna's position albeit one major difference concerning the extension of the term 'existence' (*wujūd*) and its correlation with the term 'affirmation' (*thubūt*). Notwithstanding, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī absconded from the opinion his predecessors among the Bahshamiyya by seemingly endorsing al-Ashʿarī's view which was that 'existence' is *not* a "common attribute" but an equivocal term identical to the essence of each thing—which, incidentally, is also the opinion of Ibn al-Malāḥimī himself.[52]

After this brief expository discussion of the history of these debates it is now hopefully clear that despite the nuances within their individual positions all parties seem to agree that *vis-à-vis* God essence and existence are identical. For al-Ashʿarī and Abū l-Ḥusayn this is of course a given, since all existents no matter what have an existence identical to their essences. God, therefore, is not a unique exception insofar as essence and existence are concerned. To these two thinkers are opposed Abū Hāshim and his followers, which may also tentatively include Avicenna, for whom God is the exception. Unlike other things His existence *is* identical to His essence.[53] So while there are, no doubt, important differences between these vying factions, minimally at least they all seem to be ostensibly agreed on identifying God's essence and existence. The issue it seems only becomes problematic with Avicenna's "Ashʿarite" successors. Recall, that in Ghazālī's opinion it is meaningless to posit an existence without an essence, and therefore impossible that anything should exist—including God—which does not have existence "related" (read: superadded) to its essence. When al-Taftāzānī claims that the *mutakallimūn*—he speaks in general terms—endorse the opinion that "God's existence is superadded to His essence", he can only it seems be referring to a relatively speaking "modern" group of theologians.[54]

It is against this backdrop that Rāzī's position, which he himself isolates from the other opinions, becomes all the more idiosyncratic and unlike any other opinion found within the rest of

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[52] Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfat al-mutakallimīn*, pp. $44^{15\text{-}16}$, $61^{19\text{-}20}$, $62^{10\text{-}19}$, $65^{4\text{-}16}$. As al-Ṭabāṭabāʿī mentions (*Nihāyat al-ḥikma*, p. 16), if this opinion were correct there would be no point in asking "whether" something exists, and would negate therefore the simple-whether question (*hal al-basīṭa*).

[53] Abū Hāshim's followers do not however deny God an essence (*māhiyya*).

[54] Al-Taftāzānī's arguments are mostly derived from Rāzī, but it may be that he has Ghazālī in mind also; see al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. 1, 216ff.

the Muslim community. Rāzī's argument thus proceeds in the following manner. He first adduces several proofs to show that 'existence' is indeed a common attribute and not simply a pure homonym. At this stage of the argument he puts himself firmly in the camp of Abū Hāshim and his followers and the camp of Avicenna, who all agree that 'existence' is a monosemic term (*mushtarak maʿnawī*). This is clearly, therefore, an anti-Ashʿarite move on Rāzī's part. However, unlike Avicenna and the early Bahshamiyya, Rāzī also insists that 'existence' is additional to every essence including God's essence—albeit that unlike other existents, God's existence does not have an efficient cause.

The arguments that are presented by Rāzī in the remainder of the Third Issue are all aimed at proving the *univocity* of existence. For now, this simply means that 'existence' is a common attribute with a single meaning across all referents. There are an astonishing twelve arguments in this section. (I) His first argument is simply that the notion of nonexistence (*al-ʿadam*) is self-evidently one meaning, and therefore given that nonexistence is the opposite of existence, 'existence' *per se* must a single notion also.[55] The argument is based on the now familiar rule of opposites.

(II) The second argument follows the rules of Aristotle's logic and holds that any concept which is divided must have divisions that retain the meaning of the originally divided term, the so-called "place of division" (*maqsam*). Now, the term 'existence' can be divided into different divisions—such as, for instance, substance and accident, necessary existence and possible existence, actual existence and possible existence, and so on. Accordingly, since these are all valid divisions, it proves that the meaning of 'existence' is retained and preserved in all of the subsidiary divisions, thereby indicating that 'existence' must have a single meaning.[56] Rather importantly, Rāzī says that the division of 'existence' in the Necessary of Existence and contingent beings is an *equal* division of 'existence' *qua* existence. The ramifications of this will later on prove to be crucial for Rāzī's rejection of Avicenna's identity-thesis (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*).

(III) The third reason why 'existence' is monosemic is based on the Avicennan argument that it is possible to doubt the quidditative nature or "whatness" (*māhiyya*) of things without doubting

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[55] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 291[16–18]; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, vol. 3, p. 54[1–3]; idem., *Masāʾil*, p. 31[19–20]; idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 108[12–15].

[56] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 291[19–20]; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 54[4–6]; idem., *Masāʾil*, p. 31[21–23]; idem., *Uṣūl*, pp. 25[14]–26[3]; idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 108[16]–109[1].

their existence.[57] For example, suppose you see a shadow in the distance which you believe is the shadow of a person. Suppose after a short while your belief changes, so that instead of it being a person you now believe it is a tree. Although your beliefs with regard to that thing's quiddity have changed, your belief that there is some existent out there in the distance remains the same. Initially, you predicated existence of a person after convincing yourself that there *is* a person or that "a person exists". Afterwards, this belief changed, and now you say to yourself that "a tree exists" instead of a man. Yet despite a change in the subject, "that something exists" is still nonetheless a firm belief you hold in your mind. According to this argument, then, the predicate—or more precisely the *meaning* of the predicate—is the same whatever the subject-term; hence 'existence' must be monosemic.

(IV) Fourthly, 'realized' (*muḥaṣṣal*) and 'actualised' (*muḥaqqaq*) are terms which are not only synonymous to 'exist' but also monosemic. Therefore, 'existence' (*wujūd*) must also be monosemic.[58]

(V) In his fifth argument, Rāzī appeals to a rule of Arabic poetry which states that a word which occupies the place of a rhyming term (*qāfiyya*) may or may not have the same meaning in each of the rhyming couplets. However, whenever the word 'existence' or any of its synonyms is used in this poetic fashion the meaning of this term is simply repeated, not equivocated.[59]

(VI) Also, since the extension of the term 'existence' is the largest possible extension any term can have, it is by virtue of this the best known concept. If this were not the case and it was possible to conceive of 'existence' as an equivocal term, then it would not have been a primary concept. As such every new instance of the term would have required a new definition or new terms with which to understand what it meant. Since this is not the case, 'existence' is monosemic.[60] (VIII) Therefore, as a consequence of its equivocation, anytime something is called an 'existent' it would need to be qualified by some other meaning besides its designation as an 'existent' in order for it to be comprehended. For example, if 'existence' were an equivocal term then statements such as "this exists" or "that exists" ought to convey to us different meanings, yet in both cases the predicate-term

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[57] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 291^{21-23}; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 54^{7-9}; idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 107^{17}–108^{8}.

[58] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 292^{1-7}.

[59] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 292^{8-13}; cf. idem, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 54^{17-20}.

[60] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 292^{14}–293^{2}; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 54^{10-12}; idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 108^{9-11}.

'exists' only conveys a single notion indicating therefore that 'existence' cannot be polysemic.[61] (IX) A sure way of proving this is that the statement "Existence is polysemic" (*al-wujūd mushtarak lafẓī*) itself begs the question which of the presumed multiple meanings of 'existence' is being intended if, indeed, existence is polysemic. In other words, the statement "Existence is polysemic" is itself only meaningful if the term 'existence' has a single meaning; and it is precisely due to the fact that one understands the purport of the statement that the proposition must be a self-defeating one; hence 'existence' is monosemic.[62]

This is only one half of the story, however, for every logician knows that in investigations concerning the logic of terms, meaning (*mafhūm*) is always discussed alongside predication (*ḥaml*). Thus even though Rāzī agrees with the *falāsifa* that the *meaning* of 'existence' is one meaning[63]—that is, it is a monosemic term—he takes issue with them on the fundamental question as to how this term ought to be *predicated* of different subjects; for according to Rāzī, that 'existence' has but one meaning *ipso facto* also implies that it is *equally* predicated of all existent things. In other words, having convinced himself through the aforementioned arguments that the term 'existence' *qua* its meaning is monosemic, Rāzī hastily infers that it must also be a *univocal*. In the *Mabāḥith*, for instance, in the section dealing with whether or not the existence of the Necessary Being is superadded to Its essence, Rāzī commences the ensuing discussion with the following disjunctive proposition: either, he writes, the existence of the Necessary Being is "identical" (*musāwī*) to the existence of possible beings insofar as the comprehension of the term 'existence' is concerned, or Its existence and their existences are different. If, however, their existences are not from the viewpoint of their comprehension (*mafhūm*) the same, then 'existence'—being merely a term which they have in common—must be polysemic. By contrast, if they and It have existence which are the same, then the existence of the Necessary Being will either be joined to an essence or not.

As Rāzī observes, this leads to a division with three possibilities: the first is that 'existence' is equivocally predicated of the Necessary and possible beings; the second that it is non-equivocally predicated of them but in the case of the Necessary Being not joined to an essence; and the third is

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[61] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 293^{3-13}; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 54^{21-24}.

[62] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 294^{8-15}; cf. idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 111^{12-17}.

[63] Cf. Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, pp. 75-75 were he rejects this view and accepts al-Ashʿarī's claim that 'existence' is equivocal (*mushtarak lafẓī*).

that it is non-equivocally predicated of both types of being and in each case joined to an essence.[64] What is crucial to note at this point is that although Rāzī expends much effort to show why only the third option is correct, none of his arguments would stand if it were not for the fact that he conflates the ideas of *meaning* and *predication*. He seems to take for granted that if a term has just one meaning that it must also then be predicated of all its subjects with an *equality* of predication. Accordingly, though it is true on the one hand that a term is either equivocal or non-equivocal, it is false on the other hand to conclude that the category of the 'non-equivocal' is identical to the category of the 'univocal'. All of the arguments that are given by Rāzī to show why the essence and existence of the Necessary Being cannot be equal proceed on the basis of this assumption, however, that the opposite of equivocity is univocity, and that 'existence' must be *equally* predicated of Necessary and possible beings. As we shall see in the next chapter, Ṭūsī shows how a simple mistake in logic leads Rāzī to false conclusions in metaphysics.

Existence is Superadded to the Essence of God

The discussion of topics relating to the notion of existence in Rāzī's *Maṭālib* mirrors exactly the same threefold division in the earlier *Mabāḥith*. Using the arguments of the *falāsifa*, he has shown why the term 'existence' has only one meaning—which therefore immediately rules out the first option which is that 'existence' is a polysemic term, meaning that only "two options remain in the Issue".[65] As previously mentioned in the *Mabāḥith* and repeated here again in the *Maṭālib*, these options are that either the existence of the Necessary Being is identical to Its essence; or that the existence of the Necessary Being is additional to Its essence.

In other words, one now has to choose between:

(1) Avicenna's identity-thesis (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*); or

(2) the traditional *mutakallim*'s view that existence is an attribute *superadded* to God's essence.

What follows is a series of twelve detailed arguments to show why, according to Rāzī, essence and existence cannot be identical in the Necessary Being.

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[64] Reading "*al-wujūd ghayr maqūlin ʿalayhimā*" instead of "*al-wujūd maqūlin ʿalayhimā*" at *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 120[18].

[65] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 297[1].

First argument. Rāzī strikes at the very core of metaphysics in his first so-called "proof". If admitted, then the conclusion he draws would destroy the very possibility of metaphysical science. He begins with another disjunctive proposition, this time proposing that being *qua* being is either (1) self-subsistent or (2) not, as the case may be. According to Rāzī, neither of these options can be true. If being *qua* being is self-subsistent, then every being (*mawjūd*) must be necessary of existence in itself. If, on the other hand, being *qua* being is not self-subsistent but in need of another for its subsistence, then every being (*mawjūd*). The first option precludes the existence of contingents; the second, the Necessary Existent. So given that both options are clearly false, being *qua* being (or existence *qua* existence) cannot be necessary of existence in itself.[66]

Now, as it stands, this argument is clearly intended as a refutation of Avicenna's claim that essence and existence are identical in the Necessary Being.[67] Since existence *qua* existence cannot be either self-subsistent or needy in itself, it follows that whatever is Necessary of Existence cannot be an existence that is self-subsistent. Hence the reason why the Necessary Being cannot be "sheer existence", but one the existence of which is joined to a quiddity. This argument, Rāzī says, "is so clear and obvious that […] it cannot be questioned or objected to".[68] Despite his claims, however, the argument is worthless because of the fact that it assumes that being *qua* being (or absolute existence) *is* the existence of the Necessary Existent.[69] Yet Avicenna completely rejects—and does so

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[66] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 295[6–16]; cf. idem., *Uṣūl*, p. 47[1–6]; idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 121[6]–122[4]; idem., *Arbaʿīn*, p. 144[4–17].

[67] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 295[13–14].

[68] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 295[14–16].

[69] In syllogistic form, Rāzī's argument is based on the following claims:

First syllogism:

The Necessary Being is sheer existence
Sheer existence is being *qua* being
∴ The Necessary Being is being *qua* being

Second syllogism:

Being *qua* being cannot be self-subsistent in itself
The Necessary Being is being *qua* being
∴ The Necessary Being cannot be self-subsistent in itself

Since the conclusion of the second syllogism is false, at least one of the premises in the syllogism must therefore be false. According to Rāzī, the first premise of the second syllogism is true, therefore implying that the second premise ("The Necessary Being is being *qua* being") is false. And this, according to Rāzī's first syllogism, proves

explicitly—the suggestion that the First principle is being *qua* being. For Avicenna, the existence of the First principle is a *conditioned* mode of existence, and cannot therefore be identical to absolute existence which by definition is existence without any condition whatsoever. Furthermore, if, according to Avicenna, the Necessary Being were being *qua* being—that is, the subject-matter of metaphysics—whence the need to prove Its existence, for it is a primary concept (*awwalī al-taṣawwur*) that requires nothing prior to itself in order that it might then be known.

Second Argument. Rāzī's second argument, which closely parallels his first, holds that being *qua* being is either

(*a*) necessarily predicated of an essence,

(*b*) necessarily *not* predicated of an essence, or

(*c*) *not* necessarily predicated of an essence.

In other words, being *qua* being is either always predicated of an essence, never predicated of an essence, or sometimes predicated and sometimes not predicated of an essence. If (*a*) is true, then every existent (including the Necessary Existent) must have an "essence" to which an existence is superadded *ontologically* and predicated *logically*. If (*b*) is true, then as such there would be no possible existents since every existence—not being predicated of an essence—is self-subsistent and independent in itself. Or, if possible beings do exist, then 'existence' would have to be a polysemic term, which, given the arguments of the previous section, makes this option false. Lastly, if (*c*) is true then it cannot be due just to chance that a certain essence has existence predicated of it or not, implying therefore that a cause is needed to give each existent thing its existence. That cause, whatever it might be, would then be the factor which determines whether or not a certain has existence superadded onto it. In both cases, a cause is needed to ensure that certain existents have existence superadded onto them, just as another cause is needed to ensure that certain other existents

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that the Necessary Being cannot be sheer existence. Hence Avicenna's identity thesis is false. Unfortunately, as I have argued, Rāzī's mistakes Avicenna's conception of a being that is sheer existence (*al-wujūd al-maḥḍ*) for being *qua* being. This fundamental misunderstanding continues in all of the remaining arguments, whereas in fact Avicenna does not hold to the truth of the second premise in the first syllogism. (Cf. Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 3, a. 4: "It *seems* that essence and existence are not the same in God. For if it be so, then the divine being has nothing added to it. Now being to which no addition is made is universal being *which is predicated of all things*. Therefore it follows God is being in general which can be predicated of everything.") It is interesting to note that in the thought of Ibn 'Arabī's followers, God (*al-Ḥaqq*) *is* absolute existence, i.e. being *qua* being. This, however, is an entirely separate story, and for now needs to be delayed for another occasion.

do not have existence superadded onto them. Whatever the case, given that this implies that the Necessary Existent (an uncaused existent) is related to a cause, this option must also be false. This leaves only the first option, that being *qua* being must always be predicated of the essences of existent things—*ontologically* speaking.[70] Again, notice that Rāzī thinks it is being *qua* being that takes the place of *inniyya* in Avicenna's '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle.

Third Argument. Another version of the same argument is given in Rāzī's third "proof". If, according to Avicenna, the existence of God is "unattached" to a divine essence and hence "sheer" existence (*mujarrad al-wujūd*), then the reason for this, according to Rāzī, must be due to the fact that either "the nature of existence *qua* existence" (*ṭabīʿat al-wujūd min ḥaythu annahu wujūd*) necessitates this, or because of something else inhering in the nature of existence which then is the cause of the Necessary Being's existence being "unattached" to a quiddity, or because of something which is neither the inherer within, nor a substrate of, the nature of existence. Now, by force of Rāzī's previous arguments the First's detachedness cannot be due to the nature of existence itself, or else every existent thing would be a Necessary Existent; hence the first option is false. Likewise, the second possibility is also false because the inhering property which causes the First to be detached must itself be an existent, in turn meaning that it too falls into one of these three categories. Should its existence, therefore, also happen to fall in the second category, then this would lead to an infinite regress. And since this cannot be correct, this leaves only options one and three, the first of which has already been proven false. But option three is also false because this entails that the nature of existence has a substrate (*maḥall*), which the argument *ex hypothesi* has already discounted. (Recall, Avicenna argues that the existence of the Necessary Existent does *not* occur to an essence, and hence it has no substrate.) Therefore, since all of the options are false, Rāzī concludes that God's existence cannot be "the nature of existence"—this again being a clear indication that this is what he thinks is implied by Avicenna's '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle.[71]

Fourth Argument. This is a much weightier argument and begins with the question whether or not the meaning (*mafhūm*) of the term 'existence' applied to the First principle is the same as the meaning of Its 'necessity'; in other words, do the term 'existence' and 'necessity' mean the same

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[70] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 295^{17}–296^{7}; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. $117^{3–13}$; idem., *Arbaʿīn*, p. $144^{18–22}$.

[71] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 296^{8}–297^{4}.

thing *vis-à-vis* the Necessary of Existence? As we have shown in the previous chapters, Rāzī's discussion here is a mere continuation of one of the earliest themes in the aporetic tradition's response to Avicenna's thought. And like each of his anti-Avicennan predecessors Rāzī also holds that the terms 'existent' and 'necessary in itself' do not share the same meaning. As Rāzī observes, if this were not the case then everything called an 'existent' would also—if 'existence' and 'necessity' are synonymous—be called 'necessary in itself', which entails that are no existents which are not necessary of existence in themselves. But since possible beings do exist, the terms 'existence' and 'necessity' must be disparate terms, and "thus is there is complete certainty that Him being an 'existent' cannot be the same as Him being 'necessary'".[72]

Now, according to Rāzī, since neither term has the same meaning as the other, the question arises as to what the relation is exactly between the First's *existence* and Its *necessity*.[73]

There are four possibilities:

(1) The First's necessity is the *cause* of Its existence.

(2) The First's existence is the *cause* of Its necessity.

(3) The First's existence *and* its necessity are *caused* by something else.

(4) The First's existence *and* its necessity are *un*caused.[74]

The remainder of the argument is designed as a *reductio* which attempts to show why each of these possibilities if correct would lead to an absurdity, and the final conclusion therefore that Avicenna's identity-thesis is false. One must bear in mind however that the whole discussion is *arguendo* on Rāzī's part. He is not speaking from his own perspective and inner personal convictions, but rather from the perspective of *Avicenna's philosophy*. The aim, therefore, is to show that if the main premises of Avicenna's metaphysics are admitted *arguendo* and drawn out to their logical conclusions, then in each instance the derived conclusion will be absurd and as a result the initial premises of the argument proven false. Rāzī has taken for granted that 'necessity' and 'existence' are two meanings

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[72] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 297^{20-21}.

[73] In light of the previous Issue (II), one should keep in mind that 'necessity', according to Rāzī, is a positively affirmed notion *in extensio*.

[74] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 297^{21}-298^{2}. Throughout, Rāzī uses the verb *yastalzim* which derives from *luzūm*, meaning 'necessary entailment'. However, if A is the *mustalzim* (the necessary entailer) of B, then A is necessarily the *cause* of B.

in divinis each with their own individual extension, and that intrinsic necessity—or *per se* necessity (*al-wujūd bi-l-dhāt*) *is* the essence of the Necessary Being *according to Avicenna*.

Based on this reading of Avicenna's philosophy, the possibility that the First's existence is the effect of Its own intrinsic necessity can immediately be dismissed given that anything which is the necessary entailment and concomitant of something else is necessarily its accident (*ʿāriḍ*). However, according to Avicenna's metaphysics, the existence of the Necessary Existent cannot be an accident, meaning therefore that it cannot have a substrate—in this case a divine essence; hence the reason we get the formula '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*'. The first possibility (nr. 1) is absurd, therefore, because it contradicts the very meaning and notion of a being that is necessary of existence in itself.[75]

The absurdity of the second possibility is that if the *nature of existence* itself—that is, being *qua* being—is what causes the First's intrinsic necessity, then every being no matter what would have the same intrinsic necessity as the First. In that case, either there are no beings with intrinsic or *per se* possibility (clearly false) or being *qua* being is simultaneously the principle of community (*mā bihi l-ishtirāk*) and differentiation (*mā bihi l-imtiyāz*).[76] It is crucial that the reason he gives for this is mentally registered for our discussion later. According to Rāzī, existence (*wujūd*) is a *natural species*—more accurately, a 'species-nature' (*ṭabīʿa nawʿiyya*)—which means, therefore, that all existent things (*mawjūdāt*) participate in the *nature* 'existence'. According to the dictates of Aristotle's philosophy, every true nature is *equally* distributed for all the individual members of that species: "all things *by nature* are equal". Now, that which things have in common cannot itself be the cause of that which is unique and uncommon to them; the nature of a thing (e.g. humanity) cannot itself be the cause of that thing's individuations (e.g. Zayd).[77] Existence, then, cannot be the cause of 'necessity' nor the cause of 'possibility', since these are different entailments that cannot be produced by a single nature, or else *every* existent *qua* existent would be qualified by one and only one of these modal properties.[78] So if the existence of the First principle is the cause of Its necessity and it the

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[75] As we shall see below, this is actually the option that Rāzī himself thinks is correct, namely, that a divine essence (*māhiyya*) is the cause of divine existence (*wujūd*).

[76] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 298[6-9].

[77] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 298[8–9]; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 3], p. 117[19–27].

[78] Notice that Rāzī presumes that both 'necessity' and 'essential contingency' are positively affirmed meanings *in re*.

necessary entailment (*lāzim*) of Its existence, as the second possibility claims, then as a *nature* existence *per se* would have to be consistent and produce the same entailment in all existents. Clearly, this would then mean that there are no possible beings (*mumkināt*), and hence the second option must also be false.

If, however, 'necessity' and 'existence' are caused by some third essence (nr. 3), then both 'necessity' and 'existence' would be predicated of *that* third thing. Yet having previously supposed *ex hypothesi* that the existence of the First principle is not predicated of a divine essence, this option must also be false.

The only remaining option, then, is that the First is absolutely uncaused (nr. 4) which, for all intents and purposes, makes good sense. Not so according to Rāzī, who rather incredibly states that if the First's existence is *not* the cause of Its own intrinsic necessity, then It has *no* intrinsic necessity, and cannot therefore be the Necessary Existent. What this means, therefore, is that in order for It not to be a possible being, the Necessary Being must *cause* Its own intrinsic necessity according to Rāzī. He concludes the argument by surmising: "The opinion that the Necessary of Existence in Itself has no reality (*ḥaqīqa*) apart from sheer existence has through this demonstration been shown to be false and invalid".[79] Rāzī thus agrees with Ghazālī on two counts: (1) that Avicenna characterizes the Necessary Existent as a being the *reality* of which is existence *per se*—that is, being *qua* being—and therefore a being with no reality at all; and (2) his rejection of Avicenna's identity-thesis.

Fifth Argument. Nobody doubts that a being which is necessary of existence in itself is a First principle of existence and the cause of every contingent thing's coming into being. Considered more critically, however, especially in the context of these debates, this must either imply that the First principle of existence is just sheer existence itself (i.e. unqualified existence) or existence which is in some way qualified—positively or negatively. The train of Rāzī's thinking follows the logic of previous discussions: the First cannot be a principle of existence and at the same time sheer existence, or else any possible being would produce the same effects as the Necessary Existent.[80] The second possibility in which the First is a principle of existence due to a privation must equally be false because nonbeing cannot be a cause of being. The third possibility is even less likely given that any positive qualification of the First's existence presumes *another* by which It is a principle of existence. But any

[79] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 298[17–18]; cf. idem., *Arbaʿīn*, pp. 144[23–]145[5].

[80] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 298[21]-299[23].

determination of the Necessary's existence which makes It dependent on something else would mean that It is not a Necessary Existent but a contingent being.[81] Since all three options are absurd, the First principle of being cannot be existence (*wujūd*), but an *essence* distinct from existence. Hence Avicenna's identity-thesis must be false.[82]

Seventh Argument. This is Rāzī's version of Ghazālī's argument:

> Reason testifies that something which has no reality (*ḥaqīqa*) besides sheer existence (*al-ḥuṣūl fī l-aʿyān*) cannot possibly exist, and that an essence (*māhiyya*) and reality (*ḥaqīqa*) must be presumed in order that reason may then judge that it has occurred *in re*. To suppose that there is some being (*mawjūd*) which has no essence or reality besides mere occurrence *in re* itself is therefore contrary to reason.[83]

Eighth Argument. One of Rāzī's favourite arguments. Suppose God's existence *is* identical to His essence. Yet we *know* God exists, we *know* His existence (*wujūd*), and we know that existence *per se* is a self-evident meaning (*badīhī*). But even the *falāsifa* argue that God's essence *cannot be known*. Given this difference, God's existence *cannot be identical* to His essence.[84] Rāzī employs this argument repeatedly and describes it as the "surest demonstration" (*burhān qāṭiʿ*) that the Avicennan identity-thesis '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' must be false.[85]

Ninth Argument. This argument is presented in a somewhat loquacious manner; in simple terms it focusses on the logical syntax of the proposition "God exists", the subject of which is either existence *per se* or some reality besides existence. What exactly is one assenting to when one assents to the proposition "God exists"? Rāzī says there are only two possibilities: the statement "God exists" (*Allāh mawjūd*) either means "existence exists" (*al-wujūd mawjūd*) or "the essence of God exists"

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[81] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 299[10]-300[4].

[82] The second option is by far the most significant given that it is the correct Avicennan position. Since I am not particularly interested in focussing on the metaphysics of this question directly, it suffices to mention that according to Ṭūsī relative nonbeing *can* in fact play a role in causation. The example he gives is that the nonexistence of inhibiting factors (*ʿadam al-mawāniʿ*) is a condition for the efficacy of an efficient cause, hence their nonbeing—as opposed to absolute nonbeing—does in fact contribute to the effect being produced. See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 118[11-14].

[83] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 300[5-8].

[84] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 301[9]–302[5]; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vo. 3], p. 117[14–15]; idem., *Uṣūl*, p. 46[16–17]; idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 124[12–17]; idem., *Arbaʿīn*, pp. 146[20]–147[7]. (Cf. Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 3, a. 4: "Further, we can know 'whether' God exists as said above; but we cannot 'what' He is. Therefore God's existence is not the same as His essence—that is, as His quiddity or nature.")

[85] For a general account of Rāzī's take on the relation between God's essence and His attributes, see Abrahamov, B. (2002).

(*dhāt Allāh mawjūd*). The first option, he says, is false, though Rāzī does not proffer an explanation. One has to presume therefore that it is linked to what he said previously, especially his prior understanding of meaningful speech (*kalām mufīd*) as that which cannot be repetitive or tautological. Existence must therefore be a predicate, a notion which is added to whatever occupies the place of the subject-term and supplements its meaning. For this reason, the reality of God cannot be identical to His existence.[86] An expanded version of this argument is given in the tenth argument below.

Tenth Argument. The ninth argument is noteworthy because of its seeming resemblance to Kant's objection to the ontological argument. Rāzī begins by remarking that the reason why philosophers make a distinction between essence (*māhiyya*) and existence (*wujūd*) in contingent things is because it is possible to know the former while doubting the latter—a difference which ultimately comes down to the difference between the intellect's two operations, namely, conceptualisation (*taṣawwur*) and assent (*taṣdīq*). In other words, the question about a thing's "whatness" (*māhiyya*) can be answered regardless of its existence or knowledge of its "thatness" (*halliyya*). This implies that the known ("whatness") and unknown ("thatness") object of knowledge must be essentially different *vis-à-vis* contingent beings. However, according to Rāzī, this can just as equally be applied to the Necessary Being.

> This same demonstration applies to the existence of the Necessary Being, and that is because whenever we conceptualize the Necessary Being as "that being the existence of which does not depend on another", or "that which deserves existence of itself", then one knows with certainty that this amount of conceptualization [of what the Necessary Being is] does not guarantee certainty that such a being [actually] exists. Even after it has obtained this much conceptualisation [of the Necessary Being] the mind still doubts whether or not this reality exists, which therefore establishes the fact that in this instance also [and not just with regard to contingent beings] it is possible to conceptualize the essence [of the Necessary Being] while nonetheless still being in doubt concerning [Its] existence; which implies therefore that the essence [of the Necessary Being] is distinct from the [Its] existence. If the difference between essence and existence in this instance does not follow, then it would not follow in the case of contingent beings either.[87]

One could argue that this conclusion of Rāzī's thinking contradicts his earlier contention in the eighth argument, where it had been noted that the essence of the Necessary Being is *unknown* despite the fact of Its existence being known to us. So whereas previously it was the essence of God that was

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[86] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 302^{6}–303^{2}.

[87] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. $303^{5\text{-}16}$.

unknown and His existence known, in this argument Rāzī has reversed the epistemic relations, for now it is God's essence that is known and His existence unknown. Whatever the case, Rāzī shows that the conclusion will always be the same, which is to say that because of these differing *epistemic* relations God essence and existence cannot be the same *ontologically* speaking. Suppose, as might reasonably be objected, that neither of the conceptualizations which are mentioned in the aforementioned passage are "what" the Necessary Existent is, that they do not represent in truth the real essence (*māhiyya*) of God but rather just some characterization of that essence *ab extra*. In that case the argument is a non-starter since it would not be the essence of God that is being contrasted with His existence but some non-essential aspect of His being. Perhaps more importantly, however, Avicenna himself did not claim that the proposition "the Necessary of Existence exists" has a predicate which is identical to (or a part of) its subject. If that were the case, the mere conception of the subject-term would contain the analytic truth of the proposition "the Necessary of Existence exists"—in which case a simple act of logical conception would thus have proven the ontological truth of that proposition and an idea by itself the actual existence of God. According to Ṭūsī this is a patently false interpretation, for Avicenna has never once claimed that the mere *conceptualisation* of the notion 'necessary of existence in itself' is by itself sufficient to prove its own extramental existence, that a being which is necessary of existence in itself actually exists *extra animam*. Hence the reason why philosophers have deemed it necessary to provide an argument (*dalīl*) above and beyond the mere conceptualisation of the notion of ontological necessity (*wujūb al-wujūd*) to demonstrate the existence of a being—a reality beyond the mind—which is Necessary of Existence.

Rāzī somehow thinks differently and impugns Avicenna for having failed to make this crucial distinction between the *conceptualisation* of the Necessary and the *assent* of Its existence, and therefore seems to regard Avicenna's proof as a so-called "ontological" proof of the existence of a Necessary Being from the mere notion of 'necessity' *per se*.

> From what you [Avicenna] have said it follows that anyone who so much as conceptualises 'the necessary of existence in itself' will then immediately be convinced that the Necessary Existent exists. Since this is self-evidently false, we arrive at the knowledge that it is possible to have a conception of the Necessary Existent albeit all the while doubting in Its existence. Hence Its existence must be superadded to Its essence.[88]

[88] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 303[17–20].

Eleventh Argument. In the eighth argument I explained that one reason why Rāzī thinks the statement "God exists" implies a guaranteed distinction between essence and existence *in divinis* is due to the fact that "God exists" is a meaningful statement; whereas, by contrast, the statement "Existence exists" is tautological and of no benefit whatsoever. The tenth argument explains this in greater depth. Rāzī consents that the statement "God is Necessary of Existence" is a true statement. However, as he proceeds to explain, the subject of this statement is either existence itself or something else. It cannot be existence itself since the statement "Existence is Necessary of Existence" implies that a single term is the same in both the subject and predicate positions, or that the same term has different meanings in either case. Rāzī rejects the first possibility, surmising that "to make a thing the subject and predicate for itself is false speech (*kalām fāsid*) which is empty of benefit; for if someone were to say 'A wall is a wall' or 'A triangle is a triangle', his speech would be false."[89] The second possibility is also false; the two existences cannot be different. And this is because if existence is monosemic, then the statement "existence exists" would imply that existence occurs twice, and that is absurd. Hence the reason why the subject of the proposition "God exists" cannot be identical to its predicate.

Twelfth Argument. It is quite a curious phenomenon that in none of his writings does Rāzī ever question the meaning of the term '*inniyya*' or even bother to think whether there is any difference between this term and the term '*wujūd*'. The entire discussion in fact is framed around the terms *inniyya* and *wujūd* being merely synonyms of one another in Avicenna's thought. This hitherto undeclared assumption in Rāzī's interpretation of Avicenna's identity-thesis is openly betrayed in the Twelfth Argument. He declares that "God is an individuated essence distinguished from every other particularised essence" (*anna l-ḥaqq taʿālā dhātun mutaʿayyanatun mumtāzatun ʿan kull mā siwāhu min al-dhawāt al-muʿayyana*),[90] the clear implication here being that Avicenna did not think this was the case but that for him the Necessary Existent is not some particular "individuated essence" but an non-individuated and unspecified "something." Rāzī confirms this when he says:

> There is no doubt that being *qua* being is a reality which is shared by the Necessary, the contingent, substances and accidents. We say: His specified essence is either this shared notion which is common to all existent things or it is this notion with an added qualification, thereby entailing His specification and individuation. The first is false because this shared property

[89] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 304[5–7]; cf. idem., *Arbaʿīn*, p. 146[9–19].

[90] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol 1, p .305[2–3].

> can truly be said to be something common to all things, but His specified essence cannot truly be said to be common to all things. The statement that His specific essence is this commonly shared notion therefore turns out to be false.[91]

As this passage and what is said immediately after it clearly demonstrates, Rāzī understands Avicenna's "*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*" principle as somehow meaning that the "essence" of the Necessary Existent is identical to the primary notion of existence, or being *qua* being, which, as Rāzī goes on to say, is what the philosophers refer to as "absolute existence" (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). Accordingly, "the opinion that His reality is sheer existence […] is therefore false".[92] There are two noteworthy points here. First, in Rāzī's estimation the term '*inniyya*' is simply to be identified with "common existence" (*al-wujūd al-ʿāmm*)—that existence which is predicated of all existent things (*mawjūdāt*). And it is on this basis that he criticises Avicenna for the identity-thesis on the one hand, and his negation of a divine "essence" (*māhiyya*) on the other.[93] Second, Rāzī also assumes that "sheer existence" (*al-wujūd al-mujarrad*) in Avicenna's thought is just the same as "absolute existence" (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*, i.e. being *qua* being). Based on these assumptions, it is hardly surprising that he rejects Avicenna's statement '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*', since this would more or less be the same as saying "God is all things".

Twelfth Argument. The twelfth and final argument comprises a discussion of some of the metaphysical fallacies that would result from God's existence being identical to "the nature of existence", which is how Rāzī has interpreted Avicenna's understanding of the Necessary Existent throughout. And though everything he says is strictly speaking true, the entire discussion is nonetheless premised on the presumption that God's existence *is* the nature of existence. He begins with the assertion that existence (*wujūd*) is a "single species-nature" (*ṭabīʿa nawʿiyya wāḥida*).[94] Rāzī speaks as if this were something everyone agrees on, but there are strong reasons to doubt this being the case. We know, for example, that Avicenna rejected the idea that existence is a true species given that the individuals which are part of a true species must be—at least minimally speaking—

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[91] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 305$^{3-9}$.

[92] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 305$^{23-24}$.

[93] As we shall see Rāzī's criticism have nothing to do with Avicenna's own theology, but if anything they are criticisms of Ibn ʿArabī and his followers who *do* identify God with absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). Crucially, however, absolute existence for Ibn ʿArabī's followers is not "common existence" (*al-wujūd al-ʿāmm*), but existence without any condition whatsoever (*al-wujūd lā bi-sharṭ shayʾ*).

[94] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 306$^{3-4}$.

intellectually compounded through a genus and *differentia*. If, therefore, existence were a true species, the Necessary Being would not be a simple being (*basīṭ*).[95] Avicenna is very clear on this point: "Everything apart from the First comprises some amount of composition".[96] Nevertheless, the point Rāzī wishes to make is that whatever is true of a certain nature *qua* nature is one that must also be applicable of all the individuals participating in that nature. For example, whatever is true of Zayd *qua* human being must also be true necessarily of all human beings *qua* human beings. As Rāzī clarifies, the reason for this is that "the individuals of a single species must necessarily be equal in respect of their concomitant properties" (*anna afrād al-nawʿ al-wāḥid yajib tasāwīhā fī l-lawāzim*),[97] which is of course one of the core principles of Aristotle's theory of substance. Now given that the essence of God is a reality differing in its essential properties from all other existents, the essence (*māhiyya*) of God cannot be "the nature of existence" (*inniyya*, as Rāzī interprets it). Otherwise, all existent things would participate in the essence of God, meaning therefore *all beings qua their existence are identical to God*. To appreciate what the ramifications of this would be consider that the fact that one of the concomitant properties of God's essence is that He is immaterial. But if, for the sake of argument, God's essence were the nature of existence, then all things which participate in that nature—namely, existent things (*mawjūdāt*)—would also have to have the same concomitant property. As a result of this there would be no material beings, since had there been so then a single nature *qua* itself would have entailed two opposing concomitant properties, and that is absurd. Therefore, the Necessary Existent cannot be the nature of existence itself, but rather an essence distinct from existence, *contra* Avicenna—supposedly.[98]

The Essence of God "causes" Its Own Existence

Putting aside for the moment the problematic assumptions within each of Rāzī's arguments, from his perspective he has shown that God's essence (*māhiyya*) cannot be identical to the "nature" of existence, that God therefore cannot be "sheer existence", and that He must possess an essence

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[95] For his explicit rejection of existence being a species, see Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt*, pp. 218-219 (nr. 647, 648).

[96] Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt*, p. 90 (nr. 162).

[97] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 306$^{1-2}$.

[98] Cf. Rāzī, *Arbaʿīn*, p. 147$^{8-20}$.

distinct from His existence. From these conclusions it naturally follows that existence (*wujūd*) must be an attribute (*ṣifa*) of God's essence which, like every other attribute, is superadded to the thing it describes (*al-mawṣūf*)—in this case the essence (*dhāt*) of the Necessary Being. For Avicenna's detractors this creates a huge dilemma: Every attribute—whatever it may be—is always posterior in being to the subject of qualification, and thence the effect (*maʿlūl*) of either that very subject or some other thing. When this attribute or property is existence (*wujūd*) itself, then the being (*mawjūd*) in question must a contingent being (*mumkin al-wujūd*). As we saw at the beginning of this thesis, in Avicenna's metaphysics any being "the existence of which is not included in the comprehension of its essence" must be *caused* by an efficient cause. Hence every being that has an essence (*māhiyya*) distinct from its existence (*wujūd*) is merely possible of existence in itself, having an equal relation to existence and nonexistence, needing an efficient cause in order to exist.

Ghazālī rejected this line of reasoning in the *Tahāfut* by insisting that even though it is true that every being (including God) has an essence and reality distinct from its existence, there is, nonetheless, *vis-à-vis* God a slight exception given that His essence does not have an *efficient* cause for its existence. God's existence is *related* to His essence without being the effect of an efficient cause, and therefore unlike other beings for which existence has been related to their essences *ab extra* by an efficient cause. This almost sounds like a contradiction; if the *essence* of God has no efficient cause but still has existence related to it, from "where" or "what thing" did God's essence derive its existence? What is it that causes this relation? Ghazālī's half-baked solution is simply that it is nonsensical to ask "where" or "from what thing" the Perfect gets Its attributes of Perfection. By definition, the Perfect is that being which has all the attributes of Perfection for all past and future times, and given that there has never been a "moment" when It did not possess them, the opportunity to ask where It derives these Perfections never arises. Otherwise, It would not be the Perfect.

Ghazālī's rejoinder is a rather unflattering response and mostly just a play on words. It avoids perhaps the most crucial question at the heart of these debates by simply reverting to semantics. Rāzī is much the more forthcoming and unhesitatingly declares—albeit in rather convoluted terms—that the *existence* of the Necessary Being is an *effect* of the divine essence. Put differently, the divine essence is what *causes* the divine existence. Needless to say, such a proposition is deeply offensive to Avicenna and metaphysically speaking impossible. It suggests that the essence of a thing—that it happens to be the essence of God makes no difference in the slightest given that existence is a monosemic concept—bears responsibility for its own *actual* existence *before* its *actual* existence.

Avicenna had already rejected this claim in the *Ishārāt*, noting that:

> It is inconceivable for the attribute which is a thing's existence to be itself the effect of its essence, an essence which is not existence, or the effect of another attribute. That is because the cause is [always] prior in existence, and nothing is prior in existence before existence.[99]

Dating the *Ishārāt* has proven to be a controversial topic in modern scholarship. There is however an interesting passage in the *Mubāḥathāt* in which one of Avicenna's students (Bahmanyār or Ibn Zaylā) asks him precisely this question:

> *Question*. Why is it not possible for existence to be an entailment and consequent of some essences like other entailments [that essences produce] apart from existence?
>
> *Answer*. Because all consequent properties [of an essence] are effects, and whatever the effect its existence and occurrence comes after the existence of its cause, which is why the existence of an essence cannot itself be the effect of the essence, or else the essence would have had to have an existence before (*sābiq*) the existence and occurrence of its effect.[100]

Therefore, in order for a thing's essence to be the cause of its existence, the essence would need to have existed *before* its existence, yet since 'existence' is one meaning an essence cannot cause its own existence given the fact that it has no existence *before* its existence. As Avicenna says in the *Ishārāt*, there is nothing prior—that is, before—existence other than existence itself. Let us call this the priority-thesis.

Rāzī however disagrees and responds directly to Avicenna's reasoning in the *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* by remarking that:

> All of the premises of the argument which the Shaykh relies on to show why the existence of God cannot be superadded to His essence are admitted save this one, namely, his saying that if an essence were the cause of its own existence that it would then be prior in existence to itself, given that the cause is always prior to the effect in existence. We, however, deny this priority.[101]

Rāzī presents three counter-arguments against Avicenna's priority-thesis. (I) The first of these is that the *falāsifa* themselves must contradict this principle when they claim that the form (*ṣūra*) of a hylemorphic substance is what causes of the *existence* of its matter, even though the form cannot exist

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[99] Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, IV.17, p. 107^{18-20}.

[100] Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt*, p. 109 (nr. 244, 245).

[101] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. 361^{3-5}.

without *inhering in* the matter. Thus the form of a material substance is at once both the cause of its matter's existence and its inherer, and therefore simultaneously prior and posterior to that matter's existence—prior because the form causes the existence of matter, posterior because every inherer (*ḥāll*) is posterior in existence to its substrate (*maḥall*). According to the *falāsifa*, therefore, since every cause is independent of its effect for its own existence, the form of a material body must be independent of its matter. Yet no forms exist which do not inhere in a substrate, so the form of a material body must inhere in its matter. So, according to Rāzī, the *falāsifa* themselves reject the priority-thesis by admitting that no form is dependent for its existence on matter and that it must also be an inherer in matter. Likewise, by rejecting the priority-thesis, it is possible that the divine existence is "self-sufficient" (*ghanī*) in the sense that its existence does not depend on the divine essence, and that it nonetheless inheres in the divine essence.[102] The conclusion that Rāzī takes from all of this is that the divine essence is thus both the *efficient* and *receptive* cause of its own existence.

(II) Indeed the priority-thesis must be false otherwise it would have been impossible to make a distinction between essence and existence in contingent beings. Rāzī therefore holds that in order for Avicenna to make his renowned essence-existence distinction, he must himself admit to the falsity of the priority principle.

> There is no disagreement on the fact that the essences of contingent things are different from their existences, and that the essences are the *receptive causes* of those existences. On this basis we say that if the condition which makes these essences the receptive causes of those existences is their being existent things in themselves, then the absurdities which you have cited would follow. If, however, the essence is not conditioned with being existent when receiving its existence, but is a receptive cause only insofar as it is an essence and nothing else, then why would it not be possible to say that the essence is a *cause* of that existence insofar as that essence is merely itself [i.e. in a conditioned state, not even by the condition of being-an-existent]?[103]

Rāzī's argument strikes at the heart of Avicennan philosophy and epitomises twelfth-century debates on the essence-existence distinction. As he explains in a fascinating discourse in the *Mabāḥith*, the essence (*māhiyya*) of a possible being which receives existence (*wujūd*) must either already be an existent (*mawjūd*) or nonexistent (*maʿdūm*) before it receives its existence. It cannot have been nonexistent for the obvious reason that nothing exists in this case to receive the property of existence. Neither could it have been an existent, however, for then the argument would simply turn on that

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[102] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 307^{22}-308^{13}.

[103] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. $309^{11\text{-}17}$.

essence's first existence. Presumably, given *ex hypothesi* that it is a contingent being, that first existence must also have been received. So given that it is absurd to think existences regress *ad infinitum*, the essence of a contingent being must be prior to its existence and itself non-conditioned by either existence or non-existence.

The conclusion that Rāzī infers from all of this is that *there is* a prior state in which something may precede its own existence, and that is the state in which an essence is *neither existent nor nonexistent*—a state he calls, borrowing Avicenna's terminology, the non-conditioned state of essence and the state of an essence being just itself (*al-māhiyya min ḥaythu hiya hiya*). This, he says, is true for the distinction of a contingent thing's essence and existence never mind the Necessary Being; and since everyone agrees on the validity of Avicenna's essence-existence distinction in contingent beings, the priority-thesis must be false. Hence the essences of things regardless of whether they are Necessary or contingent must be prior to their existences. All essences in other words are *receptive* causes of their existence. The only difference is that the *essence* of a Necessary Being is also the *efficient* cause of Its existence, whereas the efficient cause of contingents is not their essences themselves but some *extrinsic* cause.[104]

(III) Rāzī's third argument is the least convincing. If the *falāsifa* say that "a cause must be essentially (*bi-l-dhāt*) prior to its effect" and what they mean by this is that the cause *causes* the effect, then that Rāzī says is obvious (*maʿlūm musallam*). But if by the condition of being "essentially prior" they mean the cause is "prior in existence" to the effect, then this would be begging the question—why? Because "being prior in existence" simply means that a cause "produces its effect after its existence"; and that, says Rāzī is obvious and doesn't need mentioning (*lā fāʿida fīhi*). Being "prior in existence" therefore simply means that a cause produces an effect and nothing else.[105]

Now let us suppose that Rāzī is right and that by force of each one of these arguments the priority-thesis is false. There remains one final concern, however, and that is anything that *has a cause* cannot, according to Avicenna, be self-sufficient (*ghanī al-dhāt*). By definition, to "have a cause" means "to be dependent on another", and this means that anything qualified by "dependence on another" is "possible of existence in itself". Suppose, contrary to all metaphysical rules, the divine

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[104] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 309^{5}–310^{18}; idem., *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, vol. 2, pp. 361^{13}–362^{13}; idem., *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 126^{16}–127^{9}.

[105] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, vol. 2, p. $361^{7\text{-}12}$.

essence is the receptive cause (*ʿilla qābiliyya*) of the divine existence but not its efficient cause (*ʿilla fāʿiliyya*). By dint of having only a receptive *cause*, this nonetheless still implies that the divine existence is "dependent on another"—it inheres in the divine essence and is thus dependent on a substrate; and as a consequence the divine existence *qua* itself is possible of existence.

In the *Maṭālib*, Rāzī has a "solution." It's now his turn to attack Avicenna on the modal categories. Recall that according to Ghazālī the modal term 'necessity' was a meaningless and "badly postulated" concept, leading to much obfuscation and as a result better off altogether abandoned. It seems that for Rāzī the real problem is 'possibility', not 'necessity', since "there is a proof which prevents existence from being characterized with possibility".[106] As he now proceeds to explain, existence *per se* cannot be possible of existence, for this would imply that existence may or may not exist. If existence *exists*, then either (*a*) a second existence occurs to the subject or (*b*) the subject of the proposition "existence *exits*" is the same as its predicate. Both of these options, according to Rāzī, are false. By contrast, one cannot say of existence that it "may or may not exist" because existence *cannot* not exist. If existence may "possibly not exist" then all this means is that existence would have become nonexistence, which is a most blatant violation of the law of non-contradiction. Existence *per definiens* cannot not exist.[107] So by this argument alone Rāzī holds that existence in itself cannot be characterised as possible of existence, meaning therefore that even though God's existence has a receptive cause it cannot be called "possible of existence" given that existence *per se* cannot not exist.[108]

Unlike Ghazālī, Rāzī is bold enough to come straight out and declare that the divine essence *qua* itself is what "entails" its own existence. Perhaps one could argue that this is just the logical conclusion of Ghazālī's claim that the essence of God "exists in the sense of not being nonexistent or negated". In other words, Rāzī spells out what this remark by Ghazālī means for the Ashʿarite understanding of how God's existence relates to His essence. God's essence in itself is neither (*a*) existent, (*b*) "sheer existence", nor (*c*) nonexistent. It just happens "to be" itself and in this ontological "state" causes the property or attribute of its own existence. But Rāzī, I think, is even

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[106] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 308^{16-17}.

[107] It is interesting to note that this is precisely the argument which Ibn ʿArabī's followers use to prove the necessity of Absolute Existence—1) Existence exists; 2) It cannot not exist; Therefore, Existence is Necessary of Existence.

[108] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, pp. 308^{14}–309^{4}.

more audacious than Ghazālī. While both thinkers agree that existence is an attribute related to the divine essence and therefore distinct from it, Ghazālī had good reason it seems not to say that the divine essence is an efficient cause for its existence. Firstly, it would imply a regress of existences. Secondly, Ghazālī's discussion was always intended in relation to the *falāsifa*'s claim that something "pre-eternal" could nonetheless still have an efficient cause. Yet for Ghazālī only those things which "began to exist" (*al-muḥdathāt*) need an efficient cause. If, therefore, the essence of God was the *efficient* cause of His existence, then this would lead to the tragic conclusion, from Ghazālī's perspective, that the divine existence whose efficient cause is the essence of God "began to exist"—with the implication therefore that God is "originated", not pre-eternal.

Rāzī therefore seems to be going considerably further than Ghazālī when he says that the divine essence itself is the cause of divine existence. Now, if somebody were to ask, "Why can't every essence be the cause of its own existence?", the reply given by Rāzī is that *this* would be tantamount to polytheism since it would imply that there is *more than one* essence that causes the property of its own existence. Yet there are clear proofs establishing the "unity" of God, and so as a consequence there is only one essence—the divine essence—which is capable of causing its own existence. In the *Mabāḥith* Rāzī does confront a possible accusation here, and that is that if the divine essence is the cause of its own existence, then this would contradict a philosophical principle which states that a single thing cannot be both the efficient and receptive cause of the same property.

> They [the philosophers] may argue that if His existence is an effect of His essence, then this implies that His essence is the efficient cause (*al-ʿillat al-fāʿiliyya*) of that existence, and as a result a simple [reality] is both a receptive and efficient cause (*qābilan wa-fāʿilan*) and that is impossible. The reply to this is that all of this is silenced by [your own opinion concerning] the inseparable concomitant accidents of quiddities. For the quiddities are the efficient causes of these properties and [at the same] the subject attributed by them. Furthermore, their argument is proven false according to their own principle that the Creator (Exalted is He!) is a knower of things. For they hold that knowledge is the representation of the form of the object of knowledge *in* the knower. Hence, for God to be a knower their forms must occur in His essence, meaning therefore that His essence is a recipient cause for them and also their efficient cause.[109]

[109] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 130^{4-10}; cf. Rāzī, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, pp. 237^{12}–240^{7}.

To summarise: God's essence in the state of "being" non-conditioned by either existence or nonexistence is the cause of His existence. To me this sounds remarkably similar to some of Shahrastānī's "Ismaʿili" leanings in the *Muṣāraʿa*.

A God "beyond being" (*Maṭālib* III.I.3, Issue IV)

On the basis of our investigations thus far we have learned that Rāzī is committed to several important metaphysical positions which can be summarised as follows:

(1) First, he holds that existence *per se* exists and that it is a nature (*ṭabīʿa nawʿiyya*) which is uniformly distributed across all existence.

(2) Second, because existence *per se* is a nature Rāzī advocates the univocity of existence—the idea, namely, that the term 'existence' is *equally* predicated of all existent things (*mawjūdāt*).

(3) Third, contingent beings (*al-mumkināt*) have individual existences superadded to their essences in re. For Rāzī this is a real distinction in things themselves because existence (*wujūd*) is "a positive existential" (*ṣifa wujūdiyya*). If existence did not exist then that, in Rāzī's view, would violate the law of non-contradiction.

(4) Fourth, Avicenna's identity-thesis (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*) principle is false because the Necessary Existent's existence cannot be identical to general existence (*i.e.* being *qua* being). Hence all beings regardless of their modal qualifications have individual existences *superadded* to their essences.

(5) The difference between contingent beings and the Necessary Being is just that contingent beings have *extrinsic* efficient causes for their existence, whereas the Necessary Being has an essence which itself is the *intrinsic* cause of Its existence.

The crucial premise in all of these ontological manoeuvres is Rāzī's claim of univocity. By characterizing 'existence' as a monosemic term (Avicennan), Rāzī infers that this must also mean that 'existence' is *ipso facto* a univocal term (non-Avicennan). And as soon as he commits to the univocity of existence, Rāzī must hold that existence is a superadded property of every existent thing—including the Necessary Being. All beings therefore have individual existences superadded to their essences, but only that being whose essence *causes* its own individual existence is the Necessary of Existence. Put slightly differently, Rāzī holds that the divine essence is a kind of "internal efficient cause" of the Necessary Being's individual existence, not like contingent beings which have their individual existences caused by "extraneous efficient causes".

The Fourth Issue is the final part of Rāzī's prolonged argument against Avicenna's identity-thesis which aims to clarify the underlying metaphysical principles of the claim that "such-and-such essence *qua* itself is neither existent nor nonexistent".[110] Rāzī *must* commit to this axiom in order to sustain his argument that the divine essence itself is the efficient cause of divine existence. Rāzī himself has shown that if the divine essence was in a prior state of existence at the time when it produces the divine existence, then that would either lead to a *petitio principii* or an equivocation of the concept of being (*wujūd*). And yet if it were in a prior state of nonexistent, then nonbeing (*ʿadam*) would be a principle of being (*wujūd*), which is absurd. The only option then is that the divine essence is a cause of the divine existence from the perspective (*iʿtibār*) that it is in a non-conditioned prior state, "neither existent nor nonexistent"—which is what state exactly?

This expression can be interpreted in one of two ways. If, when reading logico-philosophical texts, we encounter the expression "the essence *qua* itself" (*al-māhiyya min ḥaythu hiya hiya*), then one possibility is that this expression conveys a logical distinction between "what" that essence is in itself and every other meaning which may be joined to it. In other words, the essence *qua* itself is only itself, and every other meaning—such as existence, nonexistence, one, many, universal, particular, etc.—is another, separate "logical intention" (*maʿnā*). Alternatively, a second possibility is that an "essence *qua* itself" means that said essence is "emptied of existence and nonexistence".[111] The first possibility is an epistemological distinction which says that I can *know* the essence just by itself without attending in my mind to any other meanings which may or may not happen to be joined to that essence in actual existence.[112] The second is an ontological distinction. It states that essence *qua* itself is some ontological mode of reality which *is* neither in a state of existence or nonexistence, that the essence *qua* itself is neither an existent nor nonexistent.[113] Rāzī holds the second interpretation to be false. "It is impossible for a triangle to be separated from being-existent and being-nonexistent. For something must either occur in things themselves or not occur in things themselves, it being

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[110] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 311[6–7].

[111] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 311[10].

[112] Even though this apple which I am now holding in my hand is a green apple, I am still able to think of the essence of an apple without thinking of the colour green.

[113] This opinion, which is heavily criticised by Avicenna (*Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt* I.5, pp. 25-27), is held by classical Muʿtazilite *mutakallimūn* who differentiate between 'existence' (*wujūd*) and 'affirmation' (*thubūt*). For these thinkers, the notion 'thing' (*shayʾ*) is the most general concept, which may either be existent (*mawjūd*), nonexistent (*maʿdūm*), or affirmed (*thābit*).

emptied from both of these being impossible to reason".[114] This remark is clearly an appropriation of Avicenna's statement in the *Isagoge* (I.12) of the *Shifā'* where he outlines the three different types of "consideration" (*iʿtibārāt*) of quiddity, and Rāzī uses it to formulate his own theory of metaphysics of causation:

> Suppose a certain essence or reality is the cause of its own existence. In this case, the cause of that existence is the essence *qua* itself, and not the essence from the aspect of it being an existent or nonexistent. It will be true to say in this case that [(1)] "the principle of that existence is neither an existent nor nonexistent thing", and also true to say that [(2)] "the principle exists and that it is the worthiest existent in its being an existent.[115]

What Rāzī says here is quite remarkable, and seems to imply that an *existent* thing can be held responsible for its own individual existence. How it does this can supposedly be explained by making a distinction between the divine essence's actual prior existence and the *aspect* in which it is neither existent nor nonexistent.[116] It seems Rāzī is conflating between an ontological characterisation on the one hand, and a logical distinction specific to contingent beings on the other. For all Shīʿī-Imāmī scholars this aspect of Rāzī's thought is emblematic of the irrational character of Ashʿarism, just one of a string illogical premises which are believed in for the sake of defending antiquated Ashʿarite theology which is rationally incoherent at its core. Not all Sunni scholars agree with Rāzī either. As al-Āmidī protests in his critique of Rāzī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, "nothing can cause the existence of anything else if it is not itself an existent".[117]

There are also curious smatterings of the Neo-Platonic doctrine of a God "beyond being" in everything Rāzī says here, which he also seems to confirm:

> Some people claim that the First principle is neither an existent nor nonexistent thing and that It is just Itself, an ipseity (*huwiyya*) which cannot be expressed by the terms "existence" and "nonexistence." As for the majority of people they are all agreed that the First principle is an existent, and that of all existent things It is the one which is most worthy of being characterised with the status of being-an-existent. The disputes that rage between supporters of either

[114] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 312[1–3].

[115] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 312[5–9]

[116] An Avicennan would cringe at this suggestion. If, by considering the divine essence *qua* itself, it is neither existent nor nonexistent, then it is a possible being.

[117] Al-Āmidī, *Kashf al-tamwīhāt*, p. 221.

> doctrine has persisted far too long. If, however, you reflect on the discussion as we have discussed it and explained it to you, you will learn that the difference is merely semantic.[118]

Having commenced his argument with the probable aim of supporting Ghazālī's remark in the *Tahāfut* that God's existence is additionally related to His essence, Rāzī has ended in almost complete agreement with Shahrastānī: God is "beyond being". Rāzī's staunch response to Avicenna's identity-thesis has seemingly led to a watered-down version of the so-called heretical theology of the Ismailis. The difference, says Rāzī, is "merely semantic". Ironically, it was Rāzī himself who in an earlier work condemned the Ismailis for advocating such a "heresy": "The Esotericists [*i.e.* the Ismailis]—God curse them !—say that God is neither an existent nor nonexistent".[119] For some reason, the difference then wasn't nearly as "merely semantic" at that earlier stage in Rāzī's career. It is also intriguing that in his rebuttal of their thought at that time, Rāzī was an out and out advocate of al-Ashʿarī's claim that the existence of everything is identical to its essence, including God, such that through pure equivocation of the term "existent" it would not be necessary to make God's existence identical to all other existents *qua* existence.[120] He also advocated the equivocity of being in the formidable *Muḥaṣṣal*, another highly influential work among thirteenth and fourteenth century scholars, by saying:

> The majority people among the philosophers, the Muʿtazilites and a group among our camp [the Ashʿarites] hold to the view that existence is a monosemic term for all existent things, but the more correct opinion is that it is not. For us, were existence like that (*viz.* monosemic) it would have been distinct to essence, implying therefore that existence subsists in that which is nonexistent.[121]

So depending on which works one relies Rāzī can either be a proponent of the univocity or equivocity of existence, which merely serves to demonstrate a lack of conviction at the level of principle. Ṭūsī brilliantly exposes such failings by pointing out that the only reason he vacillates between these two contradictory extremes is because he fails to recognize a third option: the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). Indeed, if one inspects Rāzī's arguments against Avicenna's identity-thesis closely, then his explanations of why divine existence cannot occur to a divine essence which is already existent

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[118] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 312[15–21].

[119] Rāzī, *Masāʾil*, 29[12]ff.

[120] See Rāzī, *Masāʾil*, p. 30.

[121] Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 74[11-14].

must also be the case surely with regard to the essences of contingent beings as well. Their essence, too, cannot be prior existents before their superadded existence for the same reasons that the divine essence cannot be a prior existent before its existence. I suspect Rāzī is aware of this problem also, and gets around it by saying that the reason that the divine essence is able to cause its own existence but not contingent essences is precisely because the divine essence is a unique essence. This, by the way, is another Mu'tazilite doctrine, and complicates somewhat the question of Rāzī's Ash'arism. A classical Ash'arite, as al-Āmidī seems to point out, would simply revert to the equivocity of being (*wujūd*): there is no distinction between essence and existence and therefore no need to think about how the divine essence (or any other essence) "receives" its existence.[122]

Conclusion

In the first three chapters of this study I have shown how an influential group of theologians attacked Avicenna on core aspects of his metaphysical theory. In doing so I have explored some of the different methods and strategies which twelfth and thirteenth century disputants employed in order to respond to what they considered to be the antithetical aspects of Avicenna's notion of a being which is necessary of existence in itself. To Avicenna such a First principle cannot be composed in any sense of the term and is therefore characterised in his metaphysics as a being "the essence of which is its existence" (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*). Throughout, I have shown that the prolonged criticisms on this aspect of Avicenna's thought were contiguous and cumulative, and through careful textual analysis been able to highlight specific areas where there are continuities and discontinuities in the writings of Ghazālī, Shahrastānī and Rāzī. Ghazālī focused his critique primarily on the concept of 'necessity' and questioned its usefulness as a meaningful philosophical notion. Shahrastānī opted for being's equivocation and unabashedly endorsed the "beyond being" doctrine which he found in Isma'ilism. Rāzī, the last of Avicenna's great Ash'arite critics, attacked Avicenna in more systematic fashion by targeting the core foundations of the Avicennan philosophical system.

In the next chapter, I will show that the reception of Avicenna's thought in theological circles is only one of the so-called post-Avicennan traditions. Modern scholarship, which tends to focus solely on the theological side of the Avicennan tradition, unduly paints a negative picture of the reception of Avicenna's thought which, because of the reaction of "orthodox" figures such as Ghazālī,

[122] Al-Āmidī, *Kashf al-tamwīhāt*, p. 222.

became battered and worn out until its influence eventually waned and the threat of philosophical injury to Islam was no longer potent anymore. Although admittedly somewhat exaggerated, it is this sort of historiography which led previous scholarship buoyed by a certain eurocentrism to speak in terms of "decline". Besides the theological tradition on which such narratives have been formed, however, there is a venerable *philosophical* tradition which tries to mitigate Avicenna's philosophy in light of the theological community's criticisms. This side of the Avicenna tradition, whose major representatives are still largely unknown personalities to modern scholarship, is more emphatic and lenient in its attitude toward Avicennan thought. It tries to "defend" Avicenna through subtle manoeuvres which are sensitive to the kinds of criticisms we have been dealing with so far in this thesis.

The most successful historical "defence" of Avicenna's core principles is found in Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. I use the word "defence" cautiously because, as we shall see, some of Ṭūsī's key interpretive strategies are at best only liberally connected to Avicenna's thought. It is worth stressing that Ṭūsī himself has nowhere explicitly claimed to be "defending" Avicenna or even being one of his followers, and it is a somewhat curious fact that his "commentary" on the *Ishārāt*, in spite of being a very illuminating explication of Avicenna's thought, is nonetheless called *Solving the Problems of the Ishārāt*, which seems to admit there *are* some problems in Avicenna's *Ishārāt*.[123] Though he was not an Ashʿarite, Ṭūsī did in one sense belong to the theological tradition of "Avicennan studies". He had many an acquaintance with Rāzī's students and was himself a student of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Miṣrī, who Ṭūsī refers to as "the professor" (*al-ustādh*). He also read Avicenna's *Ishārāt* with Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī who some have claimed was a student of Rāzī, although that seems highly unlikely. But Ṭūsī is also part of a mainstream Avicennan School of philosophy whose representatives were unattached, for the most part, to any theological tradition. This will become apparent in the following chapters. From Ṭūsī's perspective, therefore, many of the criticisms levelled at Avicenna's philosophy by the Ashʿarite and non-Ashʿarite *mutakallimūn* are based on false interpretations and misunderstandings of that system.

[123] Though of course this could be referring to the problems encountered by Avicenna's commentators, and not Avicenna himself.

CHAPTER 4

ṬŪSĪ ON THE AMBIGUITY OF EXISTENCE (*TASHKĪK AL-WUJŪD*) AND RATIONATE BEINGS (*AL-UMŪR AL-IʿTIBĀRIYYA*)

Introduction

Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence leads naturally to the conclusion that a being which is necessary of existence in itself must have an essence (*māhiyya*) which is identical to its existence (*inniyya*). This idea, which we have been calling the Avicennan "identity-thesis", is founded on two core principles of Avicenna's general metaphysics: modality and the metaphysics of causation; both of which are direct results of the essence-existence distinction itself. One of the important corollaries of this principle, however, is that a being which has an essence identical to its existence must also be one that is "sheer oneness". Thus, as Avicenna has argued, the Necessary Existent cannot be composed by either qualitative or quantitative means of composition. If, due to this, Avicenna's metaphysical theories have been traditionally regarded as heretical because of the challenges its presents to the Ashʿarite theory of divine attributes, then it is only due to the fact that he characterises God in terms of *per se* ontological necessity (*al-wujūb bi-l-dhāt*). That there was a sustained effort by Avicenna's theological disputants to overturn his identity-thesis can hardly come as a surprise, therefore, and in the foregoing chapters we have shown the variety of approaches that different Sunni scholars took to prove this aspect of Avicenna's thought false. However, alongside the theological tradition of Avicennan studies that dominates contemporary western narratives, historical sources provide clear evidence of another Avicennan tradition comprised mainly of individuals enamoured by Avicenna's philosophy and personalities who took upon themselves to clarify and defend his ideas.

In this chapter I look at Ṭūsī's defence of the '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle but do so in light of the core metaphysical principles on which his thought is founded. As I will show in this chapter, many of the assumptions and formulations of Avicenna's thought upon which the criticisms of Ashʿarite and non-Ashʿarite theologians were based were, in Ṭūsī's estimation, false interpretations of Avicenna's philosophy. Whether due to malicious intent or sheer ignorance of his true intentions, Avicenna's disputants failed to correctly understand the core concepts of Avicennan thought. And, in this regard, it could be argued that

the greater part of Ṭūsī's "defence" is largely focussed on correcting the false representations of Avicenna's thought in the works of subsequent thinkers, where oftentimes a small adjustment is all that is needed to completely turn an argument on its head. Furthermore, the Ashʿarites were not the only interpretative tradition of Avicenna's thought but one which existed alongside another entirely separate school of Avicennan studies, consisting of thinkers like Bahmanyār, Abu-l ʿAbbās al-Lawkarī, ʿUmar Khayyām, ʿUmar b. Sahlān al-Sāwī, and even the "pre-Illuminationist" Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, all of whom were just as equally engaged in the process of interpreting and organising Avicenna's thought. The interplay between these different strands of Avicennism between the 11th and 13th centuries is one of the most important areas still awaiting critical study in modern scholarship. What makes Ṭūsī a particularly interesting figure is that he, like many of his contemporaries in his era, is part of both of these traditions. Partly due to the favourable circumstances in which he found himself at the Maragha Observatory, Ṭūsī had access to the works of nearly all of his predecessors and was also trained and taught by intellectuals in both of these intellectual streams.

This chapter, which consists of two main parts, focusses on either side of the so-called "essence-existence distinction". In the first part, I provide a detailed analysis of Ṭūsī's views on the concept and nature of existence (*mafhūm al-wujūd*), its mode of predication (*ḥaml al-wujūd*), and its ontological status (*mawjūdiyyat al-wujūd*). In the second part I examine the metaphysics of essence (*māhiyya*) by focussing especially on the different senses of quiddity (*iʿtibārāt al-māhiyya*) and how, according to Ṭūsī, its role should be understood in the '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle of Avicenna's metaphysics. Wherever possible I try to relate every one of Ṭūsī's explanations back to an Avicennan proof-text, thereby hoping to demonstrate the true Avicennan character of Ṭūsī's understanding of Avicenna's philosophy as opposed to the false understanding of his Ashʿarite predecessors.

THE METAPHYSICS OF EXISTENCE

The Amiguity of Existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*)

By now it should be clear that the main problem at the heart of nearly all post-Avicennan debates relating to the nature of existence is twofold. Firstly, there is the problem of what 'existence' means and how it is predicated of individual beings. This is a logico-semantic problem and concerns whether existence is a monosemic or polysemic term. Here, as I have shown in the previous chapters, Avicenna's opponents can be divided into two groups, one group claiming 'existence' is monosemic *and* univocal, while the other

claiming 'existence' to be a polysemic term and therefore equivocal. The second problem is ontological and pertains to the question whether or not existence itself exists. Those who are inclined to deny the extramental reality of existence do so believing that 'existence' *per se* is merely a term of second intention (*maʿqūl thānī*). Like the term 'genus', this group claims that 'existence' *per se* does not have an extramental referent (*miṣdāq*) and that its subsistence is mind-dependent. By contrast, others in the post-Avicennan tradition claim that 'existence' is a mind-independent reality which subsists in the external world of its own accord without being dependent on anything else for its subsistence.

Let us begin with the logical aspect first. According to Ṭūsī, the concept of 'existence' is a primary concept. Therefore, it is monosemic (*mushtarak maʿnawī*). Furthermore, since it is a primary notion the concept of existence cannot be defined; though one many employ certain terms like "being there" (*ḥuṣūl*) to alert the inattentive mind of its meaning. 'Existent', therefore, has one meaning, and no matter the context in which this term is used, it always conveys one and the same meaning in the mind. The monosemic nature of existence does not imply uniformity, however, and despite having only one meaning the word 'existent' (or 'exists') can be used in a variety of different senses. For example, even though an object and its shadow are both "existent things", their "being there" is not the same, despite the fact that the comprehension of the idea of "being there" is *per se* one meaning. Clearly, an object which casts a shadow has more of a right to being called an "existent" than its shadow, since the latter would not "be there" if the former did not exist. Similarly, even though the expressions "God exists" and "Zayd exists" have the same meaning of 'exists' in their predicates, this does not mean that God and Zayd are *equally* existent things. As we shall elaborate in more depth shortly, this is due to an important difference between the *meaning* of a term and the way in which it is *predicated*. Another way of putting this is that a term by itself just conveys its meaning—it has a signification (*dalāla*)—whereas whenever it is applied in propositional contexts as the predicate-term, it conveys that meaning in relation to its subject, thereby giving rise to different relations of strength and weakness depending on what the subject-term is. Hence if I say "An object casting a shadow exists" and "Its shadow exists", the word "exists" can be analysed in two separate methods of analysis: either by itself or in the context in which is predicated in a propositional statement. On its own, independent of any subject-term, the word 'exists' signifies just one meaning—the meaning of "being there". But as soon as this meaning is considered relative to each of the subject-terms in the two aforementioned statements, immediately one will notice a slight difference in the way the meaning of 'existence' is being predicated.

According to Ṭūsī there are three ways a term having one meaning may be predicated: (1) univocity, (2) equivocity, and (3) by analogy.

> A term signifies its single meaning present in multiple things equally by way of univocal predication, such as when the term 'human being' is said of its individual referents. [A single meaning may also be said of things] unequally when it is predicated by analogy, *such as when the term 'existent' is predicated of subject and its counterpart in division.* A term signifies a diverse set of meanings whenever it is predicated by equivocation, such as when *'ayn*[1] [in Arabic] is predicated of its multiple meanings.[2]

It is, perhaps, no surprise that Ṭūsī has chosen to mention 'existent' (*mawjūd*) as an example for the analogical term. As I have shown in earlier chapters, none of Avicenna's critics took his description of 'existence' being analogous that seriously. Ghazālī and Rāzī do not even bother to report it, while Shahrastānī and Ibn al-Malāḥimī, though they do consider it, heavily criticise Avicenna's description of the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). Thus in the theological tradition Avicenna's disputants are all in agreement as regards 'existence' not being an analogous term, but in disagreement on whether it is a univocal (Ghazālī, Rāzī) or equivocal (Shahrastānī, Ibn al-Malāḥimī) term. Unlike all of his theological disputants, therefore, Ṭūsī holds that 'existence' is an analogous term, which—as previously indicated—is an Avicennan doctrine. As al-Taḥtānī says, "the source of Rāzī's mistake is that he believed there was no third division (*tertium quid*) between the univocity and equivocity of existence, and that is not the case".[3]

Signification (*dalāla*) is thus a two-step process which must first begin with the aim of ascertaining whether or not a particular term has one meaning, that is to say, whether it is monosemic or polysemic. Only once this has been determined and a particular term is noted down as being monosemic does one need to ascertain how this meaning is predicated of different referents. If, in the first step, however, a term is found to have more than one signification so as to be a polysemic term, then since by definition it means different things for different subjects, it can only be predicated by equivocation. For example, as Aristotle says, the word 'dog' is equivocally predicated of the furry animal that barks and the constellation *canis major*.[4]

By contrast, a monosemic term can be predicated in two different ways, so that its meaning is either *equally* distributed across all of its referents (univocal predication) or *unequally* distributed (analogical predication). For example, "one" may be predicated of a mathematical point or of a house. We say, "The house is one" and "The point is one". But it is clear that the term 'one' is said with greater priority and

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[1] This term is arguably one of the most polyvalent terms in the Arabic language and connotes a variety of meanings such as *inter alia* the essence of a thing, a spring of water, and the eye.

[2] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-Manṭiq*, p. 9.

[3] Al-Taḥtānī, *Muḥākamāt*, vol. 3, p. 34[3].

[4] Aristotle, *De sophisticis elenchis*, IV, 166a15.

worthiness of the mathematical point (which has no composition whatsoever) than it is said of the house, which even though it is 'one' is also a composite—that is, 'many'—from a different perspective. Since the mathematical point is essentially 'one' and cannot therefore be called 'many' in any sense of the term, it has a greater logical entitlement to being called 'one' than a house which is merely accidentally 'one'. As this example demonstrates, the meaning of 'one' does not become equivocated by having different relations to different subject-terms. It is still the same meaning albeit one that is unequally related to each of the different subjects, which is to say that the "said-of" relation has greater priority and worthiness *vis-à-vis* the mathematical point than it does *vis-à-vis* the house. Because it is unequally predicated, 'one' is said to be an analogous term (*ism mushakkika*).

Scholars have translated *ism mushakkika* in different ways. Rahman, for example, has "ambiguous".[5] Wolfson prefers "amphibolous".[6] Rizvi argues in favour of "modulated".[7] Scholars of Latin Scholasticism standardly employ the term "analogy of being" as the direct Latin translation of *analogia entis*. Etymologically, the term derives from the Arabic verb *shakkaka–yushakkiku*, 'to doubt'. As Ṭūsī explains, "the reason why the term *tashkīk* was assigned is because [an *ism mushakkik*] is neither a pure equivocal nor a univocal which is equally predicated of all its subjects, but one concerning which the intellect has doubts and the person employing it wavers in deciding whether it belongs to pure equivocation or univocity".[8] Rahman's "ambiguous" for '*ism mushakkik*' and 'systematic ambiguity' for *tashkīk* therefore best capture the root meaning of the verb. I shall opt for "analogy" since it is the more prevalent term in mediaeval Latin and modern western scholarship.

Notwithstanding the various ways in which the term *ism mushakkik* is translated, is important to stress the "analogy of existence", in the way Avicenna and Ṭūsī describe it, is a *logical* theory about the term 'existence' and not an ontological doctrine. In the wake of Avicenna's philosophy, the Islamic scholarly tradition split into two radically distinct schools of thought as regards the theory of *tashkīk*, namely, *tashkīk al-wujūd* and *al-tashkīk fī l-wujūd*. These are not the same. The first—the analogy of being—is a logical doctrine which describes how the *term* or *name* 'existence' is predicated of different subjects. The second—the "modulation" in existence—is an ontological doctrine which posits a reality for existence outside the

[5] Rahman, F. (1975: 34–77).

[6] Wolfson, H. (1938)

[7] Rizvi, S. (2009: 39–40).

[8] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. 83^{18}–84^{2}.

mind and prescribes it as the only fundamental reality (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), that is to say, a reality which subsists independently of any act of mental reflection (*iʿtibār*). Accordingly, those who advocate the reality of existence claim that existence *is* whether or not there are any perceivers to perceive it. They also claim that only 'existence' exists, and that everything else is merely "epiphenomenal" in the sense of being modulated representations of a single referent taking the multiple forms of particular "theophanic manifestation" (*tajallī*). The former doctrine is that of the Arabic Peripatetics such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna. The latter doctrine, by contrast, is an ontological theory which likens the reality of existence (*wujūd*) to an activity in which latent potentialities are capable of bursting forth, each realised form of potentiality being a manifestation of a singular reality called True-Being (*al-Ḥaqq*). In the Islamic world this monistic and mystically orientated philosophy is characteristic of the thought of Ibn 'Arabī and his adherents, and especially Mullā Ṣadrā.[9] For these reasons, the term 'analogy' is better suited to the logical sense of *tashkīk* which characterizes the Aristotelian philosophies of Avicenna and Ṭūsī as opposed to the ontological doctrine of Mullā Ṣadrā. Henceforth, Rizvi's 'modulation'—a term perfectly suited for the monistic philosophies of Ibn 'Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā—should be reserved specifically for the ontological theory of modulation in existence (i.e. *al-tashkīk fī l-wujūd*). For our philosopher Ṭūsī, however, there is no such thing as "ontological *tashkīk*". The reason for this shall be explained shortly. Rather, the only valid sense of *tashkīk* is the one occurring in the context of Aristotelian term logic.[10] This, as we shall see, does not therefore that analogous term have no important ontological implications.

From Ṭūsī's perspective, therefore, Avicenna's theological disputants failed to properly verify his doctrine of the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*).. Out of all of Avicenna's opponents, however, it was Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī who Ṭūsī probably felt was particularly at fault. Having been familiar with a wide range of Avicennan texts, he of all people should have known—and indeed must have known—that a term that has only one meaning (*mushtarak maʿnawī*) need not necessarily be predicated univocally (*bi-l-tawāṭuʾ*); yet, as al-Taḥtānī makes amply clear, this is precisely what Rāzī thinks. For reasons which seem to stem from his pre-philosophical theological commitments, Rāzī appears to deliberately conflate monosemicity and univocity.

In relation to the topics that concern us, Ṭūsī's defence of Avicenna's identity-thesis properly begins at *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17 under the section in which Avicenna states:

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[9] On the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) in the School of Ibn 'Arabī, see Chittick, W. (1981).

[10] As also maintained by Thomas Aquinas; see Answorth, E. J. (1991).

> It is sometimes conceivable that quiddity is the cause of one of its attributes or that one of its attributes is the cause of another attribute, such as when the differentia is a cause of the proprium. However, it is not conceivable that the attribute which is the existence of a thing be itself the effect of its essence which is not existence, or the effect of another attribute. That is because the cause is [always] prior in existence, and nothing is prior in existence before existence [itself].[11]

This, as it happens, is the same section in which Rāzī criticised Avicenna for holding the identity-thesis. Unlike Rāzī, however, Ṭūsī begins by initially focussing on providing a clarification of Avicenna's intention (*murād*), a strategy he follows diligently throughout his commentary on the *Ishārāt*. Indeed, as Ṭūsī states in the exordium of his commentary, this should always be the commentator's primary goal. In this particular instance, therefore, he provides an expository account of how certain properties belonging to a quiddity may in fact be caused by that quiddity itself. For example, he says that the concept of twoness is a cause of the concept of evenness, rationality a cause of wonder, and wonder a cause of laughter.[12] In all of these instances something prior causes the existence of something posterior. This, however, can never be true of the attribute 'existence', for as Ṭūsī explains, "the difference between 'existence' and all of the other attributes mentioned here is that they are all effects of the quiddity, whereas the quiddity itself is an effect of existence".[13] In other words, a quiddity cannot be the cause of its own existence since that would imply that the quiddity is prior to existence, but nothing is prior to existence apart from existence itself. In contradistinction, both Ghazālī and Rāzī reject this principle on the basis that 'existence' is an attribute which is additionally related to essence, and since every attribute (*al-ṣifa*) depends for its existence on the attribute's subject (*al-mawṣūf*), the existence of God must also somehow depend on the divine essence. This not only implies in Avicennan language that the divine existence is *contingent* upon the divine essence, but also implies that the divine essence is distinct from the divine existence—which is the reason why the Avicennan identity-thesis is false. Rāzī further endorses this anti-Avicennan conclusion by arguing in favour of the univocity of existence. On the one hand, if contingent beings have existence additionally related to their essence, and 'existence', on the other hand, is *equally* predicated of all existent things, then according to Rāzī 'existence' must also be superadded to God's essence.

Ṭūsī begins his systematic refutation of these claims as follows:

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[11] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.17, p. $107^{17\text{-}20}$.

[12] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, 31^{4-8}.

[13] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, 31^{8}–32^{2}.

> The noble commentator [i.e. Rāzī] was thoroughly confused on this matter, and because of his misunderstanding surmised that the intellects of rational people and the comprehension of the philosophers were all similarly confused. This is because he adduced several arguments to show that 'existence' is not predicated of existent things by sheer commonality of the term—arguments which he took from [the philosophers]. He then judged that 'existence' is a single thing which is equally present in all [existent things], going so far as to claim that the existence of the Necessary Being is *equal* to the existence of contingent beings! Then, after seeing that the existence of contingent beings is something accidentally related to their quiddities, and having already prejudged the existence of the Necessary Being to be equal [in existence-status] to the existence of contingents, he judged that the existence of the Necessary Being is also accidentally related to Its essence, and so Its essence is other than Its existence (*fa-māhiyyatahu ghayr wujūdihi*)—May He transcend with a mighty transcendence above that! He surmised that if he did not make the existence of the Necessary Being an accidental property of Its essence that this would either entail that that existence is equal to known existences, or that the term 'existence' would be predicated of the existence of the Necessary Being and the existence of everything else besides through the sheer commonality of the term.[14]

The error in Rāzī's thinking thus lies in the second step: existence is *not* equally predicated of all existents. As Ṭūsī explains:

> The source of this error is ignorance concerning predication by analogy (*al-wuqūʿ bi-l-tashkīk*). For that which is predicated by analogy of different things is not predicated by mere commonality of the term (such as when the Arabic term *ʿayn* is predicated of its different meanings) but is predicated with a single meaning in all [of its semantic referents] save without equality (not like the term 'human' which is equally predicated of its particulars). It is thus predicated with variation, either by priority and posteriority (such as when the term 'continuous' is predicated of a particular dimension itself and of a body which has a dimension) or by deservingness and non-deservingness (such as when the term 'one' is predicated of that which is essentially non-divisible and of something which is divisible from an aspect beside that by which it is 'one') or by strength and weakness (such as when the term 'white' is predicated of ice and ivory).[15]

It is important to note here that the various means by which an analogous term can vary is not an ontological variation. It is not that *natures* themselves actually vary in their intensities but rather the logical relation between the subject and predicate that varies in propositional contexts. The intensity of the logical relation between the subject and predicate-term is a mental judgment which is linked to the intellect's second operation. It is an intellectual assessment of how strong or weak the connection is between whatever subject and predicate-terms are combined into a proposition. There are three forms of logical variation: strength

[14] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, pp. 32^{4}–33^{2}.

[15] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, pp. 33^{3-8}.

and weakness (*al-shidda wa-l-ḍuʿf*),[16] priority and posteriority (*al-taqaddum wa-l-taʾakhkhur*), and deservingness and non-deservingness (*al-awlawiyya wa-ʿadamihā*). Thus in the statements "Substances exist" and "Accidents exist" the predicate-term has a stronger relation with the subject-term in the first statement than it does in the second statement. This is because substances have existence in themselves whereas accidents have existence by and through the existence of other things, namely, substances. Substances are therefore prior and more deserving of existence than their accidents.

The predicate 'existence' (or 'exists' or 'is an existent') includes all three logical modes of variation:

> Existence embraces each one of these variations. It is predicated of a cause and its effect with priority and posteriority; of substance and accident with deservingness and non-deservingness; of the stable and unstable essence (such as black or motion) with strength and weakness; indeed, it is predicated by each one of these aspects of the Necessary and the contingent.[17]

By a simple act of clarifying the analogy of existence Ṭūsī has deconstructed the major premise in Rāzī's argument for essence and existence being different in the Necessary Being. He has shown why 'existence' is an analogous term which is predicated by different relations depending on the nature of the subject. This, in turn, leads to another hugely significant result, which is that 'existence' cannot be a nature (*ṭabīʿa*). Consequently, this implies that 'existence' cannot be the essence (or part of the essence) of anything never mind the essence of the Necessary Existent, which proves that Avicenna was correct in characterising it as an inseparable accident of existent things.

Existence is not a nature (*ṭabīʿa*)

In Rāzī's thought existence is something which occurs uniformly in all existent things, each of which is individuated and differentiated from other existents by its own specified essence. On this view, nothing can be "sheer existence" without an essence, for existence, which by itself is a "single species-nature" (*ṭabīʿa nawʿiyya wāḥida*), cannot be individuated without a substrate in which to inhere. The basic presumption, then, is that 'existence' is a nature similar to the nature of 'humanity' which exists in all individual human beings uniformly and without distinction. Such a claim has significant repercussions. If existence is a nature,

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[16] Because of the law of the excluded middle, existence cannot be intensified or debilitated. Mayer (2003: 218) suggests that Avicenna's use of the terms *al-shidda wa-l-ḍuʿf* marks "a crucial development in Islamic philosophy". Perhaps alluding to the same conclusion, Rizvi (2009) claims that Ṭūsī is part of a processionist turn in metaphysics. Both authors seem to be attributing an ontological turn in the Avicennan tradition with Ṭūsī, which is turning away from a substance orientated philosophy.

[17] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol.3 , pp. 33^{8}–34^{2}

then it will accordingly be characterized as a true species and would therefore have to have an extramental form. If it has an extramental form, however, then existence is either a substance or a categorical accident, both of which are fervidly rejected by Avicenna.

Rāzī's position is distinctively non-Avicennan. The world according to Rāzī is a dull metaphysical space in which existent things are reduced and normalized to a single ontological horizontal, each existent *qua* existent being identical to every other. For Rāzī, existence is flat. By contrast, Avicenna's ontology posits a vertical hierarchy of being in which a multiplicity of existent things are ordered according to their different degrees—that is, intensities—of being (*marātib al-wujūd*), with the most intense and prior form of existence at the top and the weakest and least worthy existence at the bottom.[18] In connection to this is the crucial fact that Avicenna inherited the Aristotelian precept that the essences of things cannot undergo change or variation. The essence of a thing is "static" ontologically speaking.

By contrast, any variations that take place within an individual existent do so at the level of accidents and not at the level of substance. This means that a quiddity *qua* itself is fixed: it is "what it is" and only "what it is" for all times and places; not more, not less. Therefore, so long as something exists, its nature or essence or substantial form will remain exactly the same throughout the duration of its existence. When he refers to existence as a species-nature in the *Maṭālib* and *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, Rāzī deliberately invokes concepts which have a specific meaning and purpose within Aristotle's and Avicenna's natural philosophies. By intentionally characterizing existence as a nature, therefore, Rāzī is deliberately imparting it with the meaning of a species. But given that existent things do actually exist, this falsely implies that 'existence' is the essence (or a part of the essence) of individual existents—which in turn entails that 'existence' *qua* species (nature) is what *makes* existent things be existent things in the same way that 'humanity' *qua* species (nature) is what *makes* human beings be human beings.[19] From the perspective of the Peripatetic tradition, then, Rāzī's position on existence being a nature is false. As Bahmanyār explains, "existence is not that which makes something be in entified existence (*fī l-aʿyān*), but rather a thing's being and becoming in entified existence".[20] Were this not the case, then existence's being in things themselves would mean that existence

[18] The reference here is to the individual existences of existent things and not the concept of absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). In other words, 'existence' is not a single continuum spread out into a vertical hierarchy since existence *per se* does not exist (as we will see).

[19] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.1, vol. 3, p. 6^{3-5}.

[20] Bahmanyār, *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, p. 281^{1-2}.

per se is an existent, and that, says Bahmanyār, "would lead to a regress *ad infinitum*".[21] Therefore, as a term which is capable of admitting more or less, 'existence' cannot be the essence or nature of existent things. Thus Ṭūsī remarks that "existence is not a species-nature because the nature [of a thing] exists in individuals *equally* and is predicated of them by univocity, whereas existence is not like that".[22]

Elaborating further, Ṭūsī writes:

> A single meaning which is unequally predicated of different things can never be an essence (or part of the essence) of those things, because neither the essence [of a thing] nor its part can vary. Rather, [such a meaning] can only be an accident which is extrinsic [to that thing's essence], be it an accident which is separable or inseparable. For example, 'white' predicated of the white of ice and the white of ivory is not equally predicable of them, and thus can neither be identical to their essences nor a part of their essence. Rather, it is something which is inseparably and extrinsically attached [to their essences]. The reason for that is because between the two extreme limits of a pair of colours that are the contrary of one another there are a potentially infinite range of species of colour, none of which has a specific name. Instead, what they do have is a single name with one meaning which is predicated of the entire group by analogy—such as 'white' and 'red' and 'black'. This meaning is an inseparable accident of that group and is a non-constituent property [of the individuals within it]. Likewise 'existence' *vis-à-vis* its predication of the existence of the Necessary Being and the existence of contingents which differ in their ipseities albeit without having expressly formulated names for them. Note, that I do not say that [existence is predicated] "of their essences" but "of the existences of those essences". By this I mean that existence is also predicated of them [the individual existences] in the form of a non-constitutive and extrinsic accident.[23]

What Ṭūsī says in this passage is absolutely crucial for understanding the ontological implication of analogous terms. Re-iterating his earlier remark that 'existence' is an analogical predicate, he now explains why 'existence'—indeed, why any analogical term—cannot be the nature of a thing. The reason for this is simply due to a basic point of Aristotle's theory of substance which is that essence cannot vary (*al-māhiyyāt lā takhtalif*). Hence the reason why the term one uses to predicate a thing analogically—that is, by variation—cannot itself be referring to that thing's essence or any part of that thing's essence. The analogous term must, therefore, refer to some property or quality that a thing has in the form of an accident. To illustrate this, Ṭūsī gives the example of a single colour distributed across a range of potentially infinite shades. Consider, he says, the colour 'white' and the potentially infinite shades of white that might occur between the most intense and brightest form of whiteness and the dullest and dimmest form of whiteness.

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[21] Bahmanyār, *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, p. 281^{2-3}.

[22] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, p. 37^{11-12}.

[23] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, IV.17, vol. 3, p. 34^{2}–35^{2}.

Because the range of shades between these extremes is potentially infinite, the spectrum of white must be a continuous spectrum. Yet none of the individual shades of white has a specifically designated name, but are all just simply referred to by the common name 'white'. So even if there are potentially infinite shades of white, the term 'white' which is commonly predicated of all of them is still one term with one meaning. What this example demonstrates is that a single term which is monosemic may be predicated of a multiple range of subjects which all share the meaning of that term albeit unequally. In this case, the term 'white' is neither applied univocally (since the different shades of white differ and are not all *equally* white) nor equivocally (since all the different whites, no matter their individual shade, are all still nevertheless just the colour white), but predicated of that entire spectrum of shades as an analogous term. At a logical level this resolves the problem of the one and the many insofar as each of the shades of white (the many) participate in a single common name (the one). This term, however, is strictly speaking a universal because of the fact that it can be predicated of "many" different instances of the colour white, which therefore implies that it—the common form of white—is a mind-dependent meaning. Furthermore, since the common form of white is predicated unequally of each different instance of light along the spectrum, then because the "said-of" relation is attenuated the further down we move from the brightest to the lowest forms of white, the 'white' that is predicated of these varying shades cannot be the essence or part of the essence of each *individual* white. In sum, then, we can say that whenever the predicate-term of a statement like "Snow is white" is capable of being attenuated or disattentuated for different subjects, the nature of the predicate can never be the nature of the subject, and thence must be an accident of one kind or another.[24]

If we apply these same rules to existence, then what we find is that (1) *general* 'existence' is a non-essential accident of *all* existent things; that (2) each individual type of existence is a unique "species" of existence; and that (3) 'existence' in general cannot be a nature. There is also something very important to be noted in Ṭūsī's remark in *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* that the analogous form of 'existence' is predicated of *individual existences* and not the quiddities of things themselves. Why this is significant is due to the fact that it highlights an important distinction in Avicenna's metaphysics between 'absolute existence' (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) and 'individual existence' (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*). As an absolute term, 'existence' can be predicated of anything that exists regardless of the nature of its existence—that is, regardless of whether it is a substance or an accident, necessary of existence or possible of existence, being *in re* or being *in intellectu*. The purpose

[24] Ṭūsī provides a detailed elaboration of these themes in a separate treatise entitled *Nature*, in which he shows why a nature (*ṭabīʿa*) can never be modulated in existence; see Ṭūsī, *Al-Ṭabīʿa* (in ibid., *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 518).

of predicating a subject with *absolute existence*, therefore, is to give notice of the fact that said object of existence "is there"—that it, whatever "it" may be, "exists", however that existence may be. In other words, existence (*wujūd*) as a one-place predicate ("x exists"; "y exists") simply affirms the subject's (x, y) "being there". By contrast, the *individual existence* of a thing is its existence *in the form* of a particular "what", its "essence" so to speak, which is different from the more general fact of it just "being there" *simpliciter*.

The difference between absolute and individual existence can be shown by considering the difference between the statement "being there" and the statement "being-as-such-and-such". The first, absolute existence, simply notifies us that something—we know not what—exists. The second, individual existence, tells the manner in which that thing is existing by informing us that it is such-and-such thing. Ṭūsī's point is that *everything* that exists (including the Necessary Existent) must be a being of some sort, and that it must have "being-such-and-such" or else it would not be anything, that is, it must have an individual existence. Furthermore, Ṭūsī also points out that everything with an individual existence ("being-such-and-such") can have its existence affirmed by being predicated with absolute existence ("being there"). This is true even of the Necessary Being ("being-Necessary-of-Existence").

As Ṭūsī comments:

> Now that this has been established all of the objections of this noble commentator can be resolved. This is because 'existence' [absolute existence] is predicated of what lies beneath with a single meaning as the philosophers hold, but without this entailing the equality of realities in each of the subjects predicated, namely, the being of the Necessary Existent and the being of contingent things. The reason for this is that things which differ in their essential natures may be things which share in a single inseparable accident.[25]

As an inseparable accident of existent things, therefore, 'existence' is what the logicians call a 'common accident' (*al-ʿaraḍ al-ʿāmm*), one of the five Porphyrean universals. Since Rāzī began by assuming that 'existence' is a common nature, the only conclusion he could have deduced logically speaking is that 'existence' is a univocal term. If, therefore, existence is the superadded property of one existent, then it need must be a superadded property of all existents. Therefore, since contingent beings have existence superadded to them, the existence of God cannot be identical to His essence.

Ṭūsī has shown why this inference and the premise on which it is based is completely false. Since accidental properties do not impinge on the essences of things, existent things may vary in terms of their individual essences despite having a single accidental property in common. This immediately destroys

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[25] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, vol. 3, p. 35^{3-6}.

Rāzī's contentious claim that existence *qua* existence must either always be predicated of an essence or not. Because existence *qua* existence is an analogous concept, there is nothing to prevent the term 'existence' from being a superadded property of some existents and not of others. In other words, because 'existence' *qua* analogous term is an inseparable accident (*lāzim*) of existent things, there is no reason why the essences of those existent things cannot be essentially different.

As Ṭūsī says, the term 'light' can be predicated of the light of the Sun or the light of weaker substances—say, for example, a candle—even though the essence of the Sun is different from the essence of a candle. Nevertheless, the individual light of the Sun removes night when it first breaks at dawn, but a candle whose individual light is much weaker than the light of the Sun cannot do the same. The differences in their individual lights comes down to the fact that the Sun and the candle are different substances, they have different essences. Yet, despite that difference, they both produce light albeit of different intensities. And despite their intensities, both lights are referred to by the same name—'light'. In this example, even though the individual lights of the Sun and the candle have different intensities and as a consequence different entailing properties (*lawāzim*)—the Sun removes the night, the candle does not—each of them is referred to by a single meaning which is predicated of them "unequally".

From an ontological perspective, therefore, this means that the absolute notion of light which is predicated of different lights cannot—because it varies—be the nature (or part of the nature) of those individual lights. If, for example, the absolute form of light were itself the nature of the individual light of the Sun, then the individual light of the candle could not any longer be called "light" without an appeal to equivocation. And as previously mentioned, the reason for this is because substantial natures cannot vary. When spoken of absolutely, therefore, the term 'light' cannot be the essence of any particular individual light in itself. While the generic concept of light *in the mind* is therefore something common to all lights, each particular instance of light *outside of the mind* is essentially different. Uniformity is thus in respect of the common accident, which is a universal, not in respect of the individual essences of things themselves.[26]

Absolute and Individual Existence

The re-introduction of a key distinction between absolute and individual existence is a crucial step in Ṭūsī's efforts to defend Avicenna's identity-thesis. As previously explained, a key premise in Rāzī's argument for the separation of divine essence and existence was his claim that whilst it is possible to know that a Necessary

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See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, 35^{12-15}.

Existent exists, it is impossible to know the divine essence. And given that there are distinct epistemological relations to the essence and existence of the Necessary Being, it follows that God's essence and existence are ontologically distinct as well. Hence the reason why Avicenna's identity-thesis is false. But this argument simply takes for granted that known existence *is* the existence which Avicenna supposedly equates with the divine essence, and that the term *inniyya* holds no special significance but is just in fact a mere synonym for the that existence which is common to all existent things. On this presumption, Rāzī infers the conclusion that God's essence cannot be the same as common existence. This, however, is a gross misrepresentation of Avicenna's identity-thesis ultimately stemming from a failure on Rāzī's part to properly register the significance of Avicenna's theory of analogy (*tashkīk*) and his deliberate use of the term *inniyya*.

As Ṭūsī writes:

> The reply to him is that the reality which the intellects are not capable of grasping is His *individual* existence. This existence is different in its ipseity to all other existences and is an existence which is the First principle of all things. That existence which intellects are capable of grasping is *absolute* existence, which is an inseparable accident of that existence [i.e. the individual existence of the Necessary Being] all the other [individual] existences; and it is this existence which is a primary concept. Knowing the inseparable accident [of a thing] does not entail that one should know the reality of the thing of which this accident is its accident, since this would entail that whosoever grasps [absolute] existence in his understanding necessarily knows all individual existences. Thus His reality being something unknown and [absolute] existence being something known entails that His reality is different from the known absolute existence, not that it is different to His individual existence.[27]

Therefore, as Ṭūsī explains, the term *inniyya* does not mean general existence, but is a technical term which in this context denotes the unknown individual existence of the Necessary Being. This is a unique of existence which cannot be predicated of any other being besides the Necessary Existent. By contrast, that existence which is known to us is absolute existence, and it is this form of existence which is said to be a common accident of all existent things and which is predicated for the logical and syntactic purpose of positing a thing's existence (the "being there-ness" of a thing). Furthermore, it is this existence which is being described by Avicenna in the *Ilāhiyyāt* (I.5) of the *Shifā'* as "affirmational existence" (*al-wujūd al-ithbātī*) and "general existence" (*al-wujūd al-'āmm*)—the former to indicate that 'existence' in the absolute sense "posits" the reality of whatever indexical is put in the place of the subject-term in statements which have "exists" as a one-place predicate; the latter to highlight the fact that "being there" can be predicated repeatedly for every existent no matter what. Now, since "being there" cannot *per se* be said to "be there"

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[27] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, p. 36^{9-14}.

without this causing an infinite regress of existences, the absolute notion of existence must, according to Ṭūsī, be a being of reason (*iʿtibār ʿaqlī*), that is to say, a purely mind-dependent reality in the form of a secondary intelligible (*maʿqūl thānī*).[28] If this is the case, then there can be no doubt whatsoever that absolute existence cannot be the essence of some externally existent thing, least of all the essence of that being which is supposedly the First principle of the whole of existence. What this shows, therefore, is that absolute existence cannot be what the term *inniyya* refers to in Avicenna's "*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*" remark. Furthermore, as Ṭūsī poignantly observes, to equate God's essence with common existence is really quite absurd because doing so implies that by simply knowing that something exists is sufficient to know the divine essence itself. The essence of God cannot be identified with "being there" *simpliciter*. (Ṭūsī does not point out that by simply "being there" all existent things would also then be participants in the divine essence if, indeed, that essence were just "being there"). Yet it is patently obvious that this is precisely what Rāzī—and, to some extent, Ghazālī also—has presumed the meaning of *inniyya* to be, thereby creating the impression that Avicenna takes the brute of existing *simpliciter* to be the inner reality and essence of God. Having all the characteristics of a straw man argument, the Ashʿarite critic stupefies the earnest but unaccustomed mediaeval student of Avicenna's philosophy to think that Avicenna is some kind of metaphysical monist, which he certainly is not. It is Ṭūsī who makes this uncritical presupposition in the Ashʿarite appraisal of Avicenna's philosophy bare:

> The reality of the Necessary Being is not general existence, but rather His sheer individual existence which is different to all other existences by the fact that it is [a] self-subsistent [form of existence].[29]

As Ṭūsī clarifies, the term *inniyya* does not refer to *wujūd* in the general sense but rather to the individual existence of the First principle. The term 'individual' here underscores the importance of realising that every *mawjūd* in Avicenna's metaphysics has an existence which is uniquely its own, similar to, but not exactly the same as, the way every individual human being has a numerically distinct instantiation of the nature of humanity. The crucial difference is that 'existence' is not a nature, it is not a natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*), and is not therefore a part of any existent thing's essence. What this means ontologically is that the world in Avicenna's philosophy is populated by multiple individual existences (*mawjūdāt khāṣṣa*) and is

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[28] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 69: "Existence is a mental predicate given the impossibility of its subsisting without a locus and its occurs therein. It is a secondary intelligible (*min al-maʿqūlāt al-thāniyya*); non-existence and the modal frequencies, as well as being-a-quiddity, being-particular, being-essential, being-an-accident, being-a-genus, being-a-differentia, and being-a-species likewise are all secondary intelligible notions."

[29] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, p. 37^{4-5}.

not simply 'one existence' participated in by all existent things. The so-called "unity of existence" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) occurs in Avicenna's thinking at the conceptual level insofar as the notion of being (*mafhūm al-wujūd*) is one, primary notion.

By elucidating what seems to be the true import of Avicenna's distinction between absolute and individual existence, Ṭūsī has demonstrated why Rāzī's numerous attempts to confute the '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' principle is an effort which he pursues in vain. Rāzī's attack, which he carries out in so many different works, is entirely based on a basic misunderstanding of Avicenna's thought, and therefore entirely entirely superficial given that "the objection to doctrines before complete explanation is blind shooting".[30] It is important to point out that it wasn't just Ṭūsī (a Shīʿī) who found Rāzī's interpretation baffling. Even later Sunni thinkers were bemused as to how he, and by extension Ghazālī also, could have got Avicenna's teachings on this matter so badly confused. For example, al-Taftāzānī in the *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* writes:

> It is quite astonishing that the Imam [Rāzī] had been acquainted with the teachings of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna] and of their intended purpose when they proclaimed that the reality of the Necessary Existent is "sheer existence" and "pure necessity" and in which there is no participation whatsoever. [He should have known] that the known and common and shared [form of] existence is an inseparable accident of [the individual existence of the Necessary Being] and is not an essential constituent [of Its being]. Nay, he explicitly states in some of his books [e.g. *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*] that existence is predicated of existences by analogy. Yet still he persisted in a specious argument which he claimed was so strong that it could never be doubted or questioned, which is that if existence is or is not an accidental property [of quiddities] that it would thence be identical *vis-à-vis* the Necessary and contingent beings, and that if it were not one nor the other then the necessity of the Necessary Being would be due to another. To summarize the point, he failed to distinguish between the equivalence of the notion [of being] and equivalence in the true-nature [of things themselves], and by failing to do this he was left with the inevitable choice of having to decide whether 'existence' is a homonym or whether all existences are identical *qua* their essential concomitant properties.[31]

Whatever his true motives and intentions, Rāzī's successors—be they Shīʿa or Sunni—were convinced that his reading of Avicenna's identity-thesis was inaccurate and wide off the mark. Al-Taftāzānī's statement points to Rāzī's failure to 'report' (*ḥikāya*) the views of his philosophical opponent never mind the issue of 'verification' (*taḥqīq*).

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[30] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 89.

[31] Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, vol. 1, pp. 320–322.

Existence is a Secondary Intelligible (*iʿtibārī*)

In each of the preceding sections I have made little mention of the fact that throughout his career Rāzī grounded his theological beliefs on the ontological presumption that 'existence' itself is an existent. Thus according to Rāzī 'existence' (*wujūd*) is a positive existential, an affirmational property of *mawjūdāt*, a real predicate or accident of actual things themselves, which he claims attaches to their essences in *extensio*. Avicenna's distinction of essence and existence is for him a real distinction within things themselves (*fī l-aʿyān*), not only contingent beings but of the Necessary Existent as well. Rāzī's argument is simply this:

'Non-existence' is predicated of nonexistent and impossible beings
Whatever is predicated of nonexistent and/or impossible beings
must be a negative existential.
Therefore: 'Non-existence' is a negative existential

By applying the "rule of opposites" Rāzī can now argue to the conclusion that since 'non-existence' is a negative existential, its opposite, 'existence', must be something positively affirmed (*amr wujūdī*). 'Existence' therefore exists.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, this is true and that 'existence' is a superadded property of the essences of things *in extensio* as Rāzī avers. In that case, the question will need to be asked as to what exactly does this property occur to, which is to say: Is 'existence' occurring to something already existent or not? Both options make 'existence' redundant. If 'existence' occurs to something *already* existent, then what purpose does receiving a second 'existence' serve to an entity which *ex hypothesi* already has existence? As this ultimately leads to a regress of existences *ad infinitum*, the actual existence of even a single being is made impossible. Alternatively, if 'existence' occurs to something nonexistent then that according to Rāzī's own "rule of opposites" would make it a negative existential.

The only way of ensuring that 'existence' itself is existent and at the same time steering clear of the aforementioned paradoxes, is to follow the strategy of some pre-Avicennan *mutakallimūn* of making the "pre-existence" of an essence a more general mode of being than the mode of 'existence'. This means that Rāzī has to remove the premise that 'existence' (*wujūd*) and 'being' (*thubūt*) are co-extensive. That he does something similar to this is the only meaningful interpretation of his "essence causes existence" doctrine *vis-à-vis* the existence of God, where in its non-conditioned state the divine essence is the efficient cause of its own existence. Seen under a slightly different light this idea more or less coincides with the Neo-Platonic and Ismaʿili thesis of a First principle that is "beyond being". In the *Muḥaṣṣal*, which many scholars think was written before his so-called *falsafī* writings, Rāzī rejected these opinions. If divine existence is an effect

of the divine essence, then every existence must be an effect of its attached essence; for two of the crucial mainstays of Rāzī's thought-system are that (*a*) the essence-existence distinction is a real distinction *in extensio* and (*b*) that 'existence' is a univocal term. But if contingent essences also have an extra-mental "pre-existence" before their "existence", then all sorts of problems would be created for Rāzī as an Ashʿarite theologian. Besides, the "pre-existence" model of essences was already known to Islamic thought through the Muʿtazilite theory that things are precisely 'beings' (*thābit*) but not 'existents' (*mawjūd*) before they are actually realised into concrete existence.

Perhaps for these and other similar reasons Rāzī abandoned the thesis of 'existence' being a univocal term in the *Muḥaṣṣal*, instead following al-Ashʿarī's original claim of 'existence' being a pure homonym. Perhaps realising the implications which his ontological theories had on the existence of contingent beings, never mind the Necessary Existent, Rāzī professed in the *Muḥaṣṣal* that: "The majority of the *falāsifa*, the Muʿtazila and a group amongst us [the Ashʿarites] hold 'existence' to be a common property of existent things. However, the more correct opinion is that it is not so. In our opinion, we hold that if 'existence' were a common property (*waṣf mushtarak*) of existent things, that it would then be something different to [their] essences and as a result would have to be something which subsists in that which isn't an existent".[32] This astonishing remark not only shows that at this stage in his career Rāzī abandoned his earlier belief in 'existence' being a superadded property of essence, but also his complete rejection of Avicenna's essence-existence distinction.

A metaphysician of Ṭūsī's calibre can immediately spot that Rāzī's indecision and constant dithering point to a weakness at the level of principle. The proximate cause of this is Rāzī's inability to discern between "hard" metaphysical statements about things themselves *in extensio* and "soft" metaphysical statements about things apprised in the understanding *in intensio*. In other words, he fails to understand the difference between the purport of statements at the level of intension (*mafhūm*) and those at the level of extension (*miṣdāq*). Ṭūsī's philosophy is thus replete with correctives designed to make the intensional character of Avicenna's metaphysics clear, and is a perfect demonstration of why there can be no such thing as metaphysical science without prior comprehension of the act of reasoning itself. Whether or not these correctives tarry with what Avicenna says is, of course, another matter entirely. Nevertheless, in order to have a metaphysics which incorporates intensional differences, one has to submit to a key component of

[32] Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $74^{11\text{-}13}$.

Avicenna's general philosophy, namely, his theory of mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*).[33] As we shall see, this is an aspect of Avicennan metaphysics that Rāzī vehemently opposes, again for reasons and motives which seem to be connected with pre-Avicennan Ash'arite *kalām*. By rejecting the possibilities which the theory of mental existence provides to a "critical" philosophy, however, Rāzī is left with no choice it seems but to choose from one of two options: either he has to reject the non-homonymous characterisation of 'existence' (a corollary of which is the complete nullification of Avicenna's essence-existence distinction); or he must side with the Mu'tazilite theory which expands the scope of being such that *thubūt* and *wujūd* are no longer co-extensive.

If the numerous contradictions in Rāzī's *oeuvre* are anything to go by, Ṭūsī's philosophy is a perfect example of why the intensionalist approach is absolutely essential for a correct understanding of Avicenna's philosophy. Take, for example, Rāzī's claim that the essence of the Necessary Being in its non-conditioned state is the cause of the divine existence. This, he says, is a state in which the essence of God cannot be described as being either existent (*mawjūd*) or nonexistence (*ma'dūm*), but is just itself and only itself. Like a quiddity (*māhiyya*) which causes one of its own properties, the divine essence—according to Rāzī—in its pristine state of being just itself also causes one its own properties—namely, its own existence (*wujūd*). But common sense dictates that nothing can be a cause of something else without itself being first an existent. Even a quiddity (e.g. the number 2) that causes one its own properties (e.g. the concept of evenness) does so because of a relation it has to existence—namely, mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*). In other words, in order for the number 2 to be a cause of evenness, I have to *conceive* it first in my *mind* and thereby give it mental existence. In addition, one can easily see that the quiddity of the number 2 precedes the existence of the concept of evenness *in mental existence*, and no matter the case the cause of a thing must always be prior in existence to its effect.

In *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, Rāzī provides what he thinks is an argument to overrule this principle by remonstrating that "if what is intended by a cause being essentially prior to the effect is its being the efficient cause of its existence, then that is known and admitted".[34] However, as Ṭūsī paraphrases, this bizarre statement suggests that "there is no sense of a cause being prior in existence other than its causation";[35] thus implying that 'being prior in existence' (*al-taqaddum fī l-wujūd*) just means 'being an efficient cause'. In

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[33] On mental existence in Avicenna's thought, see Black, D. (1997); cf.

[34] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 2, p. 361[7-8].

[35] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, p. 38[1].

other words, the notion of being prior (*al-taqaddum*) is identical to, and the same as, the notion of causation or being a cause (*al-ta'aththur*). If this is Rāzī's claim, then he is clearly mistaken.[36] Although it seems hardly worth mentioning, Ṭūsī must nevertheless oblige readers in his capacity as a commentator on the *Ishārāt* by pointing out Rāzī's mistake; and that is that the notion of a cause being prior in being (*taqaddum al-ʿilla*) to its effect and its causation (*ta'aththur al-ʿilla*) are not the same—regardless of whether one subscribes to Avicenna's notion of 'essential causation' or not. As Ṭūsī explains, the reason for this is that in order for something to be a cause it must be *conditioned* by being prior in existence to the effect, and no two things which are related by the relation of conditionality can be the same. What this means, therefore, is that if one thing is the condition (*sharṭ*) of something else ("the conditioned thing", *mashrūṭ*), the two of them cannot be identical. As Ṭūsī puts it, "nothing can be conditioned by itself".

> We know with certainty that the action of a cause (*ta'thīr al-ʿilla*) must be conditioned with [the condition of it] being prior in existence, and that nothing is capable of being conditioned by itself. Let us grant, supposing it were true, that being-prior-in-existence is the same as being-an-efficient-cause. Even then a quiddity cannot be an efficient cause unless it is conceptualised as being in concrete reality—but in that case it being-in-concrete-reality, by which I mean its existence, would be a condition for [it being a cause for] the issuance of its existence, I mean its being-in-concrete-reality; and that is absurd.[37]

Thus, the error in Rāzī's thinking is that he confuses causation *per se* with the prior conditions that are needed in order for that causation to take place.[38] Suppose, then, that the essence of the Necessary Being is *per se* the cause of Its existence. Even then it cannot be something nonexistent; for whatever does not exist cannot be the cause of something existent—only being, in other words, can be a principle of being.

Therefore, in order for God's essence to be the cause of His existence it would have already had to have been conditioned by 'existence', thus implying that the thing for which it bears responsibility (namely, its own existence) would itself be the condition of its fulfilment. This is clearly a *petitio principii* fallacy since the consequent is itself the condition of the antecedent's own fulfilment. According to mainstream Avicennism then the mistake that Rāzī makes is almost tantamount to a kind of sophism. He seems to take for granted that a statement like "X exists" has a predicate in which a property called 'existence' occurs to

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[36] For example, I exist before tomorrow's sunrise, but I am not the cause of tomorrow's sunrise. Hence my existence being prior to tomorrow's sunrise does not equate with me being the cause of the Sun rising tomorrow.

[37] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, p. 38^{3-6}.

[38] "We do not accept that the meaning of 'priority' is identical to the meaning 'causation'. Rather the one is different to the other; for 'priority' is the *condition* of 'causation' and whatever is the condition of a thing must be different to that conditioned-thing *per se*" (al-Taḥtānī, *Muḥākamāt*, vol. 3, p. 37^{13-14}).

some entitative reality in *extramental* existence, and that the subject, functioning like a receptive cause, acquires this property which it previously lacked.

For Ṭūsī, all of this is thoroughly mistaken.

> This talk of his is built on his imagining (*taṣawwur*) that a quiddity has being (*thubūt*) in extramental existence apart from its existence (*wujūd*), and that 'existence' is something which then comes to inhere in it [the quiddity]—and that is false. For quiddity's being *is* its existence (*kawn al-māhiyya huwa wujūduhā*). The quiddity [of a thing] can never be abstracted from existence save in the mind (*al-ʿaql*); not in the sense that it becomes separated from existence in the mind since 'being in the mind' is also existence albeit of the kind that is 'mental existence' (*wujūd ʿaqlī*), just as 'being outside the mind' is 'extramental existence' (*wujūd khārijī*). Rather the mind is such that it has within itself the power to observe the [quiddity] by itself without observing [its] existence—and the non-consideration of something is not the consideration of its non-existence. The attribution of a quiddity with existence is thus an intensional process (*amr ʿaqlī*), and has nothing to do with the attribution of a body with [the accident] white. For a quiddity does not have a unique existence and the accident we call its 'existence' another existence, as if the two then combine in the way the recipient of a property and its received property might combine. Rather, whenever we say a quiddity exists its 'existence' and its 'being' are one and the same. To summarize: A quiddity is only a receptive cause for existence whenever its existence is in the mind, and given its existence is only in the mind it is impossible for [that quiddity] to be an efficient cause of any extramental property.[39]

Historically, this is one of the most important statements in Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* and is attested to by the fact that it is copied almost verbatim in the writings of later thinkers. Philosophically, it is one of the most important. Aesthetically, it is one of the most splendid. He begins by first exposing the undeclared but nonetheless underlying presumption in Rāzī's interpretation of Avicenna's essence-existence distinction, namely, the opinion that 'existence' is some extramental property occurring to the essences of things outside the mind in the same fashion that the colour white, says, occurs to an extramental body. Ṭūsī's point here is that a body which is not white is nevertheless an existent *before* it is white, and can therefore be a receptive cause of the colour white which it lacks in extramental existence. The same situation can never be true of 'existence', since nothing is not an existent *before* being existent. One reason for this is because one would need to postulate a "pre-existence" for quiddities which would then imply, as Ṭūsī remarks, that a quiddity has 'being' (*thubūt*) before it has 'existence' (*wujūd*). For Ṭūsī this is ontologically incoherent since 'being' and 'existence' are co-extensive.[40] Whatever deserves being called an "existent" (*mawjūd*) also deserves being called an "affirmed being" (*thābit*) and vice-versa. 'Existence' therefore cannot be a hyparctic

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[39] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.17, vol. 3, pp. 39^2–40^2.

[40] See Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 63; al-Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 4.

property; it is not, as Kant says, a "predicate", meaning one of the nine categorical accidents of being. By contrast, Rāzī holds to a greater ontological commitment which either implies that 'existence' is an extramental property of existent things which therefore occurs to nonexistent essences, or that 'existence' occurs to something already existent. By thinking of Avicenna's essence-existence distinction in purely extensional terms, the inadequacies of Rāzī's dichotomous division of attributional properties being either extramentally existential (*wujūdī*) or extramentally nonexistent (*ʿadamī*) becomes all too apparent. There is, however, an alternative interpretation which says that 'existence' is an intensional attribute (*iʿtibārī*), which one may refer to as an "existential" property so long as one understands this to mean a *being of reason* or *mental existent*.

Therefore, suppose we were to pay no attention to the subject (*al-maʿrūḍ*) that receives 'existence' (*al-ʿāriḍ*) and inquire about 'existence' itself. In that case, as Ṭūsī explains in *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, if 'existence' *per se* were something externally *mawjūd*, then by giving it extramental existence one would have to seek another existence for its existence, and this existence itself would also require another 'existence' in order to exist, and that existence yet a further existence *ad infinitum*.[41] The temptation here is to think that Ṭūsī has appropriated an idea from Suhrawardī's metaphysics and foisted it onto Avicenna's philosophy, thereby masquerading what is supposedly thought of as an 'Illuminationist' principle in modern scholarship in the place of a 'peripatetic' philosopher's thought.[42] This temptation is false and must be avoided. The more accurate understanding in my opinion—and here I agree with Robert Wisnovsky[43]—is that it's the other way round: namely, that Suhrawardī was expounding what he believed was *an aspect of Avicenna's thought*. In other words, those who merely read Avicenna's major writings did not benefit from the critical glosses which may have passed to his students in oral form and which, at the early stages, remained confined to the oral tradition. If modern scholarship thinks this is too speculative to be historically accurate, then it perhaps suffices to note that Avicenna made this exact and so-called 'Illuminationist' argument in the *Taʿlīqāt* where he himself acknowledged that if 'existence' is a property which quiddities themselves cause, then either those quiddities had existence "before" existence *ad infinitum*, or a nonexistent quiddity is the principle of its own existence (as Rāzī claims), both of which he says are absurd.[44] Bahmanyār similarly

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[41] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 32^{2-3}.

[42] For Suhrawardī's interpretation of the essence-existence distinction, see Rizvi, S (1999).

[43] Wisnovsky, R. (2012: 44–47).

[44] See Avicenna, *Taʿlīqāt*, pp. 557^{6}–558^{3}, p. 558^{4}–558^{6}, p. 558^{7}–558^{10}.

explains that even though 'existence' is not a true genus it is nonetheless "like a genus", being a concept which is predicable of all existent things. Thus he explains that "if 'existence' is something common then its existence must be *in the soul* […] like every other conceptualized meaning".[45] Though he does not say so explicitly, Bahmanyār is telling us that *wujūd* is *iʿtibārī*. The first person to use this term specifically would appear to be the philosopher-scientist 'Umar Khayyām, whose mathematical and philosophical writings were well-known to Ṭūsī.[46] In one of his untitled letters—I shall refer to it as *Letter to a Friend*—in which he replies to some philosophical enquiries, Khayyām presents an elegant description of the logic of terms and the difference that exists between essential and non-essential predicates, the latter of which he says divides into separable (*al-ʿaraḍ al-mufāriq*) and non-separable (*al-ʿaraḍ al-lāzim*) accidents.

> We say that 'existence' is a reflective term, a metaphysical construct (*amr iʿtibārī*), which can be applied in two different senses by way of analogy. It is not a term which is simply a univocal or equivocal. The difference between these three types is clearly laid out in the first instruction of logic. The two different senses of 'existence' are 'being in entified existence' (*al-kawn fī l-aʿyān*) for which the term 'existence' is most appropriately designated according to the general masses, and 'being in the soul' (*al-wujūd fī l-nafs*), which applies, for example, to the sensible, imaginal, estimative and intelligible forms of conceptualization. The second sense of the term [mental existence] is [extensionally] the same as the first [extramental existence] since concepts *qua* concepts exist in entified existence given that the perceiver who perceives them is herself an entified being in extramental existence. The only difference is that the object of knowledge [in the mind] is a likeness (*mithāl*), image (*rasm*) and impression (*naqsh*) of the thing itself, which itself may sometimes be something non-existent: for example, like our conceiving Adam in our minds. This intelligible sense of Adam exists in the soul and in entified existence inasmuch as the soul itself is an entified being. However, Adam, whose intelligible meaning in the soul is his likeness and impression, is himself nonexistent in entified existence. This, then, is the difference between the two senses of *wujūd* and it is clear that the difference between them is in terms of deservingness [and non-deservingness] and priority and posteriority, which was what [the philosophers] call 'analogy' (*tashkīk*).[47]

In another work, *al-Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿaqlī fī mawḍūʿ al-ʿilm al-kullī*, Khayyām again stresses that 'existence' is *iʿtibārī*, and inveighs against those amateur thinkers who think that Avicenna's essence-existence distinction is a real distinction in things themselves: "If 'existence' were superadded to the thing itself so as then to be a property by which the existent becomes an existent thing, then the existence of the Creator would also have been superadded to His essence. I mean this 'existence' which opposes 'nonexistence' about which we are

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[45] Bahmanyār, *Taḥṣīl*, p. 282[10–12].

[46] There is a curious passage in the *Mubāḥathāt* where Avicenna refers to "aspectual accidents" (*al-lawāḥiq al-iʿtibāriyya*) that "do not actually exist" (*laysat mawjūda bi-l-fiʿl*); see Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt*, p. 131, nr. 350.

[47] 'Umar Khayyām, *Letter or a Friend*, pp. 178[17]–179[12].

talking [i.e. absolute existence, being *qua* being]. The essence of the Creator would not then have been one but many, and that is impossible".[48] Laying further stress on the conceptual nature of the essence-existence distinction, Khayyām says:

Suppose someone were to say, "If the existence of Zayd doesn't exist, how then does Zayd exist?" This talk [I say] is sophistic, misrepresentative and meretricious, and the intelligent person who reflects can prove its impossibility in two ways. First, if by asking how Zayd can exist when his existence doesn't exist he thinks that the existent thing exists because of an existence, then this is a tautological fallacy and begs the question. Second, the mind's understanding of Zayd's existence is something intelligible (*amr maʿqūl*) which is found in the soul. So the person who makes this fallacious argument fails to distinguish between the two existences, 'existence in entified things' and 'existence in the soul'.[49]

The point Khayyām is making is that the distinction between essence and existence is a mental distinction. The thing itself (e.g. Zayd) is brought into the understanding (*ʿaql*) wherein it is capable of being resolved into two metaphysical parts, its 'existence' and its 'essence', of which the former is upon analysis found to be supervening on the latter. Zayd himself, that is, the entified thing which walks and talks, is not an ontological dyad consisting of two parts one of which is his 'existence' and the other his 'essence'. It is rather the mental representation of Zayd that is resolved into these distinctions, distinctions which later thinkers refer to as being "analytical" (*taḥlīliyya*). Avicenna's distinction is therefore intensional already in the mind of a thinker as early as the first half of the twelfth century. Neither 'essence' (*māhiyya*) nor 'existence' (*wujūd*) in the strictest sense have extramental reference in things themselves. And Khayyām himself indicates that this is what Avicenna taught:

> The existent thing (*al-mawjūd*) itself and its existence (*wujūd*) are one thing. This multiplicity [i.e. distinction between essence and existence] only occurs when it [the extramental thing] comes to be in the understanding as something intelligible, wherein it transforms into an intelligible quiddity to which this conceptual notion we call "existence" becomes related. How truly excellent is the statement of the greatest thinker in recent times [*viz.* Avicenna], may his soul rest in peace and be forever sanctified, who stated in some of his discussions [*Mubāḥathāt*]: "Perhaps the being which is the essence of the True One is *being*-Necessary (*al-wājibiyya*)".[50] He only says this because *being*-

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[48] ʿUmar Khayyām, *al-Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿaqlī*, p. 189[4–7].

[49] ʿUmar Khayyām, *al-Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿaqlī*, p. 191[10–16].

[50] Cf. Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt*, p. 140, nr. 386: "That existence which is the essence of the First is *being*-Necessary. Now the *being*-Necessary [of the First] is not that existence which is incapable of being impossible, but rather that [thing] whose existence is necessary. If *being*-Necessary [i.e. the essence of the Necessary Being] had been an existence which is not capable of being impossible, then the First could not have been anything apart from that existence, from which it would have followed that it could not be impossible. This, however, implies that every existence is like that.

> Necessary *simpliciter* cannot be participated in by another whatsoever. Then he says, "The existence which opposes nonexistence is predicated of all things, and it is something which is a *concomitant* of that [i.e. the Necessary Being's] essence".[51] If that meaning [i.e. 'existence'] were something realised [in existence], then the essence of God would have become composed (*la-takaththara bihi dhāt al-Bārī*).[52]

The beginning part of this passage almost exactly resembles the tone, wording and import of Ṭūsī's rejoinder to Rāzī in *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, and it would not be far-fetched at all to assume that Ṭūsī is borrowing here from Khayyām directly. Indeed, one of the key points which Khayyām raises is that the *mawjūd* and its *wujūd* are one in *extensio* but distinct in *intensio*, an aspectual relation which I am arguing is a crucial part of Ṭūsī's entire approach to metaphysics. While Ṭūsī is not original therefore in what he says, neither is Khayyām. Avicenna's prime student Bahmanyār explains in his *Taḥṣīl* that the reason why the mind gets duped into thinking that the *mawjūd* and its *wujūd* are extensionally different is because of a grammatical rule within the Arabic language that gets falsely interpreted ontologically. As he explains, derived nouns—what Aristotle calls paronymous terms—are correlatives (*mutaḍayafān*) in the sense that, from a linguistic point of view, a term like *mawjūd* means "that which has *wujūd*" (*dhū l-wujūd*), thus lending the impression that an essence (*dhāt al-waṣf*) receives existence (*al-waṣf*) *in extensio*. The imagination is thus duped into thinking this entails a real difference in things themselves, but as Bahmanyār states, this is "metaphorical speech".[53] The problem is that the metaphor is taken literally by figures outside of the philosophical Avicennan tradition. Nevertheless, the point that both Bahmanyār and 'Umar Khayyām are making is that "in truth the *mawjūd* is *wujūd* and the thing-related (*muḍāf*) is the relation (*iḍāfa*)".[54] It seems more than likely, therefore, that Khayyām is writing with Bahmanyār's *Taḥṣīl* in mind when he says that "the being-

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Or the First is composed of existence and whatever is conjoined with it, thus making It composed in essence. Thus, *being*-Necessary is "that whose existence is Necessary", and this, then, is His essence."

[51] See Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt*, pp. 140-141, nr. 387. ("If what is meant by 'existence' is that "sheer existence" then there is no participation in that; and if what is meant by it is existence which opposes non-existence, in which there is participation, then that is one of the concomitants of his *being*-Necessary. His essence, then, is "that for which existence is necessary", meaning this existence in which there is common participation. So this existence, insofar as it is common, is one of the concomitants of His essence. And how could it not be when we say "that for which existence is necessary" is the same as our saying "It is necessary for a triangle to be equal to two right angles".)

[52] 'Umar Khayyām, *al-Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿaqlī*, p. 196[10–17].

[53] Bahmanyār, *Taḥṣīl*, p. 280[19].

[54] Bahmanyār, *Taḥṣīl*, pp. 280[19]–281[20].

existent [aspect] of a thing and its existence are one thing, like how the thing-related and relation are one thing".[55]

Finally, it is important to say something about Avicenna's remark regarding 'existence' being an inseparable concomitant (*min al-lawāzim*) of God's substantive nature (*dhāt*). A concomitant, whatever its nature, is always and necessarily something subsequent in being to something else and therefore its effect; all concomitants, in other words, are caused. Avicenna's point is that "the existence which opposes non-existence" is *caused* and cannot for this reason be the substantive nature of God's "essence", as Rāzī seems to think. This, by the way, is a clear indication also that 'existence' spoken of absolutely is *iʿtibārī* for Avicenna, and he himself states this in the least ambiguous terms in the *Mubāḥathāt*:

> *Question*. It is said that 'existence' insofar as it is general (*ʿāmm*) is caused—if this is true, what do you say concerning the existence of the First, the True?; or uncaused—implying, therefore, that every existence in uncaused. In response to this, it has been said that: "The reality of the First is Its *being*-Necessary, and that general existence (*al-wujūd al-ʿāmm*) is one of its concomitants. Hence Its reality is not something which other things can participate in." But the discourse about *being*-Necessary is the same as the discourse about existence, for it is possible to say concerning *being*-Necessary the same as what has been said concerning existence.
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> *Reply*. The contradictory of the statement "either it is caused" is not "or it is uncaused" but rather the statement "or it is not caused", and the consequence of this is that "not every existence is caused", not that "every existence is uncaused". Now, existence insofar as it is general, is neither in act nor is it [something] caused [in the external world]; for existence insofar as it is general is something intelligible only—*it does not exist outside of the mind* (*lā wujūda lahu fī l-aʿyān*). If what is meant by the "general" is "existence *qua* existence," then it is existence only and every other meaning apart from existence is negated from it, whether that be from the perspective that it is the existence of the First or the existence of something else. As for existence *qua* its nature, i.e., existence insofar as it is general existence, that is an inseparable accident of the First's *being*-Necessary since His ipseity is that He is something for which existence is necessary. From the aspect of it being general, therefore, existence is a concomitant of the First's existence, not one of its essential constituents, for He has no common constituent or else this would imply He is composed from something common and something particular.[56]

So even if, for the sake of argument, one assumed that Rāzī knew nothing of Khayyām and Bahmanyār, he was without any doubt familiar with Avicenna's *Mubāḥathāt*. One also presumes that Rāzī was familiar with Shahrastānī's *Nihāya* in which Shahrastānī regularly uses the term *iʿtibārī* even if he was unaware of the *Muṣāraʿa*. Why, then, is Rāzī adamant that 'existence' exists? Briefly there are two possible reasons. The first

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[55] Khayyām, *al-Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿaqlī*, p. 188^{9-10}.

[56] Avicenna, *Mubāḥathāt*, pp. 168^{8}–169^{8}, nrs. 475–479.

is the by now familiar "rule of opposites": the nonexistent is not; therefore 'existence' is.[57] The second and more important reason has to do with his non-intensionalist approach to the relation between the contents of our minds and things themselves. Rāzī holds that every mental distinction must be represented in things themselves, the reason for this having to do with the nature of truth as he sees it. If conceptual relations and judgments do not correspond directly with what is actually the case, then the mind's contents must—he thinks—be false due to a failure of correspondence. Recall that for him the epistemological distinction between God's existence and essence is the reason why there is an ontological distinction *in divinis* between essence and existence. Perforce, the same principle holds for contingents also. Therefore, since our minds distinguish between the essences of things and their existences, things themselves must also be distinguished by a one-to-one mereological distinction of essence and existence. For any statement about things to be true, therefore, there needs to be a one-to-one mereological distinction of the subject and predicate-term in *extensio*. 'Existence' therefore has to exist, otherwise statements that make a distinction between a thing's essence and existence would be false.

Thus according to Rāzī there can be no truth to Avicenna's essence-existence distinction without the correspondent of this principle—namely, the thing itself—being compounded by an essence supervened by its existence. On numerous instances Ṭūsī has shown that this assumption in Rāzī's thought overcommits to a "hard" understanding of the metaphysical criterion needed for the correspondence theory of truth.[58] Perhaps a slight indication that Rāzī may himself have realised this is found in his remarks on the principle of non-contradiction. To see why, consider the principle in the following propositional form: "Existence and non-existence are contradictories and cannot be simultaneously combined or negated." According to Rāzī, this statement can only be true if the mind's distinction of the concepts of 'existence' and 'non-existence' is represented in reality itself. But 'non-existence' does not exist; it has no ipseity (*huwiyya*). Astonishingly, rather than question his own thought-processes and presumptions about the metaphysics of truth, Rāzī unabashedly proclaims the principle of non-contradiction to be "unassentable," which in the context of logic and grand scheme of things simply means that it has no possibility of being true.[59]

To solve paradoxes of this sort one must side with Ṭūsī and agree with him that our statements about things themselves *in extensio* and about the concepts of things *in intensio* are two different kinds of

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[57] Recall, that the same argument is used to prove the positive existence-status of 'necessity'.

[58] The full consideration of this topic is to come in our discussion of *nafs al-amr*.

[59] See Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, f. 321b$^{16-21}$; ibid., *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 29$^{7-12}$.

proposition, of which only the former requires the thing itself to be the yardstick and criterion of truth *vis-à-vis* the thing itself. If, as Ṭūsī says, every intellectual act of making distinctions required that each of the correlative mental distinctions be ontic realities, then the primary metaphysical distinction between being and non-being would also entail that what is not a being is a being, which is a *reductio ad absurdum*.[60] By contrast, according to the intensionalist method which Ṭūsī adopts in his metaphysics, distinctions *in intellectu* need not always and necessarily correspond to distinctions *in re* because the truth-maker of certain intensional statements—depending on the nature of the subject and predicate-terms—cannot be the extramental thing itself, but rather a realm of factuality (*nafs al-amr*) which transcends the physical and material order altogether. We shall say more on this later. In the meantime, the key point to take from all of this is that representatives of the philosophical strand of Avicennism, such as Bahmanyār, ʿUmar Khayyām, Suhrawardī, and Ṭūsī, all seem to think that Avicenna's essence-existence distinction is a conceptual one (*iʿtibārī*), and that the validity of the distinction therefore rests on the logical act of reasoning and not their extensional representation within individual entities themselves. In the *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, clarifying this aspect of Rāzī's incredible attack on the principle of non-contradiction, Ṭūsī explains that:

> The being that is black is [extensionally] identical to the being that is an existent, yet 'black' and 'exists' are [intensionally] distinct. The reason is that there is here only *one* thing which sometimes is said to be 'black' and sometimes is said to be 'existent'. Yet the subject of which these predicates are said is *one* thing, the two predicates being [intensionally] different.[61]

There is remarkable deftness here and strong similarities with what Khayyām says. It's worth pointing out the section from which this statement by Ṭūsī comes in the *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* appears in the same section in which Rāzī tries to prove the identity of essence and existence in all things—that is, the unique section of the *Muḥaṣṣal* where Rāzī has absconded to al-Ashʿarī's homonymy of being thesis.

Briefly formulated, Rāzī's argument here is as follows. If essence and existence are really distinct then a statement like "black exists" has two terms which are either completely identical or completely different. It is important to remind the reader that Rāzī is making *ontological* statements here; for him, the statement "black exits" either implies that the subject and predicate-terms are really and ontologically speaking distinct or not, that is, two things in existence or just one and the same. If they are the same, then Rāzī claims that the statement "black exists" simply reduces to the statement "black is black" or the statement "existence

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[60] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $30^{20\text{-}21}$.

[61] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $31^{9\text{–}11}$.

exists", which he says are meaningless forms of speech (*hadhr*).[62] If, however, they are really distinct, then this implies that 'existence', the predicate, inheres in a nonexistent subject (since the subject which has not received existence is nonexistent) or that two distinct realities become one reality in existence. Whichever option one decides, all possibilities turn out to be absurd.[63]

Ṭūsī's intervention is highly significant: "The division that the one is either identical to the other or different from it does not exhaust all the possibilities, since a third division is also conceivable. And that is that the two are united from a certain aspect but different to one another from another aspect".[64] Now any talk of "aspects" is paradigmatic of intensionalist philosophies, and what Ṭūsī is drawing our attention to is an important rule in logic concerning the nature of predication (*al-ḥaml*) and the role which the copula plays in categorical statements. Syntactically, the copula is a "linking device" (*rābiṭ*) which combines the predicate (*al-maḥmūl*) to its subject (*al-mawḍūʿ*). While the two sides of the copula may have different meanings and be intensionally distinct, in being they refer to the self-same object and are thus united. From a linguistic point of view, without this aspect of unity-in-difference nothing could ever be said. By the unity of predication (*waḥdat al-ḥaml*), therefore, logicians do not mean that the subject *per se* is necessarily the same as the predicate *per se* in existence, but rather that "the *thing* of which the subject is predicated is [ontologically] the same as the *thing* of which the predicate is predicated."[65] For example, as Ḥillī explains, in the statement "The human is writing", what it *means* to write is not the same as what it *means* to be a human being; but "that of which 'writing' is said is one *in existence* with that of which 'human' is said."[66] So, according to Ṭūsī, the statement "black exists" can be read in two ways: intensionally (*mafhūman*) and extensionally (*miṣdaqan*). Intensionally, the meanings are different; "black" does not *mean* "exists." Since "black" is an essence and "exists" its predicate, this means that 'essence' and 'existence' are *intensionally* distinct. Extensionally, however, they are the same because the "thing" (*dhāt*) which is said to possess an 'essence' is identical to the "thing" which is said to be an existent. As Ṭūsī remarks:

> Were it the case that "blackness" and "existence" are two things which are absolutely and completely distinct, then that would have led to the claim that two things are one thing (*waḥdat al-ithnayn*). But this isn't the case. Nor is the intended purpose [of Avicenna's essence-existence distinction] the that

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[62] Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $31^{14\text{-}16}$.

[63] Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $31^{17\text{-}22}$, p. $32^{11\text{-}22}$.

[64] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, $31^{12\text{–}14}$.

[65] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-manṭiq*, p. $17^{8\text{-}9}$.

[66] Ḥillī, *Jawhar*, p. $75^{10\text{–}11}$.

> *nominatum* "blackness" the same as the *nominatum* "existence", and neither is the intended purpose that "blackness" is attributed with existence-status nor that it is attributed with that attribute-status, such that this causes repetitive speech or two things being one thing. Rather the intended purpose [of saying that essence and existence are distinct] is that the thing for which it is said that "it is black" is the same thing as that for which it is said "it exists".[67]

In saying there is an "aspect" in which 'essence' and 'existence' are different and an "aspect" in which they are the same is therefore almost the same, it seems, as Frege's notion of sense and reference. The 'essence' of a thing and its 'existence' have different connotations (sing. *mafhūm*), different senses, but what they denote in actuality is the same thing—namely the thing itself. Yet neither the intension of 'essence'—or more accurately, 'quiddity'—nor the intension of 'existence' *per se* have individual distinct denotations; they are not in and of themselves entitative existents; that is, each of them is what Frege might call a "sense without reference". In Islamic philosophy, such a term is named '*i'tibārī*' which *per se* has no reference and does not denote anything outside of mental existence apart from the thing itself. It is, in one word, "non-referring". Rāzī's claim that "black exists" would *mean* "black is black" if essence and existence were really distinct is therefore completely false. Nor does it entail that "existence subsists through something nonexistent." Since the distinction for Avicenna's followers is a conceptual one, the "subsistence of existence"—that is, the predicate—is through a subject which is in mental existence. This is the quiddity *qua* itself in mental existence.

To summarise, let us take stock of our findings in this section. We have shown that Ṭūsī demonstrates a far greater understanding of the different senses of the verb 'to be' and the ancient philosophical motto that "being is said in many ways" than his theological predecessors.[68] This, I have argued, is a moment of great historical importance in the history of ideas in Islam. By resurrecting the concept of the ambiguity of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*)—or the "analogy of being" (*analogia entis*) as scholars of medieval Scholasticism describe—which had more or less been supressed at the hands Avicenna's disputants, not only did Ṭūsī resuscitate a crucial aspect of Avicenna's metaphysics, he also reawakened the Muslim mind to the importance of logic for the correct understanding of Avicenna's metaphysics. Ṭūsī showed that a "critical" philosophy is on guard to protect itself from horrendous category mistakes, of which none is more ruinous than a confusion over which things really exist and which things do so but only because of the

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[67] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, pp. 32^{23}–33^{4}.

[68] On the different senses of being in Aristotle, see Brentano, F. (1975); Shields, C. J. (1999); Owens, J. (1963). For the same idea in al-Fārābī, see Menn, S. (2008).

mind's rational construction. His philosophy in this respect is extremely modern, but itself entirely in keeping with the Avicennan distinction between 'extramental' and 'mental' existence. Like Avicenna, Ṭūsī also distinguishes between being (*wujūd*) as copula (*al-wujūd al-rābiṭ*) and being without condition (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), each of them reflecting what Aristotle calls 'being something' and 'being *haplōs*' and what the medieval Scholastics call 'being *secundum quid*' and 'being *simpliciter*'. The key point here is that whenever we predicate 'existence' or 'exists' to affirm the "being there" of something, that existence *itself* has no extramental referent; it is, as Ṭūsī says, a being of reason (*amr ʿaqlī*)—a mental construction which the mind enacts into being. In other words, the being *of* being is devised in the intellective power of the mind. By utilizing the term *iʿtibārī*, Avicenna's philosophical adherents were highlighting the fact that *wujūd muṭlaq* or being *simpliciter* has, in their view, no mind-independent existence of its own, but is instead a rationate predicate used to demarcate the "being there-ness" of a subject. That Rāzī identifies this meaning of 'existence' with the essence of God is therefore all the more remarkable given that well-known figures before his time were already pressing on the conceptualist aspect of Avicenna's position *vis-à-vis* general existence. So important was this point for Avicenna's interpreters that Ṭūsī insists upon it even in his correspondence with Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, a chief proponent of the so-called "unity of existence" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) ontology which posits a mind-independent reality for existence (*wujūd*) and which remarkably identifies it with the reality of God. "There is a tremendous secret (*sirr ʿaẓīm*) here," writes Ṭūsī, "and that is that existence, the meaning of which is predicated of the Necessary and the contingent by way of ambiguous predication (*bi-l-tashkīk*), is a being of reason (*amr ʿaqlī*)."[69] Ṭūsī therefore maintains a consistent position throughout his writings regardless of whether these are directed at Avicenna's theological detractors or the mystically inclined followers of Ibn ʿArabī. For him, the general meaning of existence or being *qua* being is a secondary intelligible (*maʿqūl thānī*), a being of reason (*amr iʿtibārī*), and therefore without an extramental referent (*miṣdāq*).

THE METAPHYSICS OF QUIDDITY

This brings us to another and arguably more important aspect of Ṭūsī's philosophy, and that is his doctrine of 'quiddity' (*māhiyya*). Up until now, our discussion has mainly focussed on the 'existence' part of the so-called "essence-existence" distinction. I have shown that in contrast to all of Avicenna's disputants Ṭūsī

[69] Ṭūsī, *al-Ajwiba*, p. 99.

holds 'existence' to be a concept that is both analogically predicated (*maqūl bi-l-tashkīk*) and *iʿtibārī*. Historically, I have tried to buttress the philosophical argument to show that *tashkīk* and 'existence' being *iʿtibārī* are quintessential aspects of Avicenna's thought for his philosophical adherents, and therefore solid indication in my opinion that they reflect what Avicenna himself believed.

Apart from Marmura's admirable essay on Avicenna's doctrine of universals, Avicenna's theory of 'quiddity' is still in my view underappreciated in modern scholarship.[70] Because of the limitations of space I am unable to deal with the topic in full, but it suffices to mention that for Ṭūsī understanding the role of "essence" is just as important as understanding the role of "existence" in the so-called distinction between them. Indeed, modern scholarship pays so much attention to the term '*inniyya*' that it forgets that something important also seems to be going on with the term '*māhiyya*' in Avicenna's "*inniyyatahu māhiyyatahu*" statement. In this section, I will try to explain what exactly Ṭūsī thinks Avicenna means when he says the First Principle's *māhiyya* is its *inniyya*.

Māhiyya is an equivocal term

The term '*māhiyya*' is a single noun mixed of two Arabic words, the interrogative "what" (*mā*) and the feminine "it" (*hiya*), which when ordinarily combined give the interrogative expression "What is it?" The contracted noun "whatness"—literally, "what it is"—has been derived from this interrogative construction and was translated in Latin as *quidditas* which, like *māhiyya*, is also a combination of the interrogative "what" (*quid*) and *est*, the third person form of the present indicative form of the verb "to be" (*esse*). The only difference between them is that the Arabic construction has no expressed copula in the present tense whereas the Latin does. '*Māhiyya*', '*quidditas*' and 'whatness' are thus direct translations of one another across three different natural languages; and for the remainder of this thesis I will use 'quiddity' as a technical translation of '*māhiyya*' instead of 'essence', a term which I think needs to be used cautiously.

The quiddity of a thing is sought whenever we wish to know what something is by asking the question "What is it?", and is one of the three main questions which is investigated in the scientific art of demonstration (*ṣināʿat al-burhān*).[71] For example, the quiddity of a human being is "rational animal". As a meaningful concept it conveys to our minds the idea of the biped whose comprehension and understanding we have sought. Since the quiddity of a thing facilitates our *understanding* of what something is, Ṭūsī holds

[70] Marmura, M. (1992).

[71] See (Avicenna) Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, vol. 1, pp. 309ff; cf. Menn & Wisnovsky (2012).

that 'quiddity' *sensu strictissimo* refers an *idea*—in his words "the thing intelligible" (*al-amr al-maʿqūl*)[72]—and thus denotes not the thing itself but its representation in our minds at the highest possible degree of abstraction. By contrast, the expressions 'essential-nature' or 'essence' or 'self' (*dhāt*) and 'true-nature' or 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) refer to the principle of "what" a thing is in the extramental world, namely, a reference to the nature itself which makes a thing to be of a certain kind and not another.

In Avicenna's *Posterior Analytics* (*Kitāb al-Burhān*), the essential "what"-question presumes that something already exists, which is to say that the demonstrator asks the quidditative-what question after she has asked and ascertained the answer to the whether-it-is-question. A definition, therefore, can only strictly be given for existent things. What doesn't exist (e.g. the goat-stag) cannot strictly speaking be defined. For example, even though the void (*al-khalāʾ*) does not exist one might still ask "What is the void?", but whatever the response to the question it would not, strictly speaking, count as the 'quiddity' of the void, but would rather be counted as "an explanation of the term" (*sharḥ al-ism*).

For this reason, says Ṭūsī, the terms 'essence' (*dhāt*) and 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) can only apply to existent things.[73] Ḥillī provides a neat explanation of these individual terms in *Asrār*, stating that 'essence' (*dhāt*) is said of *māhiyyāt* with extramental existence, whereas objects of mental existence (*al-dhihniyyāt*) only do not count as 'essences'.[74] If, therefore, we recall the discussion of the previous section, the so-called "essence-existence distinction" is a bit of a misnomer given that there is no distinction, strictly speaking, between 'essence' (*dhāt*) and 'existence' but rather 'quiddity' (*māhiyya*) and 'existence'. Furthermore, an 'essence', says Ḥillī, is "a self-subsistent entity not in a substrate" (*al-amr al-qāʾim lā fī maḥall*), and is contrasted by 'attributes' (*ṣifāt*) whose subsistence is precisely the opposite, which is to say that they subsist through the essences.[75] Likewise, the term 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) can only denote something having actual existence outside the mind. This is implied in the term itself since 'truth' (*ḥaqq*) is a "transcendental" of the existent thing (*al-mawjūd al-khārijī*); hence the term 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*), which refers to the truth of being, can only denote the real existent (*al-mawjūd al-ḥaqīqī*). As Ḥillī says, the 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) of a thing is defined as "the characteristically *unique existence* which a thing has affirmed for it" (*khuṣūṣiyyatu wujūdi l-*

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[72] In some editions, '*al-amr al-mutaʿaqqal*'.

[73] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* [*nahj*] IX.6, vol. 1, p. 309[14]; idem., *Tajrīd*, p. 73[3–4].

[74] Ḥillī, *Asrār*, p. 503[13–16].

[75] Ḥillī, *Asrār*, p. 503[13–16].

shay' al-thābit lahu).[76] What this means, therefore, is that the 'reality' of a thing is its individual existence (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ bihi*). The term '*māhiyya*' can therefore mean the 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) of a thing when it refers to something actually existent.[77]

For Ṭūsī, there are two basic senses of '*māhiyya*', each of which in the later tradition is specifically marked out and designated as 'quiddity in the specific sense' (*al-māhiyya bi-maʿna l-akhaṣṣ*) and 'quiddity in the general sense' (*al-māhiyya bi-maʿna l-aʿamm*). In the general sense, the 'quiddity' of something is "that *by* which the *existent* thing is *what it is*" (*mā bihi l-shay' dhālika l-shay'*). It is this general sense of the term '*māhiyya*' that Avicenna has in mind in the *Metaphysics* of the *Ishārāt* (IV.4) when he says: "Every true being from the aspect of its essential nature *by* which it is a true being is one concordant reality that cannot be pointed to [by the senses]. How, then, can [the First Principle] from which every true being attains its existence [not be something immaterial?]".[78] As Ṭūsī clarifies, "that *by* which the *existent* thing is *what it is*" denotes the natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*)—or 'nature' for short—that exists in every extramental thing and is the principle of "what" those things are in extramental existence. For example, a human being is a particular kind of substance, a 'nature' of a certain kind, and were it not for this nature "these particular individuals would not be human beings".[79] What Avicenna and Ṭūsī wish convey, therefore, is that *every* existent thing has a reality (*ḥaqīqa*), a '*māhiyya*' in the general sense, or else those existents would lack the quidditative principle by which they are the specific types of being they are. A 'quiddity' (*māhiyya*) in the general sense therefore refers to the 'essence' (*dhāt*) and 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) of a thing in extramental existence.

In the specific sense, by contrast, the 'quiddity' of a thing is its "whatness", that is to say, the reply one gives to the question "What is it?". The nature of a thing in the mind is thus a quiddity—a "whatness"—which the mind understands and defines by using a genus and differentia. A quiddity in the strict sense, therefore, facilitates understanding, and provides the conceptual notes through which something is comprehended. Since nothing of a simple nature can be defined, however, only composited natures have a 'quiddity' in the strict sense. And since understanding what something is does not include comprehending

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[76] Ḥillī, *Asrār*, p. 503[8].

[77] The term '*māhiyya*' can also be used interchangeably with the terms '*dhāt*' and '*ḥaqīqa*', none of which would then be taken in their technical meanings. This can potentially cause a problem of equivocation, as later thinkers point out.

[78] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* IV.4, p. 105[6–7].

[79] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.1, p. 6.

its existence (*wujūd*), all things having a "whatness" will necessarily have 'existence' as an extraneous property, which is why all 'quiddities' *sensu stricto* have 'existence' additionally related to them.

Divine Simplicity (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*)

This brings back to Avicenna's so-called "essence-existence" distinction and their identification in the First principle. So far, I have focussed on the 'existence' part of this equation and shown that according to Ṭūsī the type of 'existence' being spoken of in Avicenna's '*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*' formula is the Necessary Being's 'individual existence' (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*) and not the 'absolute existence' (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*) which is common to all existents as Ghazālī and Rāzī believe. This, I have shown, is perfectly in keeping with own Avicenna's thought. Now I want to look at the other side of the equation and briefly touch on what Ṭūsī has to say about the '*māhiyya*' part of this equation. The problem here, recall, is that Avicenna can be interpreted in two ways. Sometimes he appears to be *affirming* a *māhiyya* for the First principle and stipulating *it* as being identical to Its individual existence. Yet at other times he explicitly *denies* that the First principle has a *māhiyya* and is accordingly attacked by Ghazālī and his followers on this basis that "existence without a *māhiyya* and a *ḥaqīqa* is unintelligible".[80] Shahrastānī highlights this as one the clear "contradictions" within Avicenna's thought, and although he himself appears to reject a *māhiyya* in the First principle, he nevertheless confutes the notion of an identity-thesis by arguing that the "the First has no *māhiyya* […] since were It to have a *māhiyya* it would have been either existence *per se* or something apart from existence, and both options are false".[81] Bewildered by this, Shahrastānī exclaims: "What is it with the man that he utilizes the terms '*māhiyya*' and 'species-status' at every turn [*vis-à-vis* the First principle] when in actual fact he doesn't believe in them?"[82] Is Avicenna contradicting himself, then, when he says on the one hand that (*a*) the Necessary Being's *māhiyya* is its *inniyya* and, on the other hand, that (*b*) the Necessary Being has *no māhiyya*?

From Ṭūsī's perspective the question isn't whether or not Avicenna affirms or denies a *māhiyya* of the First principle, but rather which *sense of māhiyya* he affirms and which *sense of māhiyya* he denies. Firstly, as Ṭūsī correctly points out, the Ashʿarites are simply wrong to suggest that Avicenna denies a **reality** (*ḥaqīqa*) of the First principle. This is a claim which goes all the way to the *Tahāfut* in which Ghazālī reports

[80] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 117.

[81] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 50.

[82] Shahrastānī, *Muṣāraʿa*, p. 51.

Avicenna as denying a reality (*ḥaqīqa*). As such, this represents a false attribution given that nowhere in his writings does Avicenna deny a ***ḥaqīqa*** of the First principle. In fact the opposite is true, for in the *Taʿlīqāt* Avicenna replaces *māhiyya* with the term *ḥaqīqa* and states that "the *ḥaqīqa* of the First is Its *inniyya*".[83] He is clearly affirming the First's *ḥaqīqa* which he must given that every actually existing thing—as I have said—must have a 'reality'. The claim that Avicenna denies a 'reality' for the Necessary Being is thus a flagrant fabrication. This, however, leaves us with two statements:

(1) "The First has no *māhiyya*" (*lā māhiyya li-l-awwal*); and

(2) "The *ḥaqīqa* of the First is Its *inniyya*" (*ḥaqīqat al-awwal inniyyatuhu*).

Avicenna combines both positions in a single statement in the *Taʿlīqāt*:

> Whatever thing's *ḥaqīqa* is its *inniyya*, then it has no *māhiyya*. In all other contexts the term '*māhiyya*' means '*ḥaqīqa*'. In this context, the Necessary Being's *ḥaqīqa* is Its *inniyya*.[84]

There statement provides a clear indication in my view that the terms *ḥaqīqa* and *māhiyya* mean different things *vis-à-vis* the Necessary Being. The reason is that "whatever possesses a *māhiyya* is *caused* and [its] individual existence (*inniyya*) is a meaning that occurs accidentally to it from the outside".[85] Avicenna clarifies that the reason why the First principle is denied a *māhiyya* is because it is not a substance:

> A substance is a being whose 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) is its *māhiyya*, whereas the Necessary Being is a being whose 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*) is its 'individual existence' (*inniyya*), not *māhiyya*. **Whatever does not have a *māhiyya* is not a substance**. Hence the Necessary Being is not a substance. For this reason there is no genus for the Necessary Being in Itself. Neither is It a substance nor is It is something that falls into one of the categories, since every category is something whose existence is extraneous to its *māhiyya* and superadded to it (*wa zāʾidun ʿalayhā*). By contrast, the Necessary of Existence has an individual existence (*inniyya*) identical to Its *māhiyya* (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*). Its *inniyya* is not additional to Its *māhiyya*, but rather It has no *māhiyya* apart from Its *inniyya*. **By '*māhiyya*' we mean '*ḥaqīqa*'**. So whereas with respect to all other things we mean '*māhiyya*', with respect to the Necessary of Existence we mean '*inniyya*'.[86]

Now, in my view, this passage can only make sense if the term '*māhiyya*' is being used equivocally. A good way of seeing why this must be the case is by considering Ṭūsī's distinction of the two sense of *māhiyya*. A

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[83] Avicenna, *Taʿlīqāt*, p. 557, nr. 976.

[84] Avicenna, *Taʿlīqāt*, p. 561, nr. 974.

[85] Avicenna, *Shifāʾ*: *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, p. 276$^{27-30}$.

[86] Avicenna, *Taʿlīqāt*, p. 565, nr. 992.

quiddity in the strict sense has only logical intension, and refers to the "whatness" of a thing. In the general sense, however, the "essence" is the "the principle that makes an existent the type of being it is in existence". When Avicenna juxtaposes *wujūd* with *māhiyya* in the so-called "essence-existence distinction", therefore, he is juxtaposing existence against the "whatness" of a thing. Existence, in other words, is contrasted with quiddity in the specific sense and not quiddity in the general sense. And to be able to think of a thing's "whatness" apart from its individual existence implies that it is *capable* of being thought of *without existence*, and hence cannot be a Necessary Being. All such beings are thus contingents and have their individual existences additionally related to their "whatness", that is to say, their quiddities in the specific sense. Since, however, the "essence" of the Necessary Existent is not composed of a genus or differentia, the First Principle cannot be a substance and therefore *cannot have a quiddity in the specific sense*. In other words, one cannot make entreaties concerning the "whatness" of the Necessary Being because It has no genus, and therefore no "whatness" to speak of. Avicenna has explained this in the *Metaphysics* (VIII.4) of the *Shifā'* as follows:

> The First also has no genus. This is because the First has no quiddity [in the specific sense of "whatness"]. That which has no quiddity [in the specific sense of "whatness"] has no genus, **since genus is spoken of in answer to the question "What is it?" and moreover because genus in one respect is a part of a thing**, yet it has been ascertained that the First is not a composite.[87]

This shows that according to Avicenna the First principle is an apophatic being: unknown and unknowable. When he says that the Necessary Existent has no *māhiyya* he means quiddity in the strictest sense, and is thus removing the possibility that It can be composed by genus and differentia and thereby known through qualitative divisions. In other words, God cannot be defined—read "known"—because He has no qualitative parts. Furthermore, whatever is composed of a genus and differentia, matter and form, must be caused (*maʿlūl*), thus having an existence that is superadded onto its "whatness" by an efficient cause. So from the aspect of denying a quiddity in the specific sense, Avicenna establishes that the Necessary Being has no cause in any sense of the term, whether they be 'mental' causes such as genus and differentia, 'extramental' causes such as matter and form, or 'efficient' causes that give existence to a thing. By contrast, everything that has a *māhiyya* in the specific sense may be caused in terms of its quiddity, its "whatness", by defining terms, or it may be caused in its reality, its essence, by matter and form. No matter which of these causes one takes up for consideration, then, all of them ultimately imply partitive relations, or mereological

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[87] Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, 277^{9-14}. (Marmura's translation modified, emphasis mine.)

differentiations, and thus entail composition (*tarkīb*), whether real or intellectual. Since every whole depends on its parts, God, being Necessary of Existence in Itself, cannot therefore have a "whatness"—a quiddity in the specific sense—detached from His individual existence.

As for a reality (*ḥaqīqa*)—quiddity in the general sense—every existent no matter what has this, since it is the principle that makes those existents the types of existents they are. This holds true of the Necessary Being also. If It did not have a reality, It would be no-thing. The Necessary Being thus has a reality due to which It is the Necessary of Existence; and this reality is Its 'individual existence' (*inniyya*). So, while all contingent things have a *māhiyya* in both senses, a quiddity in the epistemological sense of "whatness" and a reality in the ontological sense of "essence", the Necessary Being has only an "essence" but not a "quiddity". The clearest indication that *māhiyya* may be spoken of equivocally occurs in a passage in the *Metaphysics* (V.8) of Avicenna's *Shifā'*, in a section which ought to be taken more seriously in modern scholarship. Avicenna writes:

> Thus there belongs to genus inasmuch as it is genus [in the mind] a quiddity, to species inasmuch as it is species [in the mind] a quiddity, and to the particular singular [outside the mind] there also belongs a quiddity by way of the concomitant accidents *that render it subsistent*. Here, it is as though, when the quiddity is said of that which pertains to genus and species and of that which pertains to the singular individual, *it is said equivocally*.[88]

We see the full implications of this in Ṭūsī's thought.

With these pointers in mind, then, the reason why Avicenna sometimes affirms and sometimes denies a *māhiyya* of the First principle is because he is not using the terms in exactly the same way. As Ṭūsī explains, responding directly to Shahrastānī's so-called "contradiction":

> The term *māhiyya* is only used here [in relation to the First principle] in an expanded and metaphorical sense, and what is intended by it is "essence" (*dhāt*) and "reality" (*ḥaqīqa*); whereas 'quiddity' (*māhiyya*) in the proper sense of the term only occurs when given as a response to the question "What is it?". It is, more often than not, something composed [of a genus and differentia] as it has been mentioned in logic.[89]

Ṭūsī clearly seems to have understood, contrary to the claims of the Safavid philosopher al-Sayyid al-Ṣadr, that the term *māhiyya* is not being used in its strict meaning for the Necessary Existent. As the debate continues in the *Maṣāriʿ*, Ṭūsī rejects Shahrastānī's claim that Avicenna and the ancient philosophers

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[88] Avicenna, *Shifāʾ*: *Ilāhiyyāt* V.8, p. $188^{10–16}$ (Marmura's translation modified, emphasis mine.)

[89] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāriʿ*, p. $89^{1–3}$.

contradict themselves whenever they suggest that the First principle is a form (*ṣūra*) since this would mean that the Necessary Being is a composite and therefore not a simple being, by clarifying that "what is meant by 'form' is 'it-ness' (*huwiyya*) and 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*). If the True-One did not have an 'it-ness' one could not refer to It with the term 'It', and if It did not have a 'reality' one could use the term 'True' for It".[90]

This goes back to a point I made earlier and that is that every existent thing (no matter what) must have an ipseitas (*huwiyya*) and 'reality' (*ḥaqīqa*)—a principle, that is, by which it is *that* specific "thing" and also the reason why it can be called "real" and "true". Hence, according to Avicenna, the Necessary Existent must also have a 'reality', and Ṭūsī has brilliantly shown why this is the case, thus proving Ghazālī's statement and subsequent disputants' claims entirely false. To conclude, Ṭūsī summarises the real purpose of Avicenna's "*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*" equation in *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* as follows:

> What is intended by existence (*wujūd*) entering into the comprehension of the Necessary Existent's essence is not the common existence (*al-wujūd al-mushtarak*) which only exists in the mind, but rather the individual existence which is the First principle of all beings. Since It [the Necessary of Existent] has no part, it [the individual existence] is identical with His essence (*nafsu dhātihi*). And this is what is meant by their saying 'His essence is His existence' (*māhiyyatahu hiya inniyyatahu*).[91]

God, in other words, is a simple being (*basīṭ al-ḥaqīqa*). The necessity of His existence demands nothing less than 'sheer oneness', that is to say, a complete denial of quantitative and qualitative distinctions *in divinis*, a result of which is that His essence (*māhiyya*) must also be identical to His existence (*inniyya*). In his correspondence to Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, Ṭūsī explains plainly why this must be the case:

> The demonstration that verifies in the clearest terms His existence being identical to His essence is that, even though He has no reality apart from existence, were He to have an existence and an essence [not identical to His existence], then the Principle of the whole [of existence] would be two [things not one]. Yet every two requires one, the principle of two, and anything which requires a principle cannot be a principle of the whole [of existence]. Suppose one should argue that "Quiddity is a subject and existence its attribute, and since every subject is prior to the attribute predicated of it, the First principle, being one, is the quiddity." To this it should be retorted that "Quiddity, on the presumption

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[90] Ṭūsī, *Maṣāri'*, p. 135[1–3]. In the next part of the thesis we will see that the term form (*ṣūra*) causes later thinkers all kinds of problems, but if we keep in mind what Ṭūsī says here, then hopefully confusion can be avoided. That the term can be used equivocally is dutifully pointed out by Ḥillī, no doubt reflecting what he has learnt from his *ustādh* Ṭūsī, where he writes: "The term 'form' is equivocal and may be used for the thing itself (*dhāt al-shay'*), and this is what conveys the notion of the simple essence or entity being identical to its 'form'; and it may be used for the inhering property that substantiates its substrate, and this is the meaning that conveys the notion of the form of a composite not being identical to its essence [i.e. the thing itself]' (Ḥillī, *Asrār*, p. 503[20–22]).

[91] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.22, vol. 3, p. 58[6–9].

of it being prior its existence, is neither existent nor nonexistent, and so the principle of all existent things is something nonexistent, which is clearly absurd.".[92]

Necessity is *i'tibārī*

To conclude this section we must return to the problem that began this study and that is the question of modality, and in particular the problem of whether or not 'possibility' (*al-imkān*) and 'necessity' (*al-wujūd*) are positive meanings with extramental reference. As shown in the previous chapters, from the time of Ghazālī onwards each of Avicenna's subsequent disputants think he is culpable of a contradiction in his views regarding the Necessary Existent and Its supposedly simple nature. If, as Avicenna says, the necessity of the Necessary Existent is "the assuredness of its existence" (*ta'akkud al-wujūd*), then given that nothing existent can be made more assured in existence by something nonexistent—such as, for example, a privation—the *necessity* of the Necessary Existent, it seems, must be a positive attribute or qualification of Its existence. This, if it is true, poses a serious challenge to Avicenna because he himself has repeatedly specified that the 'necessity of existence' is an *essential* property of the Necessary Existent, thus implying that It has the 'necessity of existence' in some capacity similar to other specific differences. But since any being which is differentiated from other beings through its essential differences, the Necessary Being cannot be a simple reality as Avicenna claims, but rather one which is composed.

From Ṭūsī's perspective the solution to the problem is quite straight-forward. The simple reason why each and every one of Avicenna's theological disputants has encountered this problem is essentially due to the fact that they have all lost sight of the meaning and significance of the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). When a philosopher like Avicenna says there is a being which is necessary of existence in itself, therefore, all he is saying is that a certain being has existence *necessarily* predicated of it. Furthermore, we know from what was said before that the *predicated* form of existence—i.e. existence which is opposed by non-existence—is just absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*); that is, existence without any conditions. This existence—which is the same as the primary notion of being—is predicated of *every* being by way of analogy (*bi-l-tashkīk*) and cannot therefore be the individual existence of the Necessary Being. And it should also be remembered that any meaning which is predicated analogously can never, according to Ṭūsī, be itself a constituent part of the essence of the predicated subject. Hence absolute existence *cannot* be the essence of God. Now, any qualifications of that existence, i.e. absolute existence, cannot therefore be included in the

[92] Ṭūsī, *al-Ajwiba*, p. 96.

essence of God either. When it is said, therefore, that there is a being which is 'necessary of existence in itself', what this means on proper understanding is that there is a being for which *the common and analogous notion of existence is necessarily predicated not due to another*, and none of the italicised part has anything to do in actual fact with the essence of the Necessary Being—but is instead a qualification of that essence *ab extra*.

Add to this is the fact also that if existence spoken of absolutely is *iʿtibārī* then 'necessity'—and indeed each and every one of the other modal frequencies—must also be *iʿtibārī*. The simplest reason for this, as says Ḥillī, is that "the assuredness of existence" is the assuredness of something *iʿtibārī*, and thus by rule of subordination something which itself is *iʿtibārī*. A more rigorous and catholic explanation, however, as to why 'necessity' and each of the other modal frequencies is *iʿtibārī* has to do with the relational character of modal judgements. As brilliantly explained by Ṭūsī, the idea of modality, of something being *necessary* of existence or *possible* of existence or *impossible* of existence, arises whenever the mind *relates* the concept or idea of a particular essence to the concept or idea of its extramental existence.[93] By that intellectual act of relation, the mind conjures up purely rationate beings which it then refers to as 'necessity', 'possibility' and 'impossibility'. Such rationate beings (or 'beings of reason') are examples of what Ṭūsī and the later tradition refer to as the *al-umūr al-iʿtibāriyya*.

Describing the metaphysics of such entities, Ṭūsī explains that:

> The truth of the matter is that 'necessity', 'possibility', and 'impossibility' are rationate beings (*umūr maʿqūla*) which occur in the mind through the act of relating conceptualised notions (*al-mutaṣawwirāt*) to extramental existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*). In and of themselves they [the rationate beings] are effects caused by the intellect through that aforementioned act of relating. They do not exist in the extramental world so as then to be the cause of things which are related to them, nor are they themselves the effects of any extramental being. Just as the *conceptualisation* of Zayd, for example, even though it is the effect of whoever conceptualises *him*, that conceptualisation itself is not the cause of Zayd nor the effect of Zayd himself. [What it means to say, therefore, that] a thing in the extramental world is "necessary of existence", is that a person, whenever he or she considers that thing in their mind and relates it to extramental existence, then automatically an rationate meaning occurs to them in their mind known as 'necessity'.[94]

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[93] The reason why it is specifically the notion of *extramental* existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*) is simply because any conceived notion in the mind—even if it be something impossible in extramental existence—has mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*) by virtue of being *in the mind*. It is the notion of a thing's extramental existence, therefore, that properly speaking is the subject of modal judgements.

[94] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $94^{7\text{-}13}$; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* IV.18, vol. 3, pp. 48^{8}-49^{2}.

The Metaphysics of Beings of Reason (*al-umūr al-iʿtibāriyya al-ʿaqliyya*)

It is worth mentioning that there are two crucial points concerning the metaphysics of pure beings of reason (*al-umūr al-iʿtibāriyya*) which are only implicitly implied in this statement, but explicitly mentioned by Ṭūsī in the *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*. The first is that the *umūr iʿtibāriyya*—"beings of reason", "mental constructs", "reflective notions", "rationate beings", call it what you may—do not exist in the mind in the same way that mental forms (sing. *al-ṣūra al-dhihniyya*) abstracted *from* extramental things exist in the mind. The obvious reason for this is that beings of reason do not, by definition, have extramental counterparts; they are not *abstracted* from anything least of all something in the extramental world. On the contrary, the reason why they are referred to as purely rationate beings is because they are incapable of existing in the extramental world, but instead have a subsistence which is only in mental existence.[95] As Ṭūsī says, they are created in the mind and destroyed in the mind as and when the perceiver chooses to consider them (*bal yanqaṭiʿu bi-inqiṭāʿ al-iʿtibār al-dhihnī*).[96] He supports this claim with the statement that all rationate beings are secondary intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt thāniyya*) which exist in the mind in the form of "judgements about existent things" (*aḥkām mawjūdāt fī l-khārij*), which is to say they are judgements of the primary intelligible forms of things abstracted in mental existence. And, as Ṭūsī rightly observes, "the judgements pertaining to existent things do not exist in the extramental world insofar as they are judgements".[97] Ṭūsī's point is just that a judgement *qua* judgement, being the product of the intellect's second operation, cannot exist outside the mind. The second reason why the modals cannot exist outside the mind is due to the fact that they are *relational* terms. The reason they exist is because of an act of relating one thing to something else; and as we shall see in the next part, no relation or relational term, according to Ṭūsī, is capable of existing outside the mind.

Although, therefore, it is true to say that beings of reason are fashioned in the mind of the perceiver, it is nevertheless important to stress that their 'invention', so to speak, is not a mere concoction out of no-where. All beings of reason are preceded by an intelligible object of knowledge which, having itself had prior representation in actual existence, substantiates the objective character of secondary intelligibles. The analogy here is with that of the faculty of estimation (*al-wahm*) which derives conative meanings (*maʿānī*) or 'intentions' from the forms of sensible particulars, forms which have been derived from external reality,

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[95] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* V.6, vol. 3, p. 105^{6-7}.

[96] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* V.4, vol. 3, p. 89^{4}.

[97] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* V.6, vol. 3, p. 105^{6}-106^{1}.

with the exception however that in the case of the intellectual faculty there is no separate faculty by which the act of deriving secondary intelligibles is performed. Hence the intellect not only employs the intelligible form as an instrument of knowledge (*modus sciendi*) to perform its first intellectual act of conceptualisation (*taṣawwur*), but can itself make the intelligible form itself the object of knowledge (rather than its instrument) through an act of reflexive "thinking"—the act being what post-Avicennan thinkers like Ṭūsī refer to as the act of "consideration" (*iʿtibār*). Hence in one respect the intellect itself is *the* object of knowledge, through which the mind—by considering its own contents—produces intelligible forms of a secondary order.[98]

Thus in its first operation the intellect functions as a purely passive recipient of mental forms, which is why—using the notion of passivity and activity—it is referred to as the 'material intellect' by figures like Avicenna in the Aristotelian tradition, highlighting the fact that matter by itself has no actuality. In the second operation, however, the intellect—in its state of being a 'derived intellect' (*al-ʿaql al-mustafād*)—actively engages the intelligible form and thereby produces mental constructs or beings of reason that result from this process. All beings of reason are therefore necessarily secondary intelligibles or 'second intentions'. And as such what explains their mental existence, their coming-to-be from a metaphysical perspective, as stipulated by Ṭūsī in his *Tajrīd* and explained by commentators of that work, is their efficient cause, which in this case is the intellectual faculty of the rational soul itself and not the Active Intellect which, according to Ṭūsī, is the efficient cause of the primary intelligibles in mental existence.

One should also emphasise that the proper domain of beings of reason is the intellectually faculty and none other; and that in spite of some similarities which the intellect's creation of beings of reason has with the imagination's creation of fictitious images, the two are essentially different. Fictitious images such as the goat-stag or golden mountain are fashioned in the mind by the internal sense known as the image-forming sense (*takhayyul*), which combines and separates material images stored in the retentive-imagination (*khayāl*), both of which together comprise the mental faculty known as the imagination. Given their

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[98] This can happen in one of two ways: either the intelligible form is made into the object of knowledge itself and then judged as such, the judgment being the *al-umūr al-iʿtibāriyya*; or it may be that a particular object in the extramental world is considered in relation to other beings, the relation itself being the *iʿtibārī* term. An example of the first is when the concept of human being (i.e. 'rational animal') is *judged* by the intellect to be a universal term (*kullī*), this judgment (i.e. 'universality'), itself an object of knowledge, being something *iʿtibārī*, i.e. of a purely mind-dependent status. An example of the second is when one thing is *considered* and *related* to another thing in terms of cause and effect. So while it may be true, for example, to say that X *causes* Y in existence outside of the mind, the idea of causation *per se* (*al-muʾaththiriyya*) is a relational concept and thus purely *iʿtibārī*, there being no 'causation' *per se* outside of the mind.

diversified functions, however, Avicenna locates each of the different internal senses in distinct regions of the brain. The retentive-imagination, being a sense which receives the unified image of the perceived object, is—like the *sensus communis*—located in the first of three chambers at the front of the brain. The mind's activity begins however, properly speaking, with the estimation (*al-wahm*) and the image-forming sense. The estimative faculty perceives the non-sensible meanings or 'intentions' (*maʿāni*) attached to sensory objects, thereby enabling the animal soul to perceive the extra-sensible properties of ordinary physical objects.

Unlike the derivative nature of the estimative faculty, however, the image-forming sense is a productive one inasmuch as what is fashioned by it is a *new* image created by joining or separating previous images previously stored in the retentive-imagination. So while goat-stags and golden mountains are also mental beings (*umūr dhihniyya*) they are not, in the technical sense in which we are speaking, 'beings of *reason*' (*umūr iʿtibāriyya ʿaqliyya*). The point of departure here is metaphysical: mental images produced by the image-forming part of the imagination are *false* because, though they also happen to exist only in the mind, they are nonetheless not metaphysically *impossible* beings; they just so happen to lack extramental existence. Beings of reason, on the other hand, are secondary intelligibles, intellectual constructions which *cannot* exist extramentally *per definiens*. So while the existence of a real golden mountain or goat-stag seems far-fetched, their existences in the extramental world are still metaphysically speaking possible. By contrast, there shall never be a time or place when the modal category 'necessity', for example, at least according to Ṭūsī, could have extramental existence. This is why, despite the enormous significance of the creative imagination, beings of reason will always and forever remain intellectual constructs.

An important question might be raised here and that is whether or not beings of reason are false in the same way that mental images of goat-stags and golden mountains are false; indeed, since they have no possibility of existing outside the mind, one could easily be tempted to think that the *umūr iʿtibāriyya* are not only false but always false, that is, necessarily false (*bi-l-ḍarūra*). Our foray into the metaphysical thought of Ṭūsī thus brings us to one of the most important questions in the history of post-Avicennan philosophy: namely, the question of what exactly the metaphysical implications of Aristotle's theory of truth as a form of correspondence are *vis-à-vis* which kinds of beings there are in existence; in other words, does the correspondence theory of truth necessitate a specific ontology in which a particular class of entified objects determine the intellectual truth of certain kinds of propositions? This problem, which has been treated under the heading of '*nafs al-amr*' (the thing-itself) in Islamic philosophy, will be discussed in the final part of this thesis. Yet, for our purposes in the here and now, it suffices to say that all meaningful discussions of

this in subsequent thinkers beings with Ṭūsī's treatise on the subject and his remarks on the conditions that are needed in order for a proposition to be either true or false.

Conclusion

By considering the cumulative torrent of criticisms against Avicenna's metaphysics, I have shown the continuity of themes and topics which post-Avicennan thinkers raised against Avicenna's philosophy. I have tried to make the case that standing at the end of this "classical" period in the reception of Avicenna's thought is the mighty figure and personality of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, and shown how two fundamental concepts—namely, the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) and beings of reason (*al-umūr al-iʿtibāriyya*)—completely change the complexion of these debates. While the analogy of being is of genuine Avicennan provenance, the same cannot easily be said of the *umūr iʿtibāriyya*, and in particular which concepts are *iʿtibārī* and which concepts are not. As such, the greater emphasis on purely conceptual terms arguably represents the most important development in Avicenna's philosophy within the philosophical branch of Avicennism, and is itself a good indication of the vitality of that tradition in the face of criticisms which it received from the aporetic movement. As Ṭūsī's philosophy therefore demonstrates, *taḥqīq*—the critical verification and resolution of matters—is more than just slavish commentary; it is getting to the truth of the matter whatever that happens to be regardless of whether this happens to agree with Avicenna or not. Ṭūsī is a *muḥaqqiq* not simply because he *interprets* Avicenna correctly, but rather because he "solves the problems" (*ḥall mushkilāt*) and gets to the bottom of matters in the subjects which he has delved into. He is interested in the truth (*al-ḥaqq*), as every *muḥaqqiq* is, whatever that may be and wherever it may lead. And it just so happens that his *taḥqīq* coincides with his Shīʿism.

PART II

MENTAL EXISTENCE

(*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*)

CHAPTER 5

RĀZĪ'S REJECTION OF MENTAL EXISTENCE

Introduction

That Avicenna has the same commitment to the existence of forms (sing. *ṣūra*, pl. *ṣuwar*) and their facilitative role in the interface between mind and matter as had Aristotle is beyond doubt. And insofar as the major sections of his thought are predominated by a concern over the existence, nature and function of forms, Avicenna's philosophy is to be properly seen as an extension of Aristotle's thesis of inherent forms albeit modulated and refined in certain aspects, mostly cosmological in nature, by the Neo-Platonic tradition of the late-antique commentators on Aristotle.[1] Both Aristotle and Avicenna therefore posit the idea of a form ('*ṣūra*' in Arabic) as one of the basic fundaments of their respective thought-systems.

The form of a thing has two main modes of existence: an existence in the thing itself (natural form) and an existence in the understanding (intelligible form); that is, in the mind of the perceiver. In this simple fashion a continuity is maintained between the extramental and mental orders of being; for even though these are two separate modes of being the form in one is "identical" to the form in the other. Anyone who stands opposed to the formal character of Avicenna's philosophy therefore stands opposed to Aristotle's philosophy also.

In the previous chapters I showed that by insisting on the univocal character of being Rāzī opposes Avicenna's metaphysics of *tashkīk* and as a consequence rejects Avicenna's notion of a First Principle whose "essence is Its existence" (*māhiyyatuhu inniyyatuhu*). A further consequence of the rejection of *tashkīk* however is Rāzī's rejection of mental existence; namely, Aristotle's and Avicenna's theory of knowledge. Mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*) is one the most important debates of the post-classical intellectual tradition in Islam in part due to Rāzī's ruinous attack on the theory. Independent treatises were devoted to the subject, such as Ṭāshküprīzāde's *al-Shuhūd al-ʿaynī fī mabāḥith al-wujūd al-dhihnī*, but

[1] On Avicenna's place within this tradition, see Wisnovsky, R. (2003).

almost nothing has been written about these debates in modern scholarship.[2] In this chapter I consider one aspect of Rāzī's multifaceted attack on the theory of mental forms and provide some suggestions as to why he may be so radically opposed to this theory of knowledge. Before doing this, however, a brief word ought to be said about what precisely the theory of mental existence is in Avicenna's philosophy.

Avicenna and the Theory of Mental Existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*)

One of the first things Avicenna enunciates in the opening section of the *Isāgōgē*, the first book of the *Shifā'*, is that "the quiddities of things may exist either in things themselves or in the understanding (*al-taṣawwur*), and may thus have three considerations".[3] As I have shown in the previous chapter these are two modes of existence (*wujūd*) and three modes of consideration (*i'tibār*), and Ṭūsī has some genuinely insightful remarks on this distinction. What Avicenna says next immediately clarifies the purpose of there being an ontological distinction between extramental and mental existence: "If whenever we wish to think of things and to know them, it shall necessarily be incumbent upon us to enter them into the understanding (*al-taṣawwur*), wherein states that only occur in the understanding shall accrue upon them".[4] Avicenna provides a concise elaboration of this idea in the *De Anima* of the *Najāt*:

> Every apprehension (*idrāk*) is as it were just the acquisition of the form of the thing-apprehended (*mudrak*), so that if that thing is something material [the apprehension of it] will be the acquisition of its form abstracted from matter by some method of abstraction, albeit that the types of abstraction are different and its degrees distinct. A material form has states and determinations which occur to in virtue of the matter [to which they are related], yet none of these [attachments] belong to the quiddity insofar as it is that form. Extraction (*al-naz'*) may therefore be an extraction of some or all of the adjuncts [of matter]; or it may be a complete extraction such that [the form] is abstracted from matter [in its entirety] and from the adjuncts belonging to it on account of matter.[5]

The complexity of Avicenna's "epistemology" can be seen in the fact that it is predicated on a range of topics from different parts of his philosophy, a complete understanding of which not only requires a discussion of the ontological foundations upon which mental forms in an abstracted mode of existence is founded, but a discussion also of the kindred psychological, logical and cosmological foundations of that theory. All of these aspects must be brought together for a complete picture of the Avicennan theory of

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[2] For a brief account of Avicenna's theory of mental existence, see Black, D. (1997; 1999). As for the reception of this idea in the thought of later thinkers, see Marcotte, R. (2011) and Eichner, H. (2011).

[3] Avicenna, *Shifā': Isāgōgē* I.2, p. 15^{1-2}.

[4] Avicenna, *Shifā': Isāgōgē* I.2, p. 15^{9-10}.

[5] Avicenna, *Najāt: De Anima*, p. 344.

knowledge, and an attack on one aspect is to a certain degree an attack on the entire system. The point for our purposes is that the whole system is driven by the notion of forms. As Avicenna says, the forms of things exist "before multiplicity", "in multiplicity" and "after multiplicity", which Ṭūsī translates as meaning just that a form exists in the Active Intellect, in natural things themselves, and in the minds of perceivers.

Avicenna's "theory of knowledge" as mental existence thus assumes a number of prerequisite notions. First, the entire system is hylemorphic and predicated on the assumption that natural things are combinations of matter and form. Second, the arrangement of forms originates with the Active Intellect which emanates them onto matter and into the intellectual faculty, the first of which causes the existence of the form as a natural substance and the latter of which causes the existence of the form as an object of knowledge in the knower. Third, the form in the uppermost degree of knowledge (*taʿaqqul*) is an intelligible form; that is, a form entirely separated from material connexions and can therefore only exist in a substrate which itself is immaterial. What this means therefore is that Avicenna's theory of intellectual knowledge is categorically predicated on the soul being an immaterial substance, and to a certain extent is itself a proof of this.

So whether it be the Active Intellect, the theory of form and matter, or the immaterial conception of the soul, nothing about Avicenna's theory of mental existence is deemed agreeable to the kalām. As Mīr Bukhārī writes in his commentary on al-Kātibī's *Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*, "the philosophers affirm mental existence, the *mutakallimūn* reject it".[6] The reason for this is quite straight-forward. For the *mutakallimūn* the world is composed of indivisible atoms, not matter and form, and since the soul is a part of the world, i.e., "everything apart from God" (*kull mā siwā Llāh*), it must also be subsumed beneath the atomistic principle. According to the *mutakallimūn*, therefore, though they differ among themselves on the precise nature of the soul, some arguing that it is an atom just like every other and some holding it to be a "subtle body" (*jism laṭīf*) which is perhaps of a luminous nature (*nūrāniyyun*), they are nevertheless agreed by consensus that it cannot be "immaterial" (*mujarrad ʿan al-mādda*) or "incorporeal" (*ghayr jismānī*) in the absolute sense of the term.

Whether it be due to his prior theological commitment or not, the fact remains that Rāzī is the first thinker to realize the full implications of Avicenna's theory of knowledge, and as consequence initiates a thorough onslaught on the theory of mental existence. He attacks every step in Avicenna's philosophy of mind and provides a systematic but devastating critique of the cosmological, psychological and ontological

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[6] Mīr Bukhārī, *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*, vol. 1, p. 254.

foundations of that theory, whether it be regard to the theory of internal senses or the facilitation of forms in mental existence. It goes without saying that a complete assessment of Rāzī's thought on these topics is well beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet it should suffice to say that as a devout proponent of the Ashʿarite theology, there is plenty of motivation here for him to reject this aspect of Avicenna's philosophy.

Objections to Mental Existence

In a study published as recently as 2012, the erudite scholar Khaled El-Rouayheb put forward the claim that "Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī accepted 'mental existence' and later standard handbooks on theology such as *al-Mawāqif* by Ījī (d. 1355) and *al-Maqāṣid* by Taftāzānī did so as well".[7] While the latter part of this statement may in fact be true, the beginning part is assuredly false. Unfortunately, El-Rouayheb's assessment of Rāzī's thought was based entirely on the latter's *Mabāḥith* which contains a section with the allusive title "On Affirming Mental Existence" (*fī ithbāt al-wujūd al-dhihnī*). However, this section of Rāzī's *Mabāḥith* cannot be read without also consulting a later section in which he *rejects* the claim that knowledge is the sole impression of the form of the thing-known in the knower.[8] So while philosophers like Aristotle and Avicenna hold that a form's reception in the intellect by itself causes the knowledge of the thing-known, Rāzī's so-called "affirmation" of mental existence is a distorted version of what that theory means to the *falāsifa*. Said otherwise, he is not "affirming mental existence" as the philosophers affirm mental existence.[9]

Rāzī, rather astutely it should be added, differentiates between the *necessity* of mental forms and their *sufficiency* in a way that previous thinkers did not. Unlike Avicenna, Rāzī *rejects* the sufficiency of mental forms but instead insists that a form be supported by the addition of an existential relation to the object of knowledge. Knowledge thus consists of a form in the mind *and* a relation to the object of knowledge, not

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[7] El-Rouayheb, K. (2012: 90). El-Rouayheb (ibid.: 77) is much closer to the truth, however, when he suggests that "[o]ne might speculate that Rāzī's alternative explication [of the subject-matter of logic] was designed in part to avoid any explicit appeal to 'mental existence' (*wujūd dhihnī*) which was a topic of contention between theologians and philosophers, the former typically denying mental existence altogether."

[8] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, 442ff (*Fī ibṭāl qawli man qāl al-ʿilm huwa nafsu inṭibāʿ māhiyyati l-maʿlūm fī l-ʿālim*).

[9] Despite his rejection of their position, the proofs which Rāzī reports (*ḥikāya*) in the *Mabāḥith* are nevertheless faithful representations of the *falāsifa*'s theory of mental existence. However, given that Rāzī was the first post-Avicennan thinker to devote an independent section of his major philosophical works to the theory of mental existence, his proofs were commonly cited by later authors in their discussions of the subject also; see, for example, Ḥillī, *Nihāya*, vol. 1, pp. 45–51; al-Ījī/al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, vol. 2, pp. 169–184. Note, however, that there are other proofs besides the ones mentioned in Rāzī's *Mabāḥith* which are included in al-Ījī's section on mental existence in the *Mawāqif*, one of which is taken directly from Ṭūsī's *Tajrīd*, namely his assertion that all 'essential propositions' having a permanent truth-value would be false if mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*) were rejected. I discuss this proof and its connection to the theory of *nafs al-amr* in Chapter 6.

just the former. There is, it seems to me, a conspicuous attempt here to accommodate Avicenna's theory of mental existence with the opinion of a large contingent among the *mutakallimūn* who consider knowledge to be "an essential attribute" (*ṣifa ḥaqīqiyya*) compounded with a "relation" (*taʿalluq*).

Be this is as it may, the *Mabāḥith* is an anomalous work in Rāzī's *oeuvre* and cannot be relied on exclusively to form an assessment of his thought. In this chapter I will show that Rāzī in fact rejects mental existence, eliciting material gathered from a range of texts such as his commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, his commentary on Avicenna's *ʿUyūn*, and his standalone writings such as the *Mulakhkhaṣ*, *Muḥaṣṣal* and *Maṭālib*. The cumulative evidence of all these works leaves no room for doubt that Rāzī opposes the theory of mental existence.

As I have already stated, Rāzī's discussion of mental existence is multifaceted and lengthy. For our purposes, given the limitations of space, I shall focus solely on his criticisms of the claim that mental forms are "necessary" and leave aside the question of their "sufficiency" for another occasion. It goes without saying that if the necessity of mental forms is rejected there can be no sense to claiming their sufficiency. I will also present this aspect of Rāzī's thought in the form of *problemata*, that is, objections which are based around certain apparently contradictory or impossible outcomes of maintaining the theory of mental existence. Even here Rāzī has a number of objections that cannot all be considered, but there are four "problems" which pervade nearly all aspects of his thinking on the subject. As I shall refer to them, these are (1) the Problem of Concomitant Attribution; (2) the Problem of the External Mind; (3) the Problem of Categories; and (4) the Problem of Correspondence.

By the end of this chapter it is hoped the reader will begin to appreciate just how opposed Rāzī is to mental existence, which as a consequence also results in many of the fundamental themes of Aristotelian philosophy also being rejected in his thought-system. Indeed, toward the end of this chapter Rāzī's inclination to the philosophy of Plato and his avowal of the theory of Forms in a multiple number of works shall be taken as evidence of (*a*) his rejection of mental existence and (*b*) his rejection of key themes of the philosophy of Aristotle and Avicenna.

Problem of Concomitant Attribution

Throughout his writings the most consistent argument that Rāzī has advanced against the representation of forms in mental existence is what I shall call the "problem of concomitant attribution". This is an argument which Rāzī employs to object to the *necessity* of mental forms and is based on the premise that

"the only true sense of one thing being attributed to another is that of an attribute occurring to its subject".[10] Accordingly, Rāzī contends that "whenever any one of us intellectually apprehends straightness or circularity or heat or coldness, then the faculty responsible for this apprehension must as a consequence become straight or circular or hot or cold at the time of its apprehending".[11] If, for example, our knowledge of heat occurs because of its form being represented in mental existence, then according to Rāzī this either implies that heat *per se* occurs to our faculties of cognition or something else besides heat itself—namely, the likeness or image or impression of heat—is occurring to us whenever we claim to know heat. Both of these options fail to account for what the true quiddity of knowledge is: the first entails that whenever I think of heat my mind (*ʿaql*) literally becomes hot since *ex hypothesi* the quiddity of heat itself has been represented in my cognitive faculties; while the second implies that I do not know heat *per se* but only its likeness, form or image which differs to the reality of heat in "the totality of its nature" (*fī tamām al-māhiyya*).[12] Hence my understanding (*taʿaqqul*) of what things are cannot be due to some mode of intellectual representation and knowledge (*idrāk*), therefore, cannot be mental existence.

It should be noted that the argument here is not merely directed against Avicenna's theory of knowledge but against all theories upholding the necessity of a form or attribute in the knower to explain the quiddity of knowledge. Rāzī therefore objects to the pre-Avicennan kalām view that knowledge is an essential attribute (*ṣifa ḥaqīqiyya*) in the knower just as much as he objects to Avicenna's view that knowledge is the mental existence of forms. In the *Maṭālib*, Rāzī equates both of these positions by arguing that inasmuch as each one makes it a necessary condition of knowledge that something occurs in the knower, they each agree on there being some "positive" determination in the subject. Whether this "something" is called a 'form' or an 'attribute' makes no difference in the slightest, even if, as one group of theologians claims, the attribute (*ṣifa*) needs to be followed by an accompanying relation (*taʿalluq*) to the object of knowledge.[13]

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[10] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p 219^{5}.

[11] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. $219^{5–7}$; cf. idem, *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, pp. 133^{22}–134^{5}; idem., *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $156^{2–3}$.

[12] Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $156^{3–4}$; cf. idem., *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, p. $134^{15–19}$; idem., *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 219^{17}–220^{4}; idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, vol. 2, p. $289^{3–22}$.

[13] See Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, pp. 103–106.

As Rāzī explains there are four schools of thought, generally speaking, on the quiddity of knowledge.[14] The first opinion is the one which Rāzī himself has championed in all his writings apart from the *Mabāḥith*, and regards knowledge to be a "sheer relation" (*mujarrad al-nisba*) between the knower and the thing-known: "The first opinion is that knowledge and apprehension are a relation and only a relation, albeit it a specified one, and this is the opinion of a great contingent of thinkers among the philosophers and the *mutakallimūn*, and it is the opinion which we have chosen and it is the truth";[15] "It is said that knowledge is a relational affair, and that is the truth […] Some who have advocated this view refer to this relation (*iḍāfa*) by the term '*taʿalluq*', and they posit another thing [in the knower] which entails this relation [the essential attribute]. There are other who say knowledge is an accident which necessitates the state of 'being a knower' (*al-ʿālimiyya*), and 'being a knower' they say is a state (*ḥāla*) which has a relation (*taʿalluq*) to the thing-known. These then affirm three things; but as for us we only affirm the relation itself";[16] "The truth of the matter is that apprehension (*idrāk*) and awareness (*shuʿūr*) are relational states (*ḥāla nisbiyya iḍāfiyya*) that occur between the apprehender and the thing-apprehended; and when this has been proven [the theory of mental existence] is completely destroyed";[17] "The truth in our view is that apprehension is not the very occurrence of a form, but a relational state […]".[18]

The second opinion is that "knowledge is an 'essential *attribute*' and is a position adopted by the majority of the philosophers who claim that knowledge is the occurrence of the *form* of the thing-known in the knower".[19] (Notice the concurrent use of the terms 'attribute' and 'form'.)

The third opinion is an extension of the previous and holds that knowledge is "an essential attribute *with* a particular relation" (*ṣifa ḥaqīqiyya maʿa iḍāfa makhṣūṣa*)" which, as Rāzī confirms, is "the opinion of the majority of the scholars of kalām".[20] It was this opinion that Rāzī appeared to favour in the *Mabāḥith* when he attempted to accommodate the Avicennan theory of mental forms, and which El-Rouayheb took as a sign of Rāzī's acceptance of mental existence.

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[14] Rāzī fails to include mention of the various Sufi theories of knowledge in this section of the *Maṭālib*. For a comprehensive survey of the different theories of knowledge in Islam, see the inimitable study of Rosenthal, F. (1970).

[15] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, pp. 103^{14}–104^{2}.

[16] Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $157^{13–17}$.

[17] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 2], p. $290^{5–7}$.

[18] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. $226^{9–10}$.

[19] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 104.

[20] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, p. $104^{10–11}$.

Finally, the fourth opinion holds knowledge to be "an essential attribute in the category of negation".[21] Though it too regards knowledge as a type of 'essential attribute' the difference between this and the previous two opinions is that it considers this attribute to be a 'negative' one, unlike the second and third opinions which regard knowledge to be some type 'positive' characteristic of the knower. An example of knowledge in the fourth category would be Avicenna's principle that intellectual substances have self-awareness by virtue of being things that are abstracted from matter (*mujarrad 'an al-mādda*).[22] Significantly, in Avicenna's psychology this explains how rational souls are capable of self-awareness and the modality by which the First Principle "thinks" Itself and other things. For Avicenna, then, the First's understanding of Itself and other things is not strictly speaking an act of knowing but rather an act of being: it is because the First *is* an abstracted mode of existence that It *is* a rational being. Now, since the meaning of "being abstracted" is just "having no relation to matter whatsoever", as a mode of abstraction self-awareness would be a form of negation, as Rāzī proclaims, but a theory of knowing the self that is squarely predicated on the soul being immaterial. Rāzī has many objections to Avicenna's theory of self-awareness in this regard.[23]

Avicenna's views on knowledge appear to Rāzī as being contradictory. Sometimes Avicenna holds that knowledge is a specific determination and positive characterization of the knower: this whenever he speaks of knowledge as a form of representation in the knower. By contrast, he sometimes says that knowledge of one's self is just an ensuing consequence of the fact that the rational soul is a being abstracted from matter, and this according to Rāzī is a negation. The difference is clearly down to the nature of the object of knowledge: the soul's cognition of things is "positive", whereas the knowledge it has of itself is, using Rāzī's language, "negative". For Rāzī this is a contradiction because regardless of the object of knowledge, knowledge *per se* cannot be something both positive and negative. The objection here can be fleshed out as follows: Every act of cognition involves an act of self-awareness. If I know *p* then I know I know *p*. This means that in a single act of knowing there are always two objects of knowledge: the immediate object of perception and my knowledge of myself as the subject of apperception. Therefore, since knowledge

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[21] Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 104^{17}.

[22] For a detailed study of Avicenna's views on self-awareness, see now Kaukua, T. (2015); cf. Black, D. (2008).

[23] One argument, appearing in this same section of the *Maṭālib*, is that "matter itself does not have another matter, and so matter is something that is self-subsistent and 'abstracted from matter', even though matter itself does not know anything. Thus we learn that this talk [of being abstracted from matter explaining how we have knowledge of ourselves] is empty talk without any benefit" (*Maṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 105^{11-13}).

is a single act it cannot possess two contradictory qualifications as "positive" and "negative" at the same time, but must be either one or the other.

So while in the *Maṭālib* Rāzī classifies Avicenna's theory of knowledge into two of the four aforementioned categories, he places it in all four categories in the *Mabāḥith*. As Rāzī states in the latter (but chronologically former) work, the implication is that Avicenna's theories of knowledge are "thoroughly confused":

> The Shaykh's [Avicenna's] opinions on the true nature of knowledge are thoroughly confused. [(1)] In certain cases, he makes knowledge into something non-existential; this being whenever he explains the Creator as being an Intellect, Intellector and Intellected, which therefore does not allow multiplicity to enter into His essence. So in this instance he has explained the nature of knowledge in terms of being "an abstraction from matter", and that is something non-existential [i.e. negative]. [(2)] Sometimes, however, he says that knowledge is the impressed forms [of things] in the rational soul which correspond with the object of knowledge; this being whenever he explains that the understanding of the essence of a thing occurs whenever its form is present with the perceiver. He states this explicitly in *namaṭ* III of the *Ishārāt* where he says that "the apprehension of a thing occurs whenever its true-nature is represented with the apprehender". [(3)] On other occasions he claims that knowledge is a relation *simpliciter* (*mujarrad al-iḍāfa*); this whenever he explains that the Necessary Existent's status of being an Intellect is not a status which It acquires because of a multiplicity of forms occurring in It, but rather a status is has because their emanation from It; such that the Necessary Being becomes related to them insofar as It is their Creator-Principle. [(4)] Yet, on other occasions still, he stipulates that knowledge is a quality which has a relation to the extramental object of knowledge; this being whenever he claims that knowledge belongs essentially to the category of quality and accidentally to the category of relation, and whenever he claims that the change in the circumstances of the object of knowledge causes a change in knowledge itself since knowledge is a quality having a *relation* to the object of knowledge. The Shaykh therefore subscribes to every possible interpretation of knowledge. When you have known this you will start to realize just how confused he was on the true nature of knowledge.[24]

Depending on the particular aspect from which knowledge is being considered Avicenna superficially appears to adhere to all four possible interpretations of the quiddity of knowledge, and according to Rāzī this merely serves to illustrate the inconsistency of his system and the lack of a clear unifying principle. Knowledge cannot be "like this" on some occasions and "like that" on others, but must be one consistent thing which accounts for the different species and objects of knowledge by a single principle.[25]

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[24] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, p. 444^{6-20}; for the same accusation, see Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 226^{3-8}.

[25] In the next chapter, I will show that the beginning part of Ṭūsī's commentary on Avicenna's *Pointer* (III.7) is purposely designed to deflect this sort of criticism by showing that despite Rāzī's claims knowledge "can be said in many ways". That is, Ṭūsī will demonstrate that knowledge is an *analogical* concept, which once again highlights just how important the doctrine of *tashkīk* is for Ṭūsī's metaphysics.

To summarize: Rāzī identifies four possible theories of the quiddity of knowledge:

1) Knowledge is a *negative* essential **attribute** and coextensive with being abstracted from matter.

2) Knowledge is a *positive* essential **attribute** in the knower.

3) Knowledge is a **relation** between the knower and the object of knowledge.

4) Knowledge is a *positive* essential **attribute** in the knower plus a relation to the object of knowledge.

The problem of concomitant attribution pertains to options two and three, and regardless of whether there is an additional relation or not both Avicenna and the majority of thinkers within kalām claim that knowledge is something which causes positive determination in the knower facilitated by the reception of forms or the inherence of attributes. Aristotle also holds to this view, referring to the positive determinations in the soul as "habits" and "dispositions" (*Cat.* 8b25–30). According to Rāzī, however, there is no distinction whatsoever between a form that occurs in things themselves and a form that occurs in the mind. This is because of the initial premise in Rāzī's argument which states that the only sense there is to saying that the form of something occurs to the knower is that the knower herself is attributed with the very property or phenomenon occurring in things themselves. To put this differently, what Rāzī is saying is that supposing mental forms even exist the occurrence of a form *in re* would have to be identical to its occurrence *in intellectu* or else the two would not be correspondent and that is not what knowledge is. The problem of concomitant attributions therefore aims to dissolve the distinction between extramental and mental existence, to show that there are not two ontological modes of existence for a quiddity but just one: extramental existence. Since the form of fire *in re* causes things to burn, its representation in the mind *ex hypothesi* must also cause the mind to burn. Obviously this is absurd and hence mental existence is false.

Rāzī considers two possible counter-arguments to this objection. The first is as follows:

> We do not say that whenever someone intellectually apprehends circularity has circularity *per se* occur in them. Rather, what we say is that it is the *form* of circularity and its *likeness* that occurs in the mind. Whoever apprehends fire, therefore, has its likeness (*mithāl*), form (*ṣūra*) and image (*shabḥ*) represented in them, not the reality of circularity itself.[26]

This is clearly a peripatetic argument or "picture theory" view of knowledge. It claims that whenever something is known to us from the extramental world, it is not the thing itself that occurs in our faculties

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[26] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 219^{8-11}.

of perception but its representation, namely, its form or likeness or image. For Rāzī this is an inadequate theory of knowledge: "Either the thing you have called the 'form' or 'likeness' of circularity has the same reality as the reality of circularity itself, or their realities are different. If the two are the same, then whoever intellects them will have their realities represented in them, which therefore entails that the mind which intellects circularity itself becomes a circular thing; for there is no sense to something 'being circular' except that circularity itself has occurred in that thing".[27] However, according to Avicenna's *Pointer* (III.7), the knowledge of things occurs whenever their realities are "represented" (*mutamaththila*) with the knower, implying therefore that one can immediately cross off the first disjunct in Rāzī's argument: the realities *per se* of things do not occur in our souls.

This then leaves the second disjunct which is that our knowledge of things occurs whenever their forms or likenesses or images occur in mental existence, none of which is identical to the thing itself in reality. In Rāzī's estimation this is a clear admission that the representative theory of "knowledge" is just a theory of ignorance given that the so-called knowledge we have of extramental things is in actual fact nothing like them in their realities, but just "shadowy" imitations which turn out to be false. The problem, strictly, is no longer now due to concomitant attribution but a lack of complete correspondence. As Rāzī states in the *Muḥaṣṣal*:

> Let nobody say that what is impressed in the mind is the form and likeness [of the external thing], since then we will retort by saying that the form and likeness, if they are completely identical to the thing itself, this would entail the [problem of concomitant attribution]; and if they are not identical [to the thing itself] then this would be a falsification of their claim [that the occurrence of a form in the mental existence is knowledge of the thing itself].[28]

Avicennan representationalists would appear then to be faced with the stark decision of having to choose between the absurdities of concomitant attribution or a theory of knowledge in which the objects of mental representation fail to correspond with actual entities themselves. For Rāzī this is a *reductio* argument and thus proves that knowledge cannot be mental existence.

The second counter-argument is the following:

> Fire does not mean burning *simpliciter*, but rather something which "were it to exist in *extramental* existence would cause burning". Accordingly, even if the reality of fire itself occurs in the mind it would not cause any burning since for this to happen fire's existence would have to be conditioned

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[27] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 219^{17}–220^{4}.

[28] Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 145; cf. idem., *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 2], pp. 288–289.

> with extramental existence. It would still be fire because it is still correct to say when it exists in the mind that "it is a quiddity which, were it to exist in extramental reality, it would cause burning.".[29]

This response clearly avoids each of the absurdities mentioned in Rāzī's disjunctive argument. It says, on the one hand, that the realities of things themselves occur in mental existence and therefore establishes the correspondence of realities *in re* and *in intellectu*. On the other hand, it stresses the importance of the *ontological* distinction between extramental and mental existence. Since these are two distinct modes of being the occurrence of *exactly the same reality* in one needn't be from the perspective of what is concomitant to the quiddity exactly the same as its occurrence in the other. In other words, reflecting what Avicenna says in the *Isāgōgē*, a single quiddity can have different concomitant adjuncts (*lawāḥiq*) depending on the mode of existence it happens to be in. The adjuncts of one mode of existence cannot be replaced by adjuncts of another. Nor can the adjuncts of mental existence be attendant upon things in extramental existence and, vice-versa, neither can those adjuncts which are specific to extramental existence accrue on quiddities in the mind. Hence the quiddity of fire is the quiddity of fire regardless of whether it occurs in natural things or in the mind, but the adjuncts of this quiddity are different depending on the mode of existence in question. Only the quiddity of fire which is in extramental existence has the adjunct of burning, not its mental form.

Rāzī's rejoinder to this counter-argument is simply a reversion back to his original premise that if the intellector's knowledge of burning is just the form or quiddity of burning in the mind, then this necessarily means that the intellector is attributed with burning. Since fire is defined as "that which burns", the knowledge of fire as mental existence implies that the apprehender has "that which burns" represented in them, and wherever this is the case the substrate of this property must burn. Hence regardless of whether the form or quiddity of fire occurs in extramental or mental existence, the point is that wherever it occurs it shall necessarily cause things to burn. The counter-argument thus fails to dissolve the original problem of concomitant attribution, but instead actually appears to strengthen it given that Avicenna's proponents have now acknowledged that the reality *per se* of fire is what occurs in the mind.[30] In the *Mulakhkhaṣ*, Rāzī defends his claim against this sort of counter-argument by insisting that properties like burning cannot be separated from quiddities like fire, albeit using the example of heat:

> Heat *is* heating itself [read: Fire *is* burning itself]. For the intellection of one *is* the intellection of the other. The mental occurrence of the former [namely, heat] either entails the mental occurrence of

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[29] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 219^{12-15}.

[30] See Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol.2 , p. 220^{5-13}.

> the latter [namely, heating] or it does not. If it does, then the faculty which intellects heating becomes actually heated; for there is no sense to something being heated except that heating has been attributed to it. If, on the other hand, heat does not represented heating in the mind then [the argument for knowledge as mental existence fails] because this is what was sought after in the argument.[31]

One cannot separate the quiddity of heat from heating itself; wherever heat goes, its property of heating shall necessarily follow. The problem of concomitant attribution therefore remains since if heat *per se* occurs it the mind, then the mind must be attributed with the occurrence of heat itself, and that means that it will be heated just as anything else coming into contact with heat in the extramental world would become heated. Rāzī's point here is that certain properties like heating are part of the essence of quiddities like heat; and that one cannot therefore maintain that the quiddity of heat occurs mentally without conceding that heating also occurs therein as well. In this case, it's not so much that heating is a *concomitant* of heat, as Avicenna's followers are suggesting, but that it *is* heat *itself.* Hence mental existence is false.

Problem of the External Mind

The second of Rāzī's so-called "general" proofs turns on the semantic and ontological significance of mental existence. Semantically, the question is whether or not the term 'existence' (*wujūd*) signifies a different meaning in the expressions "mental existence" (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*) and "extramental existence" (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*), or whether it is just the same meaning in both. This is to hearken back to the problem of homonymy and whether or not 'being' (*wujūd*) is an equivocal term. Ontologically, the question Rāzī asks is whether or not the mind itself is an extramental being (*mawjūd fī l-khārij*), and if so what implications this has for the theory of so-called "mental" existence. By framing these questions in this way, Rāzī's aim is to show that all forms of existence are ultimately reducible to extramental existence only, and therefore whatever is standardly considered to be in so-called "mental existence" is in fact just a metaphorical usage for the way in which we talk about our cognitive states. Since the mind (*'aql*) itself is something with entified existence there can be no independent realm of "mental" existence, since the "mental" is the "extramental" albeit that it deludes us into thinking that it somehow stands apart from extramental existence. I shall refer to this as the "problem of the external mind".

Rāzī introduces the semantic aspect of the problem as follows:

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[31] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol. 88r.

> Mental existence is either something which is different to extramental existence in the notion of it being "existence" or it is not. The first is impossible because the term "existent" is not predicated of existent things by mere commonality of the term (i.e. equivocally), as agreed upon by the philosophers and demonstrated by the proofs given in their appropriate places. As for the second, this would falsify their claim since the mind either has the possibility of being attributed with intelligible quiddities or not. If it is possible for the mind to be attributed with intelligible quiddities and existence, then no contradiction could be made between the mind itself and the quiddity of the Intellected object and its existence. Thus it would be necessary for these intelligibles to exist in it and that is impossible. Firstly, since it would be necessary for colour and shape and dimension to exist in the mind, it would follow that the mind becomes coloured, shaped and dimensioned by distinct colours, shapes and dimensions all at once. The reason for this is that it is possible for the mind to think these distinct objects simultaneously given the argument that it thinks of blackness as the opposite of whiteness; and the knowledge of one thing being the opposite of another is knowledge of the relation it has with the other, and this is conditioned by knowing both of the correlates in the relation at the same time. Secondly, it would follow that there be no distinction whatsoever between the human being existent extramentally and that human being existent in the mind, because each of them is identical to the other in the totality of [its] essence and [its] existence.[32]

Rāzī mentions several key points here that need to be isolated and individually considered. First, because 'existence' is a non-homonymous term it must have the same meaning in both of the expressions "mental existence" and "extramental existence". It's easy to see where Rāzī is going with this argument given our in-depth analysis of his beliefs concerning the meaning and predication of 'existence' in the previous chapters. For Rāzī the non-homonymous characterization of 'existence' automatically implies that it is a univocal term, and thus leads him to think that whatever is called "an existent" must always be uniformly consistent. If mental "existence" and extramental "existence" are different modes of being, as Avicenna and his followers assert, then 'existence' becomes an equivocated notion, which Rāzī says goes against the consensus of all philosophers who agree that 'existence' is not a homonym. Given that the term 'existence' has the same semantic signification in all its uses, therefore, the conclusion which Rāzī derives is that whatever exists in "extramental existence" must also exist in "mental existence" *ex hypothesi* with the same ontological manifestations as the former. But if this is true and 'existence' is a truly univocal term the two modes are in fact just one mode of existence: extramental existence. The consequences of this are exemplified in the aforementioned passage. First, there is the problem of concomitant attribution: the form in the mind causes the same concomitant attributions as a form outside of the mind. As Rāzī mentions this entails that whenever we think of a colour, a particular shape, or an object with specific dimensions, the formal representation of these in the mind would cause it to become coloured, shaped, and dimensioned,

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[32] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 220^{14}–221^{10}.

all of which are impossibilities. Furthermore, the mind's ability to think of contradictories is yet another proof that mental forms cannot exist, or else the mind would have to be simultaneously black and white whenever it thinks of these colours in a propositional context as two contradictory things. Yet, given that the occurrence of one colour in the mind is impossible, for there to be two colours simultaneously in the mind is simply preposterous. Finally, since 'existence' *qua* 'existence' is one meaning in all its usages the representation of the quiddity 'human being' in extramental existence is no different to its occurrence in the mind, the two are exactly the same, which therefore renders the so-called "distinction" between the mental and extramental orders of being completely useless.

There is an important reason why Rāzī thinks the distinction between these so-called "modes of existence" is a futile one. That reason is given in the least ambiguous terms in the *Mulakhkhaṣ*, as follows:

> If it is established that the mind (*'aql*) is itself a being in extramental existence, then everything which exists in it is, insofar as it is an individuated thing present in an individuated soul, an extramental being. Whatever exists "in the mind" therefore really exists "outside of the mind". Accordingly, 'existence' does not divide into "extramental" and "mental" existence; all 'existence' is but simply external and entified existence.[33]

This remarkable passage demonstrates just how reticent Rāzī was toward the Aristotelian and Avicennan theory of mental existence. For Rāzī the mind has no true ontological import of its own. The logic here is simple, perhaps too simple: If A exists in B and B exists in C, then A exists in C. Thus it follows that if mental forms exist "in the mind" and the mind itself exists "in reality", then all mental forms are just occurring "in reality". Given that 'existence' is a univocal term, it then follows that every form "in the mind" is just in fact occurring "outside the mind", which then of course leads to the problems of concomitant attribution and simultaneous contradictory pairings being attendant on the mind. As Rāzī himself concludes, "Quiddities […] may sometimes exist in a self-subsistent way and sometimes 'in the soul' in a way that resembles how an accident exists in a substrate. The first [mode of existence] is called 'entified existence', while the second is called 'mental existence'; even though, when truly ascertained, both are 'entified' modes of existence".[34]

What each of the so-called "problems" we have discussed clearly demonstrates is the extent to which Rāzī is fundamentally opposed to the Avicennan theory of mental existence and just how deeply ingrained

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[33] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol. 88r.

[34] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol. 89v: "*al-māhiyyātu tāratan yūjadu qāʾimatun bi-anfusihā wa tāratan yūjadu fī l-nafsi wujūduhā l-ʿaraḍ fī l-maḥall; fa-l-qismu l-awwalu yusammā bi-l-wujūdi l-khāriji wa al-thānī bi-l-wujūdi l-dhihnī* ***wa in kāna kullu wāḥidin minhumā fī l-taḥqīq wujūdun ʿayniyyun***'.

these objections are in his thought-system, to the extent that he rejects the *necessity* of intelligible forms *in toto*. He does this, or so I contend, because of the related theological implications which Avicenna's theory of mental existence has on topics such as the nature of the soul and the underlying hylemorphic context from which the theory is derived. In Avicenna's metaphysics the intelligible reception of forms represents the mode of "abstracted" existence—existence, that is, which is completely denuded of material connections. But this poses a serious and genuine problem for the classical Ashʿarite tradition given that a form completely denuded of matter by definition cannot inhere in a *material* substrate, yet the soul (*nafs*) according to the pre-Avicennan *mutakallimūn* is some kind of material or bodily substance or atom. Yet everything that Aristotle and Avicenna have to say about intellectual knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-yaqīnī*) and scientific understanding is based on the presumption that the faculty which understands universal forms is *per se* an immaterial substance. There is clear conflict between these vying positions and Rāzī's manifold objections to mental existence and the necessity of intelligible forms should therefore also be seen as a fulminating attack not simply on a theory of knowledge but also on a long philosophical tradition that holds the soul to be something immaterial in its nature.

Problem of Universals

As a conceptualist Avicenna believes that universals can only exist in the mind (*ʿaql*). This ability of ours to apprehend universal concepts has twofold significance in Avicenna's system. First, the intellect's capacity to receive and contemplate universal forms enables it to formulate necessary kinds judgment which then, in turn, enables scientific systems of knowledge to be constructed in the way described by Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. For Avicenna, universal forms thus provide a crucial link between the world as it is perceived through singular objects, an acquaintance of which it achieves through the senses, and the world as it is perceived as an object of intellectual and scientific understanding. Second, the capacity of the mind to receive, contemplate and understand the universal form is a proof that such forms must be entirely separated from material connections and thus a proof also of the immaterial nature of the substrate in which they inhere. The immaterial nature of the soul and its relation to the theory of mental existence are therefore connected themes within Avicenna's thought, so much so that it would be meaningless to speak of one without the other.

Avicenna's theory of mental existence and the doctrine of the soul's immateriality are so intertwined within his philosophical system that their mutual dependence on one another cannot be stressed highly enough. Indeed, the remarkable lengths to which Rāzī has gone to disprove the theory of mental existence

is, in my view, a special consequence of their interrelatedness in Avicenna's thought. Rāzī himself acknowledges this connection in different works but perhaps none more so than in his "commentary" on Avicenna's *ʿUyūn*. After commenting that the section on the rational soul (*Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn* II.16) contains Avicenna's proof that "the substrate of intellectual cognitions is a substance abstracted from matter and subsistent through itself",[35] Rāzī immediately breaks down the original body of the text into five separate arguments for the soul's immateriality.

Proof 1.

The rational faculty acts independently of matter
Everything that acts independently of matter must be free of matter in itself
Therefore: The rational faculty is free of matter in itself.

Proof 2

If the rational faculty had been located in a bodily organ, then it would either perceive that organ always or never perceive that organ
Both of parts of the consequent are false
Therefore: The rational faculty is not located in a bodily organ

Proof 3

The rational faculty intellectually apprehends indivisible meanings
The substrate of whatever apprehends indivisible meanings must itself be something indivisible
Therefore: The rational faculty must be indivisible. (Hence it cannot be a body.)

Proof 4

The rational faculty apprehends universals, and no universal meaning can be confined to a spatial location
Every body and everything inhering in a body is spatially confined
Therefore: The rational faculty cannot be a body or something inhering in a body

Proof 5

Every rational faculty has the power to perform intellectual operations that are infinite
No bodily faculty has the power perform an infinite act
Therefore: The rational faculty is not a bodily faculty.

Rāzī belligerently produces counter-arguments to every premise in all five Avicennan proofs for the immateriality of the soul. For example, Rāzī states that the second proof is predicated on the idea that

[35] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn* II.16, p. 285[15–16].

cognition (*idrāk*) is the occurrence or representation (*ḥuḍūr*) of quiddities and this, he says, can be objected on several grounds. He then proceeds to mention the "problem of concomitant attribution", the "problem of conceptualizing opposites simultaneously" and the "problem of non-correspondence", arguing that on the basis of these and other similar arguments "what they [i.e. Avicenna *et al*] say [about the immaterial nature of the soul] is feeble".[36] The third proof is predicated on the premise that every body is divisible, and that says Rāzī "is based on a rejection of the atom, which we do not accept".[37] The fourth proof is only true if every mental form is abstracted from individuating notes, but as Rāzī is quick to point out, the so-called mental form inheres within a particular soul is therefore itself a particular form.[38]

The point of providing this conspectus of Rāzī's treatment of Avicenna's theory of mental existence in the brief fashion just described is to demonstrate the interrelatedness of Rāzī's critique of mental existence and Avicenna's theory of the abstracted soul. His objections to mental occurrence occur specifically in the context of Avicenna's proofs of the immateriality of the soul. Not only does Rāzī appreciate, therefore, that the theory of mental existence is in fact a statement about the nature of the soul, he also recognizes that the theory is predicated on a particular view of nature, one that is form-based rather than atom-based; and that Rāzī himself says is not something he accepts. There is thus an explicit confirmation in Rāzī's *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, a late work of his, that he does not accept the hylemorphic theory of material substances and perforce cannot therefore accept the theory of mental existence.

Let us briefly touch on the problem of universals. It should come as no surprise that Rāzī has a succession of arguments against the conceptual existence of universals and themes related to their existence in Avicenna's logic, psychology and metaphysics. If, for the sake of argument, Rāzī can show that all mental forms have "foreign coverings" (*al-ghawāshī al-gharība*) attached to them, then no form in the strict sense of the term will be "abstracted" from matter entirely, thus paving the way for a non-abstracted view of the soul. In other words, Rāzī would have "nipped the argument in the bud" so to speak by showing that one of the main arguments for the soul's abstracted nature in Avicenna's psychology is itself a philosophical non-starter. Put simply, if every form in the mind is a particular form then it would no longer follow that the mind (*ʿaql*) or the rational soul need must be an immaterial substance.

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[36] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn* II.16, p. 290[18–19].

[37] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn* II.16, p. 292[5–8].

[38] See Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn* II.16, pp. 296[23]–297[6].

Hence Rāzī has to show that the original premise in Avicenna's argument for the abstracted nature of the soul is false. He has to convince his opponents that there are no universal or indivisible mental forms and that every intelligible form is covered by "foreign coverings" and therefore particular. He tries to do this by extending the problem of the external mind. In *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, Rāzī begins the argument by stating: "Whosoever claims that the mental [form of] a human being is a universal, he will have spoken what is baseless and without foundation".[39] As Rāzī explains, the reason for this is that the contents of the mind are entified objects of being: "This is because the thing existing in the soul is a particular form existing in a particular soul. How, then, can it be a universal?"[40]

The connection that a universal form has with indivisibility is perfectly illustrated in the aforementioned section of Rāzī's commentary on Avicenna's *ʿUyūn*. The argument, let us recall, is as follows:

Proof 3

The rational faculty intellectually apprehends indivisible meanings
The substrate of whatever apprehends indivisible meanings must itself be something indivisible
Therefore: The rational faculty must be indivisible. (Hence it cannot be a body.)[41]

The minor premise, as Rāzī explains, can be proven by the fact that every universal is shared by multiple individuals each having their own specific spatial positions, which therefore entails that the universal *per se* cannot have a spatial position, otherwise it would not have been possible for it to be shared by individuals not in its spatial position. The major premise can be proven by noting that everything which inheres in a body is confined (at least maximally) to the spatial location of the body itself. Since therefore the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true: the soul is not a body or bodily in nature.

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[39] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 221[11].

[40] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 221[11–12].

[41] Avicenna's full argument reads as follows: "A nature (*māhiyya*) common to several individuals will be abstracted from spatial position (*waḍʿ*) and all other adjuncts. This abstraction either occurs in extramental existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*) only, in mental existence (*al-wujūd al-ʿaqlī*) only, in both existence, or in neither of these existences. Now, if [the nature] exists with a spatial position in both modes of existences, then it will not be abstracted from spatial position at all contrary to what we have stated in the hypothesis—namely, that it is a nature abstracted from spatial position. Yet suppose it is abstracted from spatial position in both existences. This would be a falsehood since in entified existence it [necessarily] has a spatial position. Suppose then that it has spatial location in mental existence but not in extramental existence. This would be even more of a falsehood. What remains then is that [the nature] does not have a spatial position in extramental existence. If, then, a body is conceptualized in the mind it would have a spatial position in the mind, and that is impossible." (Avicenna, *ʿUyūn*, pp. 295[24]–296[7])

Rāzī objection to this argument focusses on the minor premise which claims that universals are intelligible forms common to many particular individuals. He tries to subvert the argument by showing that the very notion of a "universal" is meaningless since every so-called intelligible form *ex hypothesi* exists in a particular soul (*nafs juz'iyya*).

> The form which you have called a "mentally abstracted form" is a particular form existent in a particular soul. How, then, is it possible for someone to say that [the form] is a universal meaning shared by many particular individuals?[42]

The argument for the immateriality of the soul from the indivisible reception of mental forms is also presented by Avicenna in the *De Anima* (III.16) of the *Ishārāt*. Rāzī again observes that "the goal sought after in this *faṣl* is to show that there are some objects of knowledge for which division [into a spatial location] is impossible and that every space-occupant (*mutaḥayyiz*) [by contrast] is something divisible. Therefore the substrate [of indivisible] cognitions must be neither a space-occupant nor something which subsists through a space-occupant".[43]

Seeing now the challenge in front of him, Rāzī recognizes that in order to controvert Avicenna's argument and occasion an atomistic theory of the soul all he has to do is subvert the minor premise; namely, Avicenna's claim that nothing having the attribute of space-occupancy can occur to something indivisible. As Rāzī succinctly puts it, "If we can affirm a space-occupant that is indivisible, [Avicenna's] argument will have been falsified".[44] Naturally, he gives a number examples such as the mathematical point (*al-nuqṭa*), the existence of relations, and the notion of being itself, which are all non-divisible yet space-occupying cognitions each one having the potential to exist in a divisible (i.e. atomistic) substrate, at least according to Rāzī. In the case of the mathematical point, he does say that "It's possible that somebody may retort by stating that the point is the terminus of a line and therefore a negative existential (*amr ʿadamī*), which therefore deflects the argument".[45] Rāzī provides his rejoinder by simply noting that the discussion of whether or not the mathematical point is a positive existential is a lengthy debate, "but the more popular view is that it is a positive existential".[46] As for the existence-status of the mathematical point, that is none of our concern. What does concern us is discernible fact that Rāzī thinks of both existence (*wujūd*) and

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[42] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, pp. 296^{23}–297^{1}.

[43] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.16, vol. 2, p. $286^{14–16}$.

[44] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.16, vol. 2, p. 286^{16}.

[45] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.16, vol. 2, p. 286^{10}.

[46] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.16, vol. 2, p. 286^{11}.

relations (*iḍāfāt*) as *positive* existentials. Rāzī has to say this because knowledge in his view *is* a relation and only a relation, so if knowledge is going to be characterized positively then the relation perforce must also be a positive existential.

Avicenna's proof for the soul's incorporeality continues at *De Anima* (*Ishārāt*) III.17, and though the arguments themselves need not concern us it is worth mentioning that Rāzī persists in claiming that universal mental forms are impossible.

> One may object to this argument by saying that the intelligible form existing in the individual soul is a form inhering in a specific substrate. Its individuation and inherence in that substrate, and its state of being an accident, as well as its state of being conjoined by all of the other inhering accidents in that substrate, and its existing at that time; all of this is accidents and states which are foreign to its quiddity. If, then, the inherence of that form is impossible in a body because were it to do so it would then be attributed with foreign attachments, then let it also be impossible for it to inhere in the soul since it too shall be attributed with foreign attachments. In short, this proof can only completed if the intelligible form is completely divested of foreign attachments upon its inherence in the soul. But if it is surrounded by foreign attachments in this state also, then the proof would be silenced. If they should argue that what is meant by the inhering form being abstracted in the soul is that the accidents [which surround a quiddity] are not considered and that our gaze is focussed solely on the quiddity [itself], such that the quiddity *qua* itself is something distinct from all of the other attributes attached to it and therefore 'abstracted', we will say that this understanding of abstraction (*tajrīd*) is suitable also for the form inhering in a body; for the inhering form in a body, whenever its quiddity is considered by cutting off the consideration of its spatial location and dimensionality and inherence in the body, it would also be 'abstracted'. So what we learn from all this is that there is no difference in the circumstances of a form being 'bodily' and a form being 'spiritual' (*nafsāniyya*) in terms of whether they are abstracted or not. Know that in the previous sections we have explained that it is inconceivable for a universal form abstracted [from all foreign coverings] to be in the mind (*ʿaql*), and we have shown that the abstracted universal is nothing apart from the 'common part' shared between things in extramental existence. The use of the terms 'universal' and 'abstraction' *vis-à-vis* intellectual understanding (*al-taʿaqqul*) is therefore something metaphorical (*majāzī*).[47]

Rāzī's rejection of universal forms in mental existence, and mental forms more generally, represents a critical moment in the history of ideas and has far-reaching consequences on the later reception of philosophical ontologies within Islam. More broadly speaking, Rāzī's thought is commensurate with other tendencies in the mid-12th and 13th centuries which also tried to disassociate from Aristotle's system of thinking and align themselves more closely with certain precepts of the Platonic philosophy; tendencies such as those of Suhrawardī and Ibn ʿArabī which, through their greater emphasis on Sufi theories of knowledge, postulated correspondingly distinctive ontologies which were deeply un-Aristotelian and

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[47] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.17, vol. 2, pp. 291^{11}-292^{8}.

therefore, to some extent, essentially anti-Avicennan. It was, after all, in these centuries and within Rāzī's own lifetime that Suhrawardī resurrected the ancient philosophies of light and Ibn ʿArabī introduced the mystical doctrine of the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) into Islam, both of which are ontologies undergirded by a metaphysics distinctly non-Avicennan. While Rāzī's motivation for deviating from the Aristotelian tradition is more theologically inclined, he too submits to fundamentally "Platonic" solutions. Thus even though Rāzī rejects the theory of matter and form (hylemorphism), the theory of mental existence, and other crucial elements of the Avicennan metaphysic such as the intermediate place of intellectual substances, he nevertheless advocates—as I am going to show below—the Platonic doctrine of Forms. Rāzī's rejection of conceptualism (or the theory of mental existence as Avicenna calls it) should not be interpreted as a move toward 'nominalism' in the Ockhamian sense. So while Rāzī also submits, agreeing with Ockham, that knowledge is immediate and unfacilitated by so-called "intelligible forms" (*species intelligibilis*), he does not share Ockham's view that there are no universals forms whatsoever. As I will show below, Rāzī's ontology is almost akin to that of Plato's, though it remains an open question whether his endorsement of Plato's theory of Forms is identical to what Plato originally intended.

Problem of Categories

In subscribing to the view that knowledge is a form of mental existence Avicenna incorporates his views on epistemology within an ontological framework supported by his theory of psychological 'abstraction' (*tajrīd*). Existence is of two types, extramental existence and mental existence, and in order to get from one to the other the soul has to perform the "process" of abstraction whereby forms which are present in matter are denuded from their material attachments and "transferred" into the intelligible realm of existence, namely, mental existence, in the knower.

Now, regardless of whether this "process" happens as a result of a top-down emanation from the Active Intellect or a bottom-up abstraction of a single form which continues from the material object itself into the rational faculty, the occurrence of a form in the mind (*ʿaql*) leaves behind it a positive impression or mark upon the rational soul and thus implies that knowledge is not merely the *form* in the knower but also the *change* caused by it in the knower herself. To speak of any "change" occurring in a subject invokes Aristotle's notions of "potentiality" and "actuality" and thus of "motion" between the two, and like Aristotle Avicenna describes this change in terms of hylemorphic language by arguing that knowledge, in the true sense of the term, occurs whenever the *material* intellect (*al-ʿaql al-hayūlānī*) becomes an actual intellect (*al-ʿaql bi-l-fiʿl*) by the facilitation of a mental *form*. Since motion according to Avicenna can only

take place in four of the nine Aristotelian categories of accidents, the acquisition of a mental form is classified as a form of accident belonging specifically in the category of 'quality'. For Aristotle and Avicenna, knowledge is an accidental quality of the soul.

According to Rāzī's system this categorization must be rejected. For a start, Rāzī thinks that knowledge is a "sheer relation" which therefore must be placed, as the name suggests, in the category of 'relation'. Rāzī's insistence on this point can be shown even in his most philosophically inclined work, the *Mabāḥith*. As Rāzī explains, "the demonstration [that knowledge is an accident] is clear because [a mental form] exists in another [namely, the rational soul] but not as one of its parts nor in such a manner that it could subsist without the other."[48] Rāzī is not however subscribing to this view but is merely "reporting" it. He immediately goes on to say:

> But there is a strong doubt concerning this because the term 'knowledge' signifies the impression of a form in the knower which corresponds to the [extramental] object of knowledge. However, if the object of knowledge is a self-subsistent essence in itself [i.e. a substance] then the knowledge of it [in mental existence] must conform with it and enter into its species. One thing only resembles another in its species-nature if and only if it resembles it in its genus. If follows, therefore, that the intelligible form [of a substance] is [itself categorized] as a substance, and no substance is an accident. Hence the intelligible form is not an accident.[49]

Remarks like this are a clear indication that even the modified version of mental existence presented and apparently "defended" by Rāzī in the *Mabāḥith* are disingenuous or, upon a more sympathetic reading, representative of a phase in Rāzī's career where he tried his utmost best to naturalize the *falsafī* and *kalāmī* schools of thought. Whatever the case, the *Mabāḥith* is not the text which one should refer to when trying to ascertain Rāzī's true beliefs.

The argument Rāzī makes is itself a basic one, but one that was nonetheless continually debated by thinkers in the later middle period. It may even be argued that Rāzī's "problem of categories" is what ultimately led some thinkers like Mullā Ṣadrā to postulate change (or motion) within the category of substance itself, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. In the meantime, the objection Rāzī gives to knowledge being an accident is premised on the idea that our knowledge must conform to the object of knowledge with perfect correspondence, or, as Rāzī might say, "in the totality of essence" (*fī tamām al-māhiyya*). So if

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[48] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 458.

[49] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 458.

the object of knowledge is a substance—i.e., an essence which subsists *in re* through itself—then our knowledge of it must be the self-same, albeit as a form *in intellectu* which subsists *through itself*.

Rāzī has identified two potential problems here in the way peripatetic philosophers categorize the quiddity of knowledge. Firstly, if what is known to us is an accidental form and the essence of which it is the representation a substance then there is, it seems, a categorical mismatch; for one and the same quiddity (*māhiyya*) is a substance "outside the mind" and an accident "inside the mind". Yet, as Rāzī alludes, knowledge must be the correspondence (*taṭābuq*) of whatever exists "inside the mind" with its existence "outside the mind". If a substantial quiddity, therefore, is not represented as a substance in the mind, then our so-called "theory of knowledge" as mental existence actually turns out to be a "theory of ignorance" (*jahl*)—given that ignorance is the lack of correspondence between what we think *in intellectu* and what is truly the case *in re*.

Secondly, suppose that Avicenna or any other peripatetic thinker argues that the categorical status of mental forms corresponds perfectly with the categorical status of the extramental essences they represent. Then, in that case, the form of an extramental substance in the mind would also have to be a substance. But this leads to a contradiction since a mental form, which by definition has subsistence "in" the rational soul, would itself be a substance, i.e., something subsistent through itself. A single form in the mind would therefore be both an accident and a substance and that is a contradiction. Avicennan loyalists must therefore either submit that mental forms do not correspond with extramental realities or submit that their theory of knowledge as a mode of mental existence leads to a contradiction.

In the *Mabāḥith*, although Rāzī provides a clever rejoinder to the problem of categories which is clearly appropriated from Avicenna, he leaves a hint of what his true opinions are by simply labelling Avicenna's position as "inconclusive". This is yet another indication that Rāzī does not fully approve of the theory of mental existence even in the *Mabāḥith*, and is more than likely therefore just reporting the views of his *falsafī* predecessors on the topic.

He writes:

> We reject that something may be simultaneously a substance and an accident in extramental existence. But if a [quiddity] is considered in respect of its mental existence and thereby categorized as an accident, and likewise if it is considered in respect of its extramental existence and thereby categorized as a substance, then this should not be rejected.[50]

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[50] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, p. 458.

This is Avicenna's solution to the problem of categories, who, while discussing the issue in the *Ilāhiyyāt* (III.8) of the *Shifāʾ* also pre-empts Rāzī's so-called "problem of the external mind": "If it is said, 'The mind is also an entified existent' then the reply given shall be, 'What is meant by "an entified existent" (*al-ʿayn*) is that thing which, were a substance to be realized therein, would cause the acts and determinations of substance to produce from it […]".[51] Rāzī frequently it seems masquerades his true opinions in the *Mabāḥith* by appearing to side with the *falsafī* defendant of positions which are attacked by a "hypothetical" opponent whose views, it so happens, very often correspond with Rāzī's own position in many of his later works.

The twin authorial context of Rāzī's *Mabāḥith* can be perfectly demonstrated in the following situation, which also relates to the problem of categories. The passage begins with a "doubt" (*shakk*) in which a "hypothetical" opponent objects to the theory of mental existence on the basis of the problem of categories. A "solution" is offered, apparently Rāzī's own, and the passage then comes to an abrupt end with the remark: "Yet the objection nevertheless remains" (*wa-l-ishkāl baʿdu bāqin*). This is the true Rāzian voice, and instances like these should be noted wherever they occur in the *Mabāḥith* for they often correspond with what is said in Rāzī's post-*Mabāḥith* writings.

> **A further doubt remains**, and that is that a form [in mental existence] exists in a particular soul and is thus an existent in entified existence. Thus something which from the aspect of its existence in the mind also has an existence in entified existence, and is therefore both a substance and an accident by consideration of its entified existence. **We say**: There is no doubting a quiddity in the mind exists in a particular soul and that it is therefore an entified object of existence. However, whenever we talk of 'mental existence' we mean by it that a quiddity has its concomitant properties manifested. For example, if blackness exists in the concrete then it will have the property of constricting sight manifested for it. Likewise, if an intense form of heat exists in the concrete then it will have the property of causing burning manifested for it. However, no sooner have these quiddities entered into the soul than their concomitant properties no longer manifest for them. We call the first type of existence [where concomitant properties and determinations are manifested] 'extramental existence', and we call the second type of existence 'mental existence'. **Yet the objection nevertheless remains**.[52]

Now, aside from the fact that it contains three of Rāzī's most important objections to the theory of mental existence and the necessity of mental forms—namely: (1) the problem of the external mind; (2) the problem of categories; and (3) the problem of concomitant attribution—and thus demonstrates the interrelatedness of these aspects in Rāzī's thought, the passage also demonstrates albeit in one of Rāzī's works that the

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[51] Avicenna, *Shifāʾ*: *Ilāhiyyāt* III.8, p. 108^{3-4} (Marmura modified).

[52] Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, vol. 1, pp. 458^{22}–459^{5}.

distinction between 'mental' and 'extramental' existence is a sharply separated *ontological* distinction. So even though the mind (*'aql*) *per se* is an entified object in the concrete, *mental existence* is not identical to extramental existence, because mental existence is *not* simply the mind *per se*. Avicenna makes a fundamental distinction between a form in the mind (*de re* existence) and a form in mental existence (*in intellectu* existence), which are two different "considerations" (*i'tibār*) of a single so-called "mental" form. Each of these aspectual considerations leads to a different metaphysical judgment: a form considered from the aspect of its *de re* existence is a particular in a particular soul; but a form considered from the aspect of its *in intellectu* existence is a universal. Rāzī, throughout his career, emphasizes the aspect of *de re* existence to the extent that he equates it with *extramental* existence. By losing sight of the possibility that things may have intensional distinctions, he loosens his grip on the metaphysical thought of Avicenna. Ultimately, Rāzī's "hard" approach to metaphysics leads him to advocate the out and out realist principle of the Platonic theory of Forms.

In the meantime, Rāzī's definitive and non-masqueraded stand on the problem of categories is professed in his later writings. For example, in the *Mulakhkhaṣ* he states:

> ON THE PROOF THAT KNOWLEDGE IS AN ACCIDENT. According to our view, [knowledge is an accident] because it is a 'relational state' (*ḥāla iḍāfiyya*) which exists in something else but not as one of its parts, and whose subsistence without its corresponding substrate would be impossible. According to their [Avicenna's] own principles, however, the mental form is not a relation […] The objection to them is that substance is a genus for whatever lies beneath it. An intellected-object which is a substance [extramentally] therefore has the status of being-a-substance (*jawhariyya*) as one of its essential attributes. The theory of intellection therefore dictates that the [intellected-object] be equal to the object of knowledge in the totality of its essence (*fī tamām al-māhiyya*). This can only be truly accomplished however if all of the essential attributes [belonging to the object in the mind and the object outside the mind] are [fully] shared. Accordingly, the intelligible form [of a substance] would be a substance whenever it has been made intelligible, but nothing that is a substance is [at the same time] an accident. The intelligible form would not therefore be an accident [as they are want to claim].[53]

Because of an obvious contravention of the law of non-contradiction Rāzī concludes that a mental form cannot be an accident, never mind one that is in the category of 'quality'. Avicenna's theory of knowledge as a form in so-called "mental existence" is therefore false. By contrast, there are many "theological" advantages to be gained from knowledge being a relation *simpliciter* since none of the presumptions on which the theory of mental existence is predicated need be asserted for the existence of relations. One can

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[53] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol. 149v.

therefore scrap the entire hylemorphic thesis that knowledge is a *form* abstracted from *matter* and the anti-atomistic doctrine of the soul's immateriality. Furthermore, and much more importantly, the modality of God's knowledge no longer has to be considered in terms simply of His abstracted nature, of His being an Intellect, as Avicenna claims. When this suggestion of how the Necessary Being has knowledge (whether of Itself or of anything else) is scrapped, a new theory can be pushed to solve the thorny issue of whether or not it is possible for God to know particulars as particulars.

The advantages to knowledge being an unconditioned mode of relation are, it seems, manifold, not least because of the fact that every relation is a *relation to* something and therefore directly in contact (so to speak) with the object of knowledge. As Rāzī emphasizes repeatedly, knowledge for him is not *mediated* by a relation as the majority of the *mutakallimūn* think but *is* the relation itself. Therefore, since God is actually related *to* everything in the universe as Creator and Sustainer, perforce He has knowledge of all things *qua* particulars. The same is true of course for human beings, and solves many of the so-called "problems" which I have discussed in this chapter. For example, if my knowledge of an object is the relation itself to that object, then whatever the categorical status of that object (substance/accident) is it will also be the categorical status of my knowledge, since I will be either *related to* a substance or *related to* an accident. Rāzī's theory is an economical one and like Ockham, who also rejected the intelligible species, he sees this as a positive thing working in its favour and a sign of its correctness. Furthermore, it is catholic. It works for all types of knowledge regardless of the type of subject (material/immaterial; God/human), unlike Avicenna's theory which is modulated not only in terms of the type of knowing subject but also the type of known object. So in just the same fashion that he maintained the univocity of being, Rāzī also maintains the univocity of knowledge. There is no place for *tashkīk* whatsoever in the Rāzian metaphysic.

In the *Mulakhkhaṣ*, those objections which had been "hypothetically" advanced on behalf of an innocent objector in the *Mabāḥith* are now repeated by Rāzī in almost verbatim fashion; the key difference now, however, is that these are his *own* objections to the theory of mental existence. Recall that in the *Mabāḥith* the problem of categories was resolved by reaffirming the distinction between extramental and mental existence, albeit that the argument had abruptly terminated with the statement: "Yet the objection nevertheless remains". When treating of the exact same objection in the *Mulakhkhaṣ*, Rāzī now gives the reason why the objection—his own—in the *Mabāḥith* "remains":

> This is a weak argument. If intellection is the occurrence of a form equal to the object of knowledge in the knower, then whenever the soul "intellects" a body or motion it would be necessary for the thing occurring in the mind to be a particular body occupying space and having all the attributes that are attributed to it [outside of the mind], and that is plain stupidity. On the other hand, if this

> doesn't happen then whatever occurred in the mind would not be a quiddity equal in the totality of its essence to the quiddity of an [extramental] body [and would not therefore be knowledge but ignorance].[54]

The *Mabāḥith* is thus a springboard from which Rāzī launches his attacks in later writings such as the *Mulakhkhaṣ* and might, therefore, reasonably be compared with Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid*, so as to demonstrate to future scholarship that Rāzī is not just a belligerent theologian "shooting in the dark" and arguing for argument's sake, but a scholar who has properly understood, reported (*ḥikāya*) and verified the truth of the matter (*taḥqīq*) on a range of topics concerning which the *mutakallimūn* and the *falāsifa* are at loggerheads.

As the aforementioned passage illustrates, Rāzī is working his notion of a correspondence (*taṭābuq*) theory of truth (or knowledge) back into his criticisms of Avicenna's doctrine of mental existence. Should the mental form of a thing vary even in the slightest degree with that of which it is supposed to be a likeness then there would be no correspondence and therefore no knowledge. For "representation" demands nothing less than the thing itself being "re-presented" in the mind. Hence there cannot be any difference if the *same* thing moves from being "outside the mind" to being "inside the mind", which as Rāzī has pointed out either leads to all of the problems already mentioned, or simply proves that mental existence is false. It is important to note that whenever Rāzī mentions "correspondence in the totality of essence" (*al-taṭābuq fī tamām al-māhiyya*) he is referring to a quiddity's essential properties. If Avicenna and his followers deny such correspondences by asserting that the concomitant properties are determinations of a quiddity's *existence* and not its *essence*, i.e., of its existence *in matter* and not its existence *in the intellect*, then Rāzī has subverted this argument by showing that properties like heating are not "concomitants" at all but merely heat itself. In other words, heating is not a separable accident of the quiddity of heat but is rather the essential nature of heat itself. If something doesn't cause heating it cannot be heat, in the same way that a painting of an ox is in no way identical to the ox itself; an ox is an ox and a painting is a painting.

Suppose Rāzī is correct and all true forms of knowledge have to correspond exactly with the thing itself. Still, Avicenna's prime argument for the realm of mental existence was his claim that we can know things which do not actually exist, such as the idealised mathematical forms of geometry, which, because these are paradigmatic of those kinds of knowledge Aristotelian philosophers consider to be "demonstrative" or "axiomatic" knowledge, must be true and therefore must be represented in a separate mode of existence (apart from existence in the concrete) known as "mental existence". Arguing from our

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[54] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol. 149v.

knowledge of non-existents thus creates a pathway in Avicenna's ontology to an intellectual mode of representation (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*).

But if knowledge is an unconditioned form of relation and certain known-things do not exist, how could there ever be a relation to something non-existent? How could it have been possible for us to know things that do not exist? Having turned his back on Aristotle, it is not in the least surprising that Rāzī's solution to this problem invokes the "imam" Plato and the Platonic theory of Forms.

Problem of Correspondence: Rāzī's Affirmation of Plato's Ideas

Avicenna's "conceptualism" is ontologically grounded on a theory of mental existence. As a part of his theory of being (*wujūd*), it enables him to proffer an intermediate solution to the excesses caused by two ancient rival schools of thought: the nominalists and the Platonists. As a thinker belonging to the Neo-Platonic tradition of interpreting Aristotle, therefore, Avicenna's theory of mental existence is better apprised as an extension of the Stagarite's denial of the existence of separate forms, a corollary of which is that the universal concept has a purely mind-dependent status. Unlike Aristotle, however, Avicenna has a much more sophisticated theory of universals in which the intension of a universal *qua* universal (*al-kullī al-manṭiqī*) is differentiated from the intension of a universal *qua* nature (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*). Each of these "considerations" (*iʿtibār*) is a distinct consideration of the quiddity even though there is only one quiddity present in the mind. So while there is but one "act" of apprehension (*idrāk*) and only one intelligible form present in the mind, there are nevertheless multiple "acts" of consideration (*iʿtibār*). One form, multiple intensions.

Such "acts" of consideration are perhaps the proper stage at which we can say the mind of the perceiver takes an "active" role in the thinking process. Putting aside the claims of recent scholarship, Avicenna's interpreters—both his supporters and opponents alike—all conceded that for him the knower has no inherent power whatsoever to create the existence of the intelligible form in mental existence, but must rely on an extraneous cause, the Active Intellect, to emanate the forms into her rational soul. "Abstraction" is, according to this interpretation, a passive process whereby the cause of a form's existence in the mind is effected from outside the perceiver (*min khārij*), albeit that "thinking" the form is an activity of the perceiver. Where the activity of the perceiver can be said to come into its own, however, is when she begins to reflect and operate on the form now present in her mind by actively engaging in reflexive modes of thinking. This "act" is not effected by the Active Intellect even though it may, as we shall see, be correspondent with it.

It might be argued that one of the things working in favour of the "top-down" hypothesis *vis-à-vis* Avicenna's theory of knowledge is that some intelligible forms can *only* come to be in the knower by the emanation of the Active Intellect, such as, for example, the form of mathematical objects and the idealized postulates of Euclidean geometry, which of course is the basis upon which Avicenna posited the theory of mental existence in the first instance. The intelligible form of non-existent (*al-maʿdūmāt*) and impossible (*al-mustaḥīlāt*) things can therefore only be represented in "intellectual existence"; they have no possibility of "extramental existence" and must be acquired directly from an intellectual source. Importantly, such "abstracted" forms in Avicenna's philosophy do not have independent self-subsistence as Platonic realists might hold; they are not Ideas (*muthul*) but rather inherent forms within individualised intelligences, be they human or "transcendental" (*al-mabādiʾ al-ʿāliyya*). The Active Intellect thus performs a crucial service to Avicenna's "conceptualism" given that the forms of impossible and non-existent things cannot be "abstracted" from things themselves of which by definition there can be none in extramental existence; and must therefore be represented in some form of ontological "repository" wherein they are preserved. Otherwise, the possibility of knowing anything beyond what already exists in particular things themselves would not have existed.

From Rāzī's perspective there are two main problems with this solution to the problem of non-existents. The first is that there seems to be an unjustified step in Avicenna's argument since what he refers to as "non-existent" things may in fact just be things which are "absent from our cognitive faculties" (*ghāʾib ʿannā*) at the time in which they are known to us. In other words, the things Avicenna refers to as "non-existents" may in fact be concrete objects of existence albeit not immediately within the reach of our cognitive faculties. Of course, this argument itself is only possible outside of an Aristotelian and Avicennan context since nothing can be known whose form is not within one or other of the cognitive faculties of perception. But these are theories of cognition which their proponents claim is coming out of a hylemorphic theory of natural substances, such that if one were to deny the existence of forms *tout court* then perhaps this alternative might seem plausible. For Rāzī, according to whom the theory of knowledge reduces to the epistemological role of relations not the intermediation of forms, the problem of non-existents can—from one aspect of the problem at least—be resolved in that it would no longer be necessary for a *form* to be present in the faculties of cognition but rather that the knower herself is *related* to the said object of "non-existence"; which really happens to be something existent but is just something which currently is "absent" from our "field of vision". This would be especially true in the case of things like "universals", which for thinkers like Avicenna do not exist *in re*. For Rāzī, however, to postulate the theory of mental existence

because of the two facts that (*a*) "universals" are known and (*b*) "universals" do not exist in extramental existence is precisely to beg the question, since "universals" may in fact exist as Platonic Forms. Rāzī says this even in the *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, a "commentary" supposedly on Avicenna's thought, by claiming that the whole premise behind the theory of mental existence "is built on the denial of Platonic Forms, but no conclusive proof exists which points to their falsehood. Yet those who deny [the impression of mental forms] rely on conclusive proofs which are not merely probable".[55]

The second problem with Avicenna's claim that non-existent things are known in "mental existence" has to do with the problem of non-correspondence, and holds that if what is said to be "known" in the mind has no actual referent or correspondent (*muṭābaq*) outside of it in actual existence, then this, in the strict sense of the term, would not be 'knowledge' due to the fact that there is an absence of the correspondence relation. The mental form of a non-existent thing has, by definition, nothing to relate to extramentally, it has no correlate, and therefore instead of being something which is called "knowledge" (*'ilm*) it ought to be called "ignorance" (*jahl*). According to Rāzī this argument holds equally true of actual existents given that the quiddity of a thing in the mind *ex hypothesi* does not conform perfectly in the "totality of its essence" with the extramental thing itself. In the extramental world Zayd speaks a certain language, is of a certain height and of a given complexion, yet his form in the mind is none of these things but rather, according to the proponents of this theory, a "universal" abstracted from all of these individuating factors. Where is the correspondence, asks Rāzī, in order that the presence of the mental image of Zayd be referred to as "knowledge" of Zayd himself?

In replacing a form-based theory of knowledge with a relation-based one instead, Rāzī thinks he has gained one-upmanship over his philosophical predecessors since his theory of knowledge as a relation advances a direct realism toward the object of knowledge itself, rather than obfuscating our knowledge of things themselves by positing the existence of intermediate forms. The relation (*iḍāfa*) to the object of knowledge is not therefore an intermediary, but the very modality of knowledge itself. For Rāzī this entails that whenever we know something by having a relation to it, the object itself must be an existent. As he says, "the relation to a thing implies the existence of that thing".[56] There is never any "knowledge" in the strict sense therefore of anything "non-existent", and therefore no reason to posit the mode of being called "mental existence".

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[55] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 226[1–2]

[56] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 219.

The Platonic elements of this cannot and should not be mistaken. Rāzī concludes his "commentary" on Avicenna's *Pointer* (III.7) in the *Ishārāt* by surmising that:

> The meaning of ignorance is just that whatever has occurred in the mind does not correspond with anything outside of it. So if a mental form does not correspond with something outside of it, it would be ignorance, and if does correspond to something outside then it is obvious that its correspondent must exist. If, then, the existence of something outside of the mind is established, on what grounds would it be inconceivable to say that apprehension is a relational state between the apprehending faculty and that extramental thing? Also, why would it be inconceivable to say that the forms which we think and imagine, though it be absent from us, are in fact existent things in themselves, either because they are in themselves self-subsistent as Plato argues, or because they are things which are impressed in a celestial body which is absent to our faculties of perception? Although this is something admittedly far-fetched, compared to those who would have us believe that the thing which occurs in our mind whenever we think of the sky is identical to the sky itself, to the extent that even the non-perceptible accident would be identical from every possible aspect to the substance which subsists in the soul, it is not far-fetched at all but rather easy to fathom.[57]

It should be stressed that Rāzī's appeal to the Platonic theory of Forms is not merely for the sake of argument. He is not simply engaging in polemical disputation for the sake of confuting an opponent's position by adopting strategies that he himself is not willing to submit to. The clear proof of this is that the argument is repeated in more explicit terms again and again in presumably subsequent works like the *Mulakhkhaṣ* and the *Maṭālib*. In the *Mulakhkhaṣ*, Rāzī explains that "those who affirm mental forms affirm them as impressions in the mind, but we have affirmed them as Ideas (*muthul*) which are self-subsistent in themselves just as the imam Plato says".[58] In a later section of the same work, he writes:

> What is accepted from Plato is that in every species-nature there must exist an individual whose existence is eternal [and] permanent […] Plato's proof for this was his saying that this human [e.g. Zayd] no doubt exists and that 'human' is something common to all the individual instances [of this notion] which must be variant insofar as they have unique accidents, but 'human' itself must be abstracted from all of these. Otherwise, were it not so, then it would not have been possible for it to be common to each one of them. Hence it is necessary to affirm [the existence of] a Human abstracted from all accidents.[59]

Immediately after this statement Rāzī considers and rejects all of Aristotle's famous objections to Plato's theory of Forms. He insists that what is affirmed as being common to each and every particular individual in its species is an "independent thing in itself" and not just a hylemorphic form impressed in those

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[57] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 235^{17}–236^{6}.

[58] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol. 147v.

[59] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol. 147v.

particulars as Aristotle claims. Owing to its brevity, however, Rāzī's counter-arguments against Aristotle are rather unsatisfactory, not least because it completely fails to account for Avicenna's resolution of the problem of Platonic Form in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'* through his consideration of a 'negatively conditioned' quiddity (*al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ lā shay'*). Rāzī does provide a much more considered analysis in the *Maṭālib*:

> That existence [i.e. the existence of the form of 'human' in the *Mulakhkhaṣ*] is either something that exists in minds and minds alone, having therefore no existence in the concrete therefore, or it is something that exists in the concrete individual. The first [i.e. the theory of mental existence] is false because the common factor [*al-qadr al-mushtarak*] shared between particulars is an intrinsic part of those existents, and whatever is part of the essences of concrete things must itself perforce be an existent in the concrete. Otherwise, if these concrete things exist and the parts which constitute their essences are non-existent, then something [the whole] would have existent without the part which is essential for its subsistence, and that is absurd. Hence it is proven that this nature is a common factor between [concrete things] must exist in them. Now that this has been established, we will say that its existence in the concrete is either dependent on the subsistence of these accentual properties [e.g. height, shape, position, etc.] or its existence is not dependent on them. The first is false […]. So it has been proven that there are existences which are immaterial in concrete existence and that these are what the imam Plato called "Ideas".

There are strong reasons to doubt whether this is actually what "the imam Plato says" since Rāzī appears to be equating Avicenna's notion of a non-conditioned quiddity (*al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ*), what is otherwise referred to as the natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*), with the separated existence of immaterial forms—that is, negatively conditioned quiddities. The more likely understanding is that Rāzī is establishing a full-on participatory theory of being in which the individuals of a species "participate" in the Form of that species. Given what has already been said about his views on the knowledge of so-called "non-existents", Rāzī's rejection of the theory of mental existence combined with his affirmation of knowledge as a "relational state" all seems to be heading toward a complete avowal of the metaphysics of Plato and the theory of Ideas (*muthul*).

Conclusion

What began as a concern over theological issues (e.g. safeguarding God's knowledge of particulars, protecting a non-abstracted view of the soul, and endorsing the atomistic theory of nature) has in the end led Rāzī as a post-Avicennan Ashʿarite thinker to a subtle but nonetheless powerful assertion of Platonic realism. The interplay between these separate elements in Rāzī's thought, nowhere better typified than in his rejection of mental existence, represents a major turning point in the intellectual history of Islam. Aspects of Rāzī's thought, in logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics, shall exert tremendous influence

upon later thinkers, especially those who are vehement in their opposition toward Aristotelian metaphysics and all its talk of "essences" and "universals", such as Ibn Taymiyya who advocates a completely nominalist stance in his attitude towards language and meaning.[60] For thinkers like Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya, nearly all the heresies that Avicenna and other *falāsifa* commit in their metaphysical doctrines originate from the essence-based approach to questions of meaning in logic. Hence the reason why logic is forbidden (*ḥarām*) in Islam. Ibn Taymiyya frequently mentions Rāzī and the *Muḥaṣṣal* in the course of his fulminating attack on Greek logic, demonstrating just how much of an impact Rāzī had on subsequent thinkers' attacks on the *falāsifa*.

Responding to Rāzī would became one of the main preoccupations of the later Scholastics in Islam, and it would be accurate to say that Ṭūsī is not only the first major thinker to defend Avicenna after the systematic attacks made by Rāzī, but also probably last major thinker to defend Aristotle as he had been received in the Islamic world from the late antique tradition of Neo-Platonic commentators. There is a Ṭūsīan tradition of philosophy that continues to exist alongside other philosophical movements in major parts of the Islamic world today, but it is the only tradition that comes closest to preserving the conventional and mainstream form of Avicennan and Aristotelian thought in spite of the fact that Ṭūsī too deviated from Avicenna on certain topics. The other major vying philosophies either opt for the more "mystical" ontologies inspired by Sufism such as those of Suhrawardī and Ibn ʿArabī (thus Mullā Ṣadrā)—the system of these latter thinkers being premised on a thorough form of monism; or they tend toward the more austere theologies that undermine the ability of reason to speculate beyond what is present in the immediate particular, to the extent that some thinkers like Ibn Taymiyya and those who follow him go so far as to endorse more or less anthropomorphic attitudes of the divine, basing their specious arguments on literal readings of the Qur'ān.

Nevertheless, Rāzī's attack on mental existence created new problems for scholars of later generations. In the next chapter, I look at Ṭūsī's defence of mental existence but also highlight some of the areas in which Ṭūsī as a philosopher of the Aristotelian and Avicennan tradition had to find novel solutions given Rāzī's aporetic treatment of the subject; and I will show that the concepts of *tashkīk* and *iʿtibār* have a major role to play in Ṭūsī's defence of the Aristotelian-Avicennan theory of knowledge.

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[60] See Hallaq, W. (2003).

CHAPTER 6

ṬŪSĪ ON KNOWLEDGE, MENTAL EXISTENCE AND TRUTH (*NAFS AL-AMR*)

Introduction

Few topics in the history of post-classical thought are more significant in terms of their impact on other topics and areas of later Islamic philosophy and theology than the theory of mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*). Its relevance to the thought of later scholars is so far-reaching that one can confidently say, without exaggeration, that entire sections within post-classical thinkers' discourse on themes and topics connected to metaphysical issues are incomprehensible without recourse to the theory of mental existence. A proof of this is the fact that by the mid to late thirteenth century each and every one of the primary metaphysical notions which are existence (*wujūd*), necessity (*wujūb*), possibility (*imkān*) and impossibility (*imtināʿ*) was regarded as a notion of secondary intention, i.e. a meta-concept or being of reason (*iʿtibār ʿaqlī*), which is psychologically fashioned and made ontologically subsistent by the mind of the perceiver (*al-muʿtabir*). As shown by Ṭūsī and others within the mainstream Avicennan tradition, such intentional constructions are the *conditio sine qua non* of metaphysical science. And since, by definition, every being of reason is made ontologically subsistent through mental existence, this alone suffices to show that there can be no science of being *qua* being without a realm of mental ontology. For thinkers like Ṭūsī there is no enterprise which we call "metaphysics", then, without mental existence; and to see why one need only reflect on the things we have said in the previous parts of this thesis. If, as Rāzī claims, being (*wujūd*) is coextensive with extramental existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*), then perforce all forms of rationate being—i.e., beings incapable of *extramental* existence—would be precluded.

In this chapter I try to show why Ṭūsī's response to Rāzī's criticisms of mental existence mark a crucial point in the history of post-classical Islamic thought. I try to demonstrate why Ṭūsī's firm grasp of the distinction between concepts which, on the one hand, are purely mental but absolutely essential for metaphysics and those which, on the other hand, do refer extramentally, is one of the main (if not the main) points of departure between two very different kinds of philosophy—only one of which, as later thinkers confirm, can be philosophically sustained. In keeping with the traditional style and method of Ṭūsī's commentary, I shall begin by first considering his illuminating exposition of the relevant section in

Avicenna's *Ishārāt* (III.7) in which the debate on mental existence takes place. It is in this initial part of his commentary, even before he gets round to dealing with Rāzī's objections, that much of the hard work is done and the foundations of Avicennan cognitive theory firmly established. What Ṭūsī says in the initial parts of his commentary is thus the preparatory stage in which he outlines the key principles of the metaphysics of knowledge and which later on he will refer back to in order to deflect Rāzī's objections. Hence, by following this section carefully, I will show how Ṭūsī is able to dismiss Rāzī's objections by referring the discussion back to the first principles of knowledge, principles which demonstrate that Avicenna's cognitive theory is underpinned by key presumptions within his ontological scheme. Ṭūsī's defence of mental forms is thus a lucid demonstration of the fact that the philosophy of mind is a crucial interface at which Avicenna's ontology meets with his psychological theory—an interface which in the Islamic tradition is referred to as "mental existence".

This chapter provides a detailed appraisal of what may, therefore, be referred to as Ṭūsī's "theory of knowledge", albeit that the main focus of our discussion shall be on the metaphysical aspects of Avicenna's theory of knowledge rather than its psychological underpinnings. The chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first part, I consider Ṭūsī's elaboration of the principles of knowledge and show how, within the discourse of first principles, he manages to refute each one of Rāzī's objections to mental existence. The second part of this chapter isolates the problem of correspondence and discusses why, despite the fact that it is one of Rāzī's criticisms, it has its own special significance within Ṭūsī's philosophy. Given his resolute commitment to the fecundity of mental constructions, the problem of correspondence raises an important question about the metaphysics of truth. If, by definition, one or both of the terms of a *true* propositional statement is a non-referring term (i.e. *i'tibārī*), the question arises as to how then the truth of that proposition be justified? The simple answer is that every truth requires a mind-independent "truthmaker", and the truthmaker of propositions of the aforementioned kind according to Ṭūsī is "the thing itself" (*nafs al-amr*). The latter part of this chapter discusses what exactly this means in ontological terms for Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī.

The Object of Knowledge

Whenever post-classical authors debate the problem of mental existence, they do so with reference to the following remark in Avicenna's *Ishārāt* (III.7):

> The apprehension (*idrāk*) of a thing is for its true-nature (*ḥaqīqa*) to be represented (*mutamaththila*) with the apprehender (*al-mudrik*), who observes it [the true-nature] with that by which she

> apprehends. Now, either that true-nature (*ḥaqīqa*) is the very nature of the thing outside of the apprehender whenever it is apprehended (in which case the true-nature of a thing which has no actual existence in the extramental world—such as the many different types of geometrical figures and even more so postulates which are posited in geometry and which do not become actualised whatsoever—would not have been apprehended) or it is the likeness of its true-nature (*mithālu ḥaqīqatihi*) which is impressed within the apprehender's self which is non-differentiated from it [that is the apprehended object].[1]

This is a difficult paragraph and one could easily write an entire monograph on post-classical authors' engagement with this single passage from Avicenna's *Ishārāt*. Suffice it to say, since nearly all of these refer—whether knowingly or unknowingly—to Ṭūsī's commentary, we shall keep things as simple as possible by focussing on what he has to say.

Ṭūsī commences his commentary on this richly packed "definition" of knowledge[2] with a distinction of the various elements involved. First, there is the object of knowledge (*al-mudrak*), the *thing*-known, which may either be material or immaterial. The material object of knowledge which exists outside of the perceiver has its true-nature represented in the mind as "a form (*ṣūra*) extracted from the very true-nature of the external thing itself";[3] and it is the presence of this form in the mind which facilitates the perceiver's knowledge of that object outside the mind. This extraction occurs through a "process" known as abstraction (*tajrīd*).[4] By contrast, an immaterial object which is already completely detached from matter and the adjuncts of matter does not need to be extracted since, by definition, there is nothing from which it needs to be abstracted.[5] The first way, then, of dividing the objects of knowledge (*mudrakāt*) is to consider whether or not the extramental object exists in matter. This, in turn, provides us with our first principle of knowledge, namely, that there are two kinds of objects of knowledge: material and immaterial.

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[1] Avicenna, *Ishārāt* III.7, p. 91^{12-16}.

[2] Henceforth, I shall be referring to knowledge instead of apprehension in order to keep things consistent. This is not an unjustified move; as Ṭūsī explains (*Tajrīd*, p. 104), the term we are translating as apprehension (*idrāk*) can be used in two ways. In the technical sense, *idrāk* is like a genus beneath which there are four categories of apprehension: namely, sensation, imagination, estimation, and intellection. In the general sense, however, *idrāk* can be used just as a synonym for ordinary meaning of "knowledge". Thus, when used as a technical term, knowledge (*ʿilm*) is the uppermost degree of apprehension (*idrāk*), namely, intellectual apprehension or intellection (*al-taʿaqqul*), and cannot therefore be equated with the genus itself. In the non-technical sense, however, 'knowledge' is just 'apprehension' in the general sense (cf. Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 211^{14-24}; cf. al-Lāhijī, *Shawāriq*, vol. 4, p. 200^{1-13}). When Avicenna uses the term *idrāk* in this pointer, he is using it in the general sense of all the different types and degrees of "knowledge".

[3] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt: De Anima* III.7, vol. 2, p. 310^{7-9}.

[4] On this crucial aspect of Avicenna's psychology and the various controversies surrounding it, see Black, D.

[5] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 310^{9}.

A second way of dividing the objects of knowledge depends on their "location", so to speak, and in particular whether or not they are external to the knower's self (*khārijan ʿan dhāt al-mudrik*). For reasons I shall mention later, Ṭūsī chooses his words deliberately here by purposely not mentioning the word "inside" the perceiver. In other words, the second principle of knowledge is that the objects of knowledge are either (*a*) external to the perceiver's self or (*b*) not external to the perceiver's self.[6] He then states that if an object of knowledge falls in the latter category (i.e. it is not external to the perceiver's self), then it is the very reality or true-nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of that object—as opposed to its "likeness" or "similitude"—which is represented in the knower.[7] Ṭūsī is alluding here to the fact that self-awareness according to Avicenna is nothing else besides the self being "present" to itself.[8] This means that self-awareness cannot be "representational" in the sense of one thing being presented to another since the knower and herself are coextensive in being (*fī l-wujūd*), that is to say, the knower does not present herself to herself in self-awareness. Nevertheless, one is still permitted to use the language of representation since—no surprise here—there is an *iʿtibārī* distinction between the knower and herself.[9] This can exemplified in the statement "I know myself" which has three intensionally distinct terms—the knower ("I"), the object of knowledge ("myself"), and the act of knowing itself ("know")—even though in reality they are co-extensionally united.[10]

Strictly speaking, therefore, "representation"—i.e. one thing being presented to another thing *in extensio*—only occurs in those situations where the object-known is outside of the knower's self, in which case "it is not the reality existing in external things itself" which is apprehended, but its form (*ṣūra*).[11] Again, there are two possibilities here depending on whether or not the represented form has a corresponding extramental referent. Thus either the form is extracted from an external object and knowledge thereof derived from concrete entities themselves, or the form of the thing-known exists with the knower from the very outset regardless of whether or not an object of entified existence comes into being from its pre-

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[6] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 312[1-2].

[7] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 312[2].

[8] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 320[13]-321[4].

[9] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 321[2-3].

[10] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 320[13]–321[4]. "It is sometimes possible for a thing which is [extensionally] to have [a multiple number of] intensional aspects (*iʿtibārāt dhihniyya*) which are not cut off [from the mind of the perceiver] so long as the perceiver continues to consider them (*mā dāma l-muʿtabir yaʿtabiruhā*)". (Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 321[3-4])

[11] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, 312[5ff].

existence in the knower.[12] The contrast here reflects an important distinction which Ṭūsī has in mind between "active knowledge" (*ʿilm fiʿlī*) and "passive knowledge" (*ʿilm infiʿālī*).[13] The first of these indicates that type of knowledge in which the form of a thing exists in the mind of the knower and precedes the thing itself in existence, thus being a characteristic form of knowledge involving the creation of artefacts. Active knowledge is thus not only the knowledge of an artefact before its actual existence, but the *formal* cause of its coming into existence also. Contrasted to this is passive knowledge, which occurs whenever the existence of a form in the mind comes after the existence of the form in nature and is thus derived from the thing itself, the knowledge of which must be gained through sensation and abstraction. Whatever the case, both active and passive knowledge imply that "the knowledge of the true-nature of a thing in external reality is the occurrence of that mental form with the knower";[14] which is why both are therefore truly speaking "representational" forms of knowledge.[15]

Now, although the divisions which Ṭūsī mentions are done so for the purpose of explaining Avicenna's cognitive theory, it must be stressed that these are strictly speaking ontological distinctions predicated on a twofold distinction of being (*wujūd*) itself. This point is especially noted in *Sharḥ al-Mas'ala* where Ṭūsī says:

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[12] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 312[6-9].

[13] See Avicenna, *Ishārāt* VII.13, pp. 136[17]-137[12]: "It is permissible that in some manner the intelligible forms are acquired from external forms as, for example, the form of the sky is acquired from the sky [="passive knowledge"]. It is also permissible that the form first proceeds to the intellective power and then exists externally, as when you intellect a figure and then you make it exist [="active knowledge"]. *It must be the case that that whose existence is necessary intellect the whole in the second manner*" (Inati's translation; emphasis added); cf. Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.13, vol. 3, pp. 298[16]-299[4].

[14] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*: *De Anima* III.7, 312[9–10].

[15] In the *Tajrīd* and *Sharḥ al-Masʾala*, Ṭūsī introduces a third category here by nothing that some knowledge is neither active nor passive (*lā fiʿlī wa-lā infiʿālī*). This is a critical step in Ṭūsī's argument and builds on his prior criticisms of Avicenna's theory of the knowledge of God in *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*. The key point here is that both the active and passive modes of knowledge are characterised by the pre-existence and post-existence of *forms* in mental existence respectively, and therefore entail multiplicity (*kathra*) within the essence of the knower. Since, however, the First principle is absolutely simple, Its knowledge of things cannot be form-based. Hence the Necessary Existent must know things in a way that is "neither active nor passive". Furthermore, since God is the cause (*fāʿil*) of things He cannot also be a receptive-cause (*qābil*) for knowledge-forms since this would contravene the metaphysical principle that something cannot be both the efficient and receptive cause of the same thing. See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.16, vol. 2, pp. 303[13]-307[6]; ibid., *Tajrīd*, p. 104[2–3]; ibid., *Sharḥ al-Masʾala*, p. 75, 91.

> Every known thing has being (*thubūt*) either in the essence of the knower only, or in her essence and also outside of it. The first is called 'mental existence' and the second 'mental' and 'extramental' existence, and being affirmed in the absolute sense is more general than each of these divisions.[16]

Ṭūsī informs us that everything he has said up to this point in the commentary is an explanation of the second disjunct ("or it is the likeness of its true-nature (*mithālu ḥaqīqatihi*) which is impressed within the self of the apprehender and which is non-differentiated from it [that is apprehended]—and this [the latter possibility] is the one remaining") of Avicenna's "definition" of knowledge. He also explains that Avicenna disproved the option in the first disjunct of external realities themselves being the sole means by which knowledge occurs by showing that certain things are known to us despite the fact they have no extramental existence, and so could not have been known if knowledge *per se* were just the realities of external things being represented in the knower.

Ṭūsī then considers Avicenna's statement "… and which do not become actualised whatsoever" (*mimmā lā yataḥaqqaqu aṣlan*), here crucially observing that this does not merely refer to things which happen not to exist, that is, non-existents (*al-maʿdūmāt*) generally, but to things which can "have no extramental reality" *per definiens.*[17] In other words, Avicenna's proof of mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*) is not simply founded on the assertion that knowing nonexistents is possible, but on the more forceful claim that knowing *impossible* things (*al-mumtaniʿāt*) is possible.[18] The reason why Ṭūsī emphasises this is because Rāzī had earlier claimed that Avicenna's proof of mental existence rested on our so-called knowledge of "nonexistent things" (*al-maʿdūmāt*), which he then argued against by surmising that what we know is actually just something "absent" (*ghāʾib*) from our immediate grasp but is nevertheless "out there" in the world. Ṭūsī is going to bar this objection by re-emphasising that the impossible things which Avicenna is referring to in the pointer are not merely nonexistent things; but rather they have *no possibility* at all of "being out there" so the argument is a non-starter. Rāzī, in other words, has missed the point of the example of geometrical figures (*al-ashkāl al-handasiyya*) which Avicenna has mentioned, since no will or power in the world can make an ideal mathematical object into a real existent. So, as Ṭūsī says, "since they [impossible things] *are* apprehended, it is therefore known that they are existent things but only

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[16] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Masʾala*, p. 93[12–14].

[17] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 313[5].

[18] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 313[1–5]; he mentions "impossible things" (*al-mumtaniʿāt*) explicitly in line 4.

with the knower, not in extramental reality".[19] Hence given the axiomatic principle that impossible things have no extramental nature—they have no '*ḥaqīqa*', they do not exist—the knowledge of such impossibilities cannot be due to their realities (of which there is none) being itself represented, but instead due to their "likenesses" (sing. *mithāl*) occurring in the knower.[20] As Ṭūsī explains, the word 'likeness' (*mithāl*) here in Avicenna's remark ("the likeness of its true-nature") means 'form' (*ṣūra*), which is either extracted from the external thing itself or precedes the existence of the artefact.[21]

The Nature of Knowledge

The next key principle is that knowledge *per se* is not a relation (*iḍāfa*) but something the nature of which it is to be relational (*iḍāfiyyun*). As for the reason(s) why knowledge cannot be a relation, that is something we are going to have to consider in a separate section below. That it is something relational, however, is due to the fact that a knowledge act has "a relation to the possessor of the knowledge" (*viz.* the knower, *al-mudrik*), on the one hand, and "a relation to the thing-known" (*viz.* the object of knowledge, *al-mudrak*), on the other.[22] Therefore, as a relational term, 'knowledge' (*idrāk*) *per se* cannot be "defined" in the strict sense of a real definition given any relational term would need to have its correlatives mentioned in order to be defined—which ultimately entails that something is its own *definiens*.

> Know that what the Shaykh [Avicenna] has said is not a definition of knowledge (*taʿrīfun li-l-idrāk*), which explains why he did not feel any restraint in mentioning the knower (*al-mudrik*).[23] This is because one cannot say, for example, that the definition of motion is "a state belonging to the mover". Nevertheless, [what he says] is a specification of the meaning of what is referred to as 'knowledge' (*idrāk*), which is [a term] that is common to sensation (*iḥsās*), imagination (*takhayyul*), estimation (*tawahhum*) and intellective understanding (*taʿaqqul*), even though the meaning itself is clear and in no need of being defined. Those who investigate the true natures of things will very often do so by specifying things which are already well-known and whose meanings are predicated of different things; and their investigation is such so that they may better understand their states (such as whether or not [their meanings are predicated] by equality or not) and how their association might be to the things to which they are related. Also, many who delve into philosophy (*falsafa*) and consider the statements of the philosophers, such as their statement: "The soul perceives particular sensible things through an instrument but intelligible things through itself" understand from it that

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[19] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 313^{5-6}.

[20] Likeness (*mithāl*) and representation (*tamaththul*) have the same Arabic root (*m-th-l*), which does not unfortunately come across in English.

[21] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 313^{7-9}.

[22] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 310^{12}–311^{1}.

[23] Cf. Al-Taḥtānī, *Muḥākamāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 314^{5-6}.

> only the instrument perceives particular things and not the soul. They thus calumniate the philosophers and accuse them of holding the belief that the soul does not perceive particulars, oftentimes speaking at great lengths concerning this. Yet their objections and defamatory accusations are on the whole based on what they have understood and not what the philosophers themselves say.[24]

The first point here is that knowledge cannot be defined. Whoever knows something—anything—has first-hand knowledge that they *know* and does not need to be told "what" knowledge is. The concept (*taṣawwur*) of knowledge cannot be acquired independently of the act of knowing itself, but is rather co-extensional with that self-same act. "To know" is thus identical with knowledge *per se*, which, since one is never not self-aware, implies that the concept of knowledge is as basic and primitive as the knowledge we have of ourselves. The concept of knowledge is therefore a basic one, primitive so as not to be capable of being acquired, and therefore self-evident (*badīhī*), just as self-awareness is basic, primitive, and self-evident.[25] Nevertheless, this does not mean that the "phenomenon" of knowledge cannot be investigated any further. In fact, as Ṭūsī observes, it is precisely concepts like knowledge which are so familiar to us that demand the greatest attention, lest they be mistaken for things which they are not.

He writes:

> Know that men of erudition have differed greatly on the quidditative nature of knowledge (*māhiyyat al-idrāk*) and spoken at tremendous lengths concerning it. This is not because it is something obscure but rather because of its intense clarity […] Some claim that [the nature] of knowledge cannot be defined and therefore ought not to be defined. This is true, but in saying this they intend to free themselves of the burden of trying to solve the problems which people have fallen into concerning it.[26]

So while the concept of knowledge is immediate, it is not immediately clear whether all kinds of knowledge are *equally* the same *qua* the concept of knowledge, or whether certain kinds are more worthy of being called 'knowledge' than others; indeed, it is not even immediately clear whether knowledge comes in different degrees or whether it is just one unmodulated reality—this being a necessary consequence of Rāzī's assertion that knowledge *per se* is a relation.

According to Ṭūsī there are different "degrees of knowledge" (*marātib al-idrāk*), meaning therefore that the term 'knowledge' (*idrāk*) is predicated by way of analogy (*bi-l-tashkīk*). The variation that occurs within the different ranks and degrees of knowledge is a direct result of the differing "degrees of

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[24] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 314^{7}–315^{5}.

[25] See Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $155^{17–19}$.

[26] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 313^{10}–314^{6}.

abstraction" (*marātib al-tajrīd*).[27] The more abstract and universal something is the more intelligible it will be in the understanding, thereby having a greater right to being called knowledge than other more material forms of knowledge. Knowledge, like being (*wujūd*), can therefore be "said in many ways".

If Ṭūsī is correct and knowledge is indeed an analogical term, then all of the glib criticisms which Rāzī uses to attack Avicenna's theory of knowledge can begin to be dismantled.[28] The first and most important feature of knowledge, then, is that it is analogically predicated of different types of knowing, each one ranked according to their different degrees in abstraction. Rāzī's vituperative comments in the *Mabāḥith* which accused of Avicenna of being "thoroughly confused" for characterising knowledge in different ways can now be rejected since the concept of knowledge is analogical. The entire first part of Ṭūsī's commentary aims to make this aspect of knowledge crystal clear: knowledge is a nuanced phenomenon whose individual elements have to be carefully ascertained. Ṭūsī thus cautions his readers in true Aristotelian fashion to be sensitive of the analogical character of knowledge. Rāzī either fails to understand *tashkīk* or chooses to ignore its place in Avicenna's philosophy. Whatever the case, he fails to do justice to the true Avicennan philosophy.

The second point concerning the nature of knowledge is that although it is the soul and only the soul that perceives, knowledge itself is divided into that which occurs through the facilitation of an instrument (*āla*) and that which occurs without the facilitation of an instrument.[29] This is now the next key principle which Ṭūsī lists in the preparatory stage of his commentary. That knowledge which occurs without the utility of an instrument does so by facilitation of the "apprehender's self" (*dhāt al-mudrik*) and not the senses, whether external or internal. Avicenna's use of the expression "who observes it with that which he apprehends" (*yushāhiduhā mā bi-hi yudrik*) is, Ṭūsī says, an allusion to the fact that every knowledge is by facilitation of something—in other words, the soul perceives an object of knowledge either (*a*) by facility

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[27] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.17, vol. 3, p. 302[11-12]; cf. ibid., *Tajrīd*, p. 106[6] where it is stated that intellectual understanding and being denuded from matter are "co-extensive" (*al-taʿaqqul wa-l-tajarrud mutalāzimān*). As Ḥillī explains (*kashf*, p. 226[4]), this implies that "every rational being is immaterial and vice-versa" (*kullu ʿāqilin mujarradun wa-bi-l-ʿaks*).

[28] Recall, that according to Rāzī, all knowledge is just a relation (*mujarrad al-iḍāfa*) occurring between the knower and the object of knowledge. But since every relation *qua* itself is equally the same as every other relation, Rāzī's position necessarily entails that all forms of knowledge are homogeneous. In that case, there is no difference between my knowledge of this green apple and God's knowledge of this green apple, which, to say the least, is quite blasphemous because it seems to equate my knowledge (creaturely knowledge) with the Creator's knowledge. The doctrine of analogy (*tashkīk*) thus, it seems, is a crucial ingredient for theologies which deny any form of anthropomorphic resemblance (*tashbīh*) between God and His creation.

[29] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 311[4–5].

of an instrument, or (*b*) by facility of just itself (i.e. no instrument is needed).[30] The use of the term "observes" in particular serves to clarify that the mere presence (*ḥuḍūr*) of a thing at the senses is not sufficient to cause its apprehension in the perceiver, since, very importantly, "the soul which is not attentive to what is present at the senses does not perceive it".[31]

The next principle of knowledge is that the soul itself perceives *both* particulars and universals albeit in different ways, and not just intelligible concepts which have no correspondence (*qua* intelligible concepts) with external particulars. External things which are particular and sensible in nature must therefore be facilitated by the instrument of the body and can only be perceived through contact with the external senses. Since, however, the First principle is not a body, It cannot know particulars insofar as they are sensible and susceptible to change.[32] Intelligible notions—i.e. universals—are thus perceived directly by the apprehender's self without being facilitated by a bodily instrument, although here it is significant to note that in Avicenna's cognitive theory the senses do play a decisive role in preparing the rational soul for the reception of the intelligible form from the Active Intellect in instances where the formation of a concept derives from a complex object mixed with matter.[33]

As Ṭūsī explains:

> The ancients say that there is a potentiality within the human essence to receive knowledge in accordance with its intrinsic nature, and that if this were not the case it would not have been possible for human beings to be knowers. Anything that has the potentiality to receive something else cannot remove itself from potentiality into actuality through its own doing, or else it would have always

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[30] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 311^{4-5}.

[31] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 311^{7-8}. This is also a principle of apprehension which Ṭūsī will use to refute another one of Rāzī's criticisms relating to the sufficiency of forms. The limitations of space did not afford us the luxury to consider this aspect of Rāzī's critique, but it can be briefly stated as follows. Rāzī argues that even if the necessity of forms can be granted, the sufficiency of forms cannot. There are many reasons for this, but one which is specific to visual perception is that Avicenna himself declares that "the similitudes [of visual objects] impress upon the two vitreous humours yet vision does occur in these places, but rather at the optic nerve". This, says Rāzī, shows that (visual) apprehension cannot be merely the occur of forms since vision does not take place where the similitudes first occur (Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 233^{9-11}). Ṭūsī will reject this argument and all others which are similar to it because of the rule that only the soul apprehends, not the sensory organs. Hence even if the forms of these things has occurred at the organs, they will only be perceived when the soul is attentive to them. See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 311^{6}–312^{4}, 321^{12-15}.

[32] This, according to Avicenna, is of no detriment to the Necessary Being since Its perfection, as well as the perfection of every being capable of knowledge, lies in knowing things in their most perfect form—and that means knowing them in their state of complete abstraction. For exactly the same reason, this implies that it *would* detrimental for the Necessary Being if It knew things in their particularity, since that means (*a*) It would have be a body and therefore composed, and (*b*) contingent given that nothing which is composed is necessary of existence in itself.

[33] Cf. Black, D. (2014).

> been in a state of actuality from the very beginning of its existence (*fī awwalī fiṭratihi*). Furthermore, had this been possible it would have meant that a thing is both the efficient and receptive cause [of a single attribute] simultaneously, [and that is impossible]. The agent which causes the occurrence of self-evident knowledge in the essences which receive it in human beings is therefore some other being, one that is already in a state of actuality *vis-à-vis* the act of knowing. You should know that the [innate] capacity to receive knowledge in human beings has degrees and varies in terms of remoteness and proximity from the attainment [it strives after]. It undergoes preparations and only gradually attains the state of fulfilment by facilitated movement from the stages of remoteness to the stages of proximity one part at at a time due to proximate causes known as "the preparative causes" (*al-muʿiddāt*). These preparative causes are the senses—all of them—which are engaged moment by moment, continuing in this state until that capacity for being prepared is completed. When this happens, universal conceptualizations are emanated onto the essence of the human being by the essence which knows in act, followed by the primary assents—that is, the self-evident forms of knowledge. For this reason, it is said "Whosoever is deprived of their senses is deprived of knowledge" (*man faqada ḥissan faqada ʿilman*). These are then related to the preparing causes so as to make the capacity for preparation even more complete, thereby causing experiential, intuitive, and other forms of knowledge which then serve as principles for the theoretical sciences.[34]

According to Ṭūsī, Avicenna's theory of intellectual understanding (*al-taʿaqqul*) is predicated on the dual interaction of the sensible and intelligible worlds coming together at the level of the subject's soul to cause in her the knowledge of things at the level of rational understanding (*ʿaql*). The formation of a concept thus requires three causes to combine in order to create the existence of the intelligible form in the knower's self: (*a*) the sensible thing itself, (*b*) the soul, and (*c*) the Active Intellect. These are the preparative cause (*al-muʿidd*), the receptive cause (*al-qābil*), and the efficient cause (*al-fāʿil*) respectively. The former helps prepare the intermediate to receive the emanation of the latter. And even though this is a "process" which requires the perceiver being actively engaged with the sensible object, it is not one that is reducible to a crude sense of "empiricism".[35]

There are two fundamentally metaphysical reasons why, according to Ṭūsī, the soul cannot actualize the intelligible form by itself. The first (as he remarks in the above passage and in the following statement of the *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*) is that "everything that is taken from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality is done so by something *other* than itself".[36] From an Aristotelian perspective this basic metaphysical rule can never be sabotaged, and evidence of it can be seen in the fact that thinkers like Aquinas, who preferred the more austere "Aristotelian" theory of knowledge as opposed to the "Augustinian" and Avicennan doctrines

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[34] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Masʾala*, pp. 93^{17}–94^{7}.

[35] In contradistinction to scholars like Dimitri Gutas who think it is; see Gutas, D. (2006; 2012); Hasse, D. N. (2014).

[36] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt: De Anima* III.7, 355^{10-11}.

that depicted true knowledge as a sort of mystical illumination, nonetheless had to posit an active intellect albeit one which is the soul of the apprehender.[37] This incidentally also happens to be the reason for Avicenna's insistence that intellectual substances are always self-aware (*maʿqūl al-dhāt*) since actual intellects are, by definition, perpetually in act. If the soul were not always in act *vis-à-vis* its own self-awareness it would have needed an *external* agent for its own self-awareness which is hardly possible, and must therefore be a substance abstracted from matter since it is matter which ultimately causes act to be reduced to potentiality. In Avicenna's psychology the soul's constant self-awareness is proof that the soul must therefore be an immaterial substance. For Avicenna, the reason why the Active Intellect cannot be a part of the human rational soul is down to his observation that if this were really the case then a certain part of the soul would have been in constant actuality and therefore always "thinking" the intelligible form. Since our thoughts are not always constant and we regularly forget (*nisyān*) the intelligible form, the human intellect cannot be one which constantly in act *vis-à-vis* the intelligible form (*ṣūra maʿqūla*).[38] As Black shows, this is also the reason why according to Avicenna there can be no such thing as "intellectual memory".[39]

The second point which Ṭūsī mentions stresses the importance of another metaphysical principle, and that is that no being can be both the receptive (*qābil*) and efficient (*fāʿil*) cause of one of its own properties lest it be simultaneously in potentiality and act towards the same thing. This itself an extension of the first point since whatever is a "receptive" cause for some property it lacks must be in a state of potentiality toward it, and can only therefore have this potentiality actualized by an agent other than itself—i.e. an *extrinsic* efficient cause.

Based on these principles Ṭūsī raises an important objection to Avicenna himself regarding the First principle's knowledge of things. The dilemma for Ṭūsī is Avicenna's claim that the modal relation of God's knowledge to things is of the "active knowledge" (*ʿilm fiʿlī*) type which, as we have seen, is simply the "pre-existence" (*qabla l-kathra*) of a form in the apprehender before its existence in the artefact itself. Avicenna says in the *Ishārāt* that this would not cause multiplicity to enter into the essence of the First principle but Ṭūsī disagrees. This is one the rare occasions in which Ṭūsī accepts Rāzī's criticisms and himself explains that

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[37] See Haldane, J. (1992).

[38] See Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. $54^{4\text{-}12}$.

[39] Black, D. (2014: 136–139).

> [T]here can be no doubting that his [Avicenna's] opinion in which he claims that the First's concomitant effects (*lawāzim*) to be established within the essence of the First principle is an assertion of a single thing being the receptive and efficient cause simultaneously, and an assertion that the First Principle is attributed with properties which are neither non-relational nor non-negational just as the noble commentator [Rāzī] mentions. It would also be an assertion that the First principle is a substrate for Its multiple and contingent effects—may He loftily transcend [such claims]—as well as an assertion that Its first effect [the Universal Intellect] is not distinguished from It in its essence. Furthermore, [this would entail] that He—the most sublime—does not cause the existence of anything different to Itself without the intermediary of [forms] inhering in It […].[40]

The upshot of all this is that God's knowledge cannot be form-based, yet both the "active" and "passive" types of knowledge require the inherence (*ḥulūl*) forms. God's knowledge cannot be "passive" for the obvious reason that this makes His knowledge and effect and His being a knower dependent on an extraneous cause—implying, therefore, that He is not necessary of existence in Himself.[41] For these reasons Ṭūsī holds that there must be a third modality by which God's knowing is described which is neither "active" nor "passive" (*lā fiʿlī wa-lā infiʿālī*).

The complete discussion of Ṭūsī's views on the modality of God's knowledge takes us away from the expressed aims of this chapter. Our discussion here is aimed at highlighting the principles of knowledge, and the reason why it was expedient to mention Ṭūsī's objections to Avicenna's position on this subject is to point out that for him there is a non-representational and non-form based sort of knowledge that is neither "active" nor "passive". This, then, is another principle of Ṭūsī's theory of knowledge.

Knowledge cannot be a Pure Relation

The responses that Ṭūsī gives to each and every one of Rāzī's criticisms of mental existence can all be classified—broadly speaking—into three categories. The first category includes the rebuttal of the Rāzian position itself, namely, the assertion that knowledge is a pure relation (*mujarrad al-iḍāfa*). The second category covers all of the direct counter-rebuttals of the criticisms themselves, such as, for example, Ṭūsī's response to the problem of concomitant attribution or the response to the problem of categories. The third type of response highlights the consequences of denying the theory of mental existence. I am going discuss each of these in the order just mentioned.

Rāzī's rejection of mental existence is the negative counterpart of a positive argument to show that knowledge is a purely relational state (*ḥāla nisbiyya iḍāfiyya*) which, unlike Avicenna's modulated theory

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[40] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.17, vol. 3, p. 304^{7-14}.

[41] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.17, vol. 3, p. 299^{5-20}.

of knowledge, provides a singular explanation of the quiddity of knowledge. For Rāzī, explaining the metaphysical basis of knowledge in terms of the relation is especially expedient for two main reasons: first of all, a relation obviates the need for intermediary forms (*cue* atomism) and therefore provides the knower with a direct encounter with things themselves; second, it circumvents the philosophers' path to denying God's knowledge of particulars *qua* particulars and therefore removes one of the pitfalls which, according to Ghazālī, leads to unbelief (*kufr*).[42] Rāzī's attempts to universalize the scope of relations to explain the nature of knowledge regardless of the kind of subject in question can be seen as a direct consequence and continuation of Ghazālī's claim in the *Tahāfut* that God's knowledge of particular things reduces to the "status of a pure relation" (*al-iḍāfa al-maḥḍa*).[43] However, though it might be argued that a relation-based theory of knowledge, since it standardises the nature of knowledge to single modality, is aesthetically more pleasing, this does create the potential weakness that Rāzī's theory of knowledge is an "all or nothing" thesis. More importantly, Rāzī does not merely advance an epistemological claim by saying that knowledge is a relation, but a concomitantly ontological claim as well, since in order for knowledge "to be" a relation means that the relation itself must exist. And this it seems is where Rāzī's theory of relations, in place of ontological forms, is going to expose him to a number of criticisms.

A philosopher like Ṭūsī can immediately latch onto this aspect of the relation-based theory by pointing out that relations *per se* have no extramental existence, that the entire possibility of their being is predicated on *mental existence* and therefore ontologically reliant on the very mode of being that Rāzī is so keen on rejecting. By showing why Rāzī's position—the same as Ghazālī's and Abū l-Barakāt's position—overcommits on the ontology of relations, Ṭūsī is able to perfectly demonstrate why *ex hypothesi* there can be no knowledge whatsoever. If he can prove this, then Ṭūsī will have trapped Rāzī into a "metaphysical" cul-de-sac: either he will have to admit that intentionality (or mental existence) is true or he shall have to disallow the possibility of knowledge *in toto*, including that of God. It goes without saying that the latter option is the one of the greatest ignominies for any theist never mind the followers of Islam. Since Rāzī props his entire "theory of knowledge" on the ontological affirmation of relations outside the mind, should this prop itself turn out to be faulty then he would have inadvertently rejected the possibility of knowledge (and ignorance) completely, be it human or divine. And yet even in the *Mulakhkhaṣ* Rāzī himself admits that "According to our theory of knowledge being a relational state, [establishing how intelligent substances

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[42] Cf. Abrahomov, B. (1992)

[43] Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 138.

have self-awareness] is problematic".[44] The reason for this detrimental consequence simply boils down to the fact, as Rāzī himself observes, that nothing can be related to itself *in extensio*.[45] If, therefore, the Ashʿarites continue to insist on the relation-based (*taʿalluq*) theory of knowledge, and if Ṭūsī's assertions about relations *per se* being *iʿtibārī* are true, then he will have shown that in their premature indictments of the philosophers' beliefs they may have inadvertently denounced their own position as a greater form of *kufr* than theirs.

Having said all of this the ontology of relations is another topic that requires deep analysis. Marmura's essay is still the best we have on the subject but it is exclusively focussed on Avicenna.[46] The subject has frequented numerous discussions in the post-Avicennan period.[47] Those who deny the quiddity of knowledge being a relation *simpliciter* have two main lines of argument: either they try to show through general arguments why relations *per se* cannot exist; or they invoke specific arguments to show why knowledge in particular cannot be a relation. Ṭūsī's writings contain both types of argument and we shall consider them briefly.

In this connection, there is an anecdote recorded by Ḥillī in his *Nihāya* which reads as follows:

> On one occasion I asked our master, the best of verifiers (*afḍal al-muḥaqqiqīn*), Naṣīr al-Milla wa-l-Dīn [i.e. Ṭūsī], may God sanctify his spirit, concerning this issue [whether or not relations exist in the concrete], to which he replied: "There are some relations that are existential (*wujūdī*), such as 'being above' (*al-fawqiyya*) and 'being below' (*al-taḥtiyya*); and some which are purely mind-dependent (*iʿtibārī*). Now those that are 'existential' do not exist in the sense of being things [which are independently] affirmed in the concrete, such as the case with, say, the affirmation of blackness for a body. Rather their existence is of the type such that the essence attributed with 'being above' has within its existence the [property] of 'above-ness', and that is something that is affirmed in the concrete.[48]

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[44] Rāzī, *Mulakhkhaṣ*, fol 149v.

[45] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 320^{13}–321^{9}. One of Rāzī's criticisms against the *necessity* of mental forms is based on the problem of self-awareness, which actually stems from al-Masʿūdī's "doubts" (*shukūk*) on Avicenna. The argument here is simply that self-awareness cannot be due to the representation of a form, and therefore apprehension (*idrāk*) cannot be representational. Above, I have shown how Ṭūsī gets around this problem by falling back on the principle that the objects of knowledge are divided into two types, those which are (*a*) external to the self and (*b*) those which are not external to the self. Ṭūsī's use of the word "non-external" is deliberate, or so I claim. He does not use the word "internal" since the soul is not internal to itself. Therefore, in the propositional statement "I know myself", the object of knowledge (*viz.* myself) is not an internal part of the subject (*viz.* "I") but in fact identical to it in extension. The differences, as Ṭūsī states, are merely intensional (i.e. *iʿtibārī*).

[46] Marmura, M. (1975).

[47] For an in-depth analysis, see al-Lāhijī, *Shawāriq*, vol. 4, pp. 356–382.

[48] Ḥillī, *Nihāya*, vol. 2, p. 253.

The two types of relation which are here referred to as the "existential" (*wujūdī*) and "mind-dependent" (*iʿtibārī*) correspond with two other names which in the *Tajrīd* are referred to as the "objective" (*ḥaqīqī*) and the "conventional" (*mashhūrī*) respectively.[49] The distinction between them can be shown by considering the difference between "father" and "fatherhood". The first is a relative (*muḍāf*) and is contrasted with another relative such as "son" or "daughter". In each case there is something in the one (e.g. the father) which relates it to the other (e.g. the son); that is, a property in virtue of which the substance (*dhāt*) of each relative thing has the specific relation it has to other things.[50] Modern philosophers calls this a "polyadic" or many-place property.[51] If, therefore, Zayd is the father of ʿAmr, then Zayd has the "property" of *being related to* ʿAmr as his father, and this is known as the "conventional" or "existential" sense of the relation. This quality, which in our example is some biological factor, must exist in Zayd himself or else Zayd would not truly speaking be the father of anyone. Therefore, since "father" in this instance is reducible ontologically speaking to Zayd himself, and given also that Zayd himself really exists, the popular sense of the term 'relation' is referred to as the "existential" relation. It is also referred to as the "conventional" relation because it is the one that is popularly thought of as a relation, though strictly speaking it is a *property* which enables a thing to be *related* to something else. By contrast, the "objective" relation (and it's the objective relation about which our debate is concerned) is the proper philosophical sense of the term 'relation' (*iḍāfa*). It connotes the non-autonomous notion of "in-betweenness" which characterises all true relational states. Zayd may be the father of ʿAmr but the notion of *fatherhood* has no existence outside of the mind. Now, every true relation is reciprocal (*munʿakis*) due its bi-directionality: Zayd is related to ʿAmr with the relation "being a father" and ʿAmr is related to Zayd with the relation "being an offspring".[52] So while Zayd and ʿAmr are *related* (i.e. they are correlatives, *mutaḍayafān*), the *relation* between them is purely mind-dependent (*iʿtibārī*).[53] The true relation (*al-iḍāfa al-ḥaqīqiyya*) is therefore a being of reason (*iʿtibār ʿaqlī*) and has no true existence in things themselves, although we still need an argument to show us why this is the case.

Before we get to that argument, however, it is important to note that Ṭūsī's stance on the conceptual character of relations is one that contradicts the position of Avicenna, who provided a detailed exposition

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[49] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 108$^{4–7}$.

[50] See Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 237$^{1–7}$.

[51] See, for example, Brower, J (2016) and Penner, S. (2016).

[52] See Ḥillī, *Kashf*, 237$^{9–15}$.

[53] See Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 108^{5}; ibid., *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 132$^{3–11}$.

on the quiddity and existence of the relational term in the *Ilāhiyyāt* (III.10) of the *Shifā'*.[54] However, as Ḥillī explains in his commentary on Ṭūsī's *Tajrīd*, Avicenna's lengthy argument to prove the extramental existence of relations "does not lead to the conclusion [that relations exist]" (*ghayr mufīd li-l-maṭlūb*).[55] The crucial point of departure between Avicenna and his successors who contested his position comes down to whether or not the existence of a relation outside the mind leads to an infinite regress of relational states. Avicenna's argument, as Marmura shows, is that although the relatives (e.g. father/son) themselves have the need for the relation (e.g. fatherhood/son-hood) in order to be related things (i.e. correlatives), the relation *per se* is not a relative and does not as a result need another relation and is therefore finite.[56] Avicenna's argument however seems to be connected with the categorical meaning of the relation (*al-muḍāf min al-maqūla*); but as Ḥillī explains this is not the sense in which the debate surrounding the existence of relations is being had. Rather, the question is concerned with whether or not the "objective" relation (e.g. fatherhood *per se*) exists and not the category "relation" (*iḍāfa*).

Ṭūsī presents four terse statements in the *Tajrīd* which explain why the objective relation is a being of reason.[57] Only one of these arguments need concern us since it alone provides the principle for why the relation is *i'tibārī*. The argument runs as follows: Suppose a relation such as fatherhood *per se* exists extramentally. Since everyone agrees that a relation is an accident in need of a substrate, it follows that a relation such as fatherhood requires a locus in which to inhere. This, however, implies that the relation "fatherhood" is itself *related* to the substrate, *and that is another relation* which by the force of this same argument entails yet a *further* substrate in which to inhere. To explain this again: If the relation "fatherhood" *occurs* extramentally to Zayd, then "occurring to" is also a type of relation and would *ex hypothesi* itself require a substrate in order to exist. As a result, each "occurrence" would form a sequence of relational occurrences regressing to infinity, and that is impossible. Hence the true relation (*al-iḍāfa al-ḥaqīqiyya*) cannot exist in the concrete, but rather has its existence "mentally constructed" between extramental things as a being of reason (*amr i'tibārī*).[58]

In this connection, one of the most important questions to arise in the post-Avicennan Islamic philosophical tradition concerning the metaphysical characterization of beings of reason (or *i'tibārī*

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[54] See Avicenna, *Shifā': Ilāhiyyāt* III.10, p. 119 onwards; cf. Marmura (1975).

[55] See Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 238^{9-24}.

[56] See Marmura (1975).

[57] See Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 108^{5-7}.

[58] For the details of this and each of the other three arguments, see Ḥillī, *Kashf*, pp. 238^{1}-240^{6}.

statements) is the question of truth (or correspondence). On the basis, for example, that it is true to say that "The sky is *above* the earth," it does not follow that "above-ness" itself exists *extra animam*. Not every term in a statement needs to have an extramental referent (*muṭābaq*) in order for the statement to be true. An instance of this was already noted in the case of "is" since 'existence', according to Ṭūsī, is a secondary intelligible, i.e., *iʿtibārī*. I will discuss the question of truth in propositional statements having *iʿtibārī* terms in greater depth toward the end of this chapter when I consider Ṭūsī's treatment of '*nafs al-amr*', but in the meantime the following remark in Ṭūsī's *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* provides a glimpse of what is to come later regarding the problem of correspondence:

> That which is [purely] rational (*ʿaqlī*)—for example, the *above-ness* of the sky—is distinct from that which is [purely] suppositional (*farḍī*), since it is possible to suppose the below-ness of the sky. Properly speaking, the 'rational' is whatever must occur in reason whenever the intellect considers that thing, such as—for example—the 'above-ness' of the sky [which occurs in the mind whenever the intellect considers the relation between the earth and the sky]. As for the suppositional, this is whatever the one who is supposing posits even though it may be something impossible; and whatever is said to be 'mental' (*dhihnī*) includes both categories [i.e. the rational and the suppositional]. It is imperative that what is meant by each of these [concepts] is properly understood lest one should make a mistake due to confusion.[59]

Where Ṭūsī is going with this can be seen in a remark that appears a few paragraphs later: "You have learned that this [i.e. statements containing terms which are beings of reason] is affirmed [as being true] in *nafs al-amr* without supposition, and that it is not merely something contrived in the mind".[60] As we shall see toward the end of this chapter, the point of these remarks is to show that statements containing *iʿtibārī* terms are objectively speaking true even if there is no truthmaking correspondent for them to correspond with among concrete particulars outside of the mind. So even though—literally speaking—*nafs al-amr* means "the thing itself" ("das Ding an sich" in Kant's terminology), the real sense of what appears to be meant by it a "the realm of fact" (or as Kant might say the realm of the noumenon where things exist as they truly are in and of themselves and not merely as they appear to us as phenomena).[61] Ṭūsī is the first philosopher of the entire post-Avicennan period to therefore show that in order for certain "synthetic a priori" statements to be true—that is, statements whose predicate-terms are not logically contained within

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[59] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 133$^{6-10}$.

[60] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 134$^{12-13}$.

[61] The "location" or "whereabouts" of this realm of factuality is contested. As we shall see, Ṭūsī holds it to be identical to the intelligible forms of things in the Universal Intellect. Ibn 'Arabī's followers, by contrast, say it is identical to the fixed essences (*al-aʿyān al-thābita*) in the knowledge of God.

their subject-terms but statements nevertheless whose verifiability does not depend on the senses—there must be a Transcendental Truthmaker that represents for all times and places the intelligible nature of things (*al-maʿqūlāt*) and therefore provides the deontic value of true *iʿtibārī* statements. Ṭūsī's discovery is of enormous historical significance and in many respects a medieval forerunner to Kant, but it is motivated historically by Rāzī's problem of correspondence. We shall discuss the problem of correspondence or "truth" in greater detail below, but for now we simply note that in making the relation (and many other metaphysical concepts) into an *iʿtibārī* concept Ṭūsī is not inattentive to the implications this has on the ontological properties of truth and their truthmakers.

This brings us now to the specific reason(s) why knowledge *per se* cannot be a relation (apart, that is, from the already mentioned general argument concerning all relations). Two of these are stated by Ṭūsī in the *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*:

> Among the notable scholars there are some who posit the relation which occurs to the knower (*mudrik*) [and relates her] to the object of knowledge (*mudrak*) as knowledge (*idrāk*) itself in the hope of deflecting some of the doubts concerning knowledge as a form. However, whosoever does this forgets that a relation requires the existential affirmation of the two correlatives, and shall therefore be compelled to admit that whatever does not exist extramentally cannot be known and that no type of perception can ever be ignorance given that ignorance is the non-correspondence between a form in the mind and the external reality.[62]

Since every relation has the character of "in-betweeness", the existence of a relation necessarily presupposes the existence of the co-relatives, of a "this something" related to a "that something". Since this is necessarily the case, the fact that each of the co-relatives must exist explains why knowledge itself cannot be a relation as this would imply that nonexistent things (whether of a purely fictitious nature such as a mountain of gold or purely intelligible nature such as any one of the geometrical shapes in mathematics) could not be known. Yet these are things which have the property of "being known" (*ṣifat al-maʿlūmiyya*) and cannot, therefore, be absolutely nonexistent. But if they are found not to have existence in the world then their existential affirmation (*thubūt*), according to Ṭūsī, must be in a non-extramental mode of existence, which by definition is precisely what we are calling "mental existence". Those who therefore deny mental existence by making knowledge reducible to the relation itself have no way of establishing our knowledge of nonexistent things (*al-maʿdūmāt*).[63] Rāzī's ultimate solution to the problem of non-existents is to hearken

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[62] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 313^{11}–313^{4}.

[63] See Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. $162^{5–10}$: "That which is nonexistent in the external world is affirmed in the mind from the aspect that it is ascribed with the property of being-known (*mawṣūfun bi-l-maʿlūmiyya*). It is predicated with

back to the realist position, which is to say the adoption of either the existence of Platonic Forms or the existence of forms impressed upon a far-off and absent (*ghā'ib*) celestial body to which our faculties of perception are related, as we have shown. But this, though it may appear to remove the necessity of mental existence only further compels the need for it. However, as Ṭūsī remarks, even if for the sake of argument the Platonic Forms existed, still there could be no Platonic Form of that which is *impossible* of existence externally.[64]

It is interesting that even though Rāzī purposely chose to discuss nonexistent things as a means by which to prove the existence of the Platonic Forms, he nonetheless appears to have forgotten or deliberately negated the possibility of our knowledge of the impossible. Our knowledge of non-existent things includes things which are impossible by nature—such as, for instance, our knowledge of the void (*al-khalā'*), which Aristotle's and Avicenna's motion-based arguments have proven cannot exist.[65] Yet in spite of this, we are still able to conceptualise the notion of a void in our minds, which therefore points to the existence of "a something" since what is absolutely nonexistent cannot be spoken of whatsoever. Avicenna's proof of mental existence is not therefore merely based upon our knowledge of nonexistent things, but on the stronger assertion that we know things which are *impossible* of existence outside the mind (*al-mumtani'āt*).[66] On the other hand, that our knowledge of "absent" things occurs due to a relation between

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'being affirmed in the mind' insofar as it is known from this aspect, and apart from this aspect it is not predicated with 'being affirmed in the mind'. There is no contradiction between these two judgments since the subject of one is not the same as the subject of the other. In a similar way that which is non-affirmed absolutely, neither in the extramental or mental sense of being non-affirmed, is predicated with 'affirmation' from this aspect and denied 'affirmation' when this aspect is no longer being considered."; idem., *Ta'dīl*, p. 143^{13-18}: "The truth of the matter is that the 'absolutely unknown' has two different senses: the first being the referent and referent alone of this expression; and the second being the referent together with its ascription of being 'absolutely unknown'. Now, in the second sense the 'absolutely' unknown is unknown absolutely speaking because the ascription 'something unknown' is itself known to us, and whatever is attributed with a known property is known from the aspect of that property. The subject in our statement 'No thing absolutely unknown can be given a predicate', from the aspect that it is impossible of a predicate, is taken in the first sense; whereas from the aspect that it *is* predicated with the predicate 'impossible of a predicate' is taken in the second sense. This, then, is what is meant by their subject-terms being different." The problem of the absolute nonexistent and how it can be known is an important topic in later Islamic philosophy. For Ṭūsī, it can be resolved through intensional considerations of the *de dicto* rather than the *de re* sense of the expression 'absolutely non-existent'. Insofar, then, that we have something in our minds that we name the 'absolutely non-existent', the thing from the aspect of its *naming* or *label* is known and therefore affirmed in mental existence. But no sooner have we stopped considering that name, 'absolutely non-existent', than nothing remains any more in our minds; the 'absolutely non-existent' in this case is no-thing, not an extramental reality nor even a mental concept. For more on this aspect of later Islamic philosophy, see Lameer, J. (2014).

[64] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 316^{4-6}.

[65] See McGinnis, J. (2007).

[66] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, pp. 312^{10}–313^{7}.

ourselves and its form impressed in or upon a celestial body is, according to Ṭūsī, "obviously impossible" (*min al-muḥālāt al-ẓāhira*):

> The response to his second argument[67] is that neither Plato nor anybody else claims that things which are impossible and in themselves self-contradictory exist in the extramental world, and no-one could ever adopt such a position. As for his statement [*arguendo*] that the perceived form is something in a body absent from the perceiver, not only is that "far-fetched" [as he himself says] but something which is also obviously impossible.[68]

Unfortunately for us Ṭūsī does not explain why it would be "obviously impossible" for a form to impressed upon a far-off body, but one might easily conjecture, as al-Taḥtānī surmises in his *Muḥākamāt*, that he thought this impossibility is "self-evident" (*wa-ka'annahu yaz'amu fīhi l-badāha*).[69] Nevertheless, by giving the example of the intelligible form—that is, a form which can only inhere upon an immaterial or abstracted substrate—al-Taḥtānī shows exactly why Rāzī's position is untenable (or "obviously impossible") given that whatever, by definition, is *immaterial* and therefore *indivisible* cannot inhere within a *body* which, by definition, is both material and divisible. An *intelligible* form can never inhere upon a material substrate no matter "where" this body is; that it be one that is so far away that our cognitive faculties are unaware of its whereabouts makes no difference in the slightest: an "absent" body is a body nonetheless.[70]

The second reason why knowledge, in particular, cannot be a relation has to do with the fact that it is possible not to know (*al-jahl*), the full importance of which to our discussion shall become ever the more significant when we discuss the problem of correspondence in certain kinds of factual statement. Appreciating the definition of ignorance, however, requires us to understand more accurately what the definition of knowledge is, since ignorance is but the "absence of knowledge" (*'adam al-'ilm*) and thus its privation. Ṭūsī gives a careful definition of these terms in *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* remarking that "a form which corresponds to the *external* thing is 'knowledge', while a form that does not correspond to the *external* thing is 'ignorance'".[71] This definition, which to me seems to be a restatement of Aristotle's famous definition of truth at *Metaphysics* Γ.7, 1011b26–27, may appear innocuous at first glance, but anyone with even a slight awareness of the contextual history of these debates will notice two important things. The first

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[67] "Why cannot imaginal forms exist in a self-subsistent fashion as Plato says or as forms impressed in bodies which are absent from us?" (Rāzī)

[68] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 316$^{4–7}$

[69] Al-Taḥtānī, *Muḥākamāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 312$^{3–4}$.

[70] Al-Taḥtānī, *Muḥākamāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 312$^{3–8}$.

[71] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 316$^{2–3}$.

is the seemingly ostensible conflation of the definitions of the "true" and the "false" with the definitions of "knowledge" and "ignorance" which, as I shall prove later, is a deliberate move by Ṭūsī designed to augment Avicenna's proof of mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*). In the meantime, the use of the word "the external," the second noticeable aspect of Ṭūsī's definition of what knowledge and ignorance are, can be interpreted in two ways both of which may be valid depending on context. Whatever is "external" to the perceiver in the first sense of its meaning denotes anything with real existence in the *physical* world and therefore refers specifically to individual particulars in the concrete, i.e. the thing itself. However, in the second sense the word "external" may denote, as Ṭāshküprīzāde explains, whatever has existence independent of the perceiver's mind or cognitive faculties (*al-khārij ʿan al-quwā al-darrāka*), and thus may refer to existents such as the Necessary Existent which, although not a physical being, is nevertheless a being whose existence is "independent of the perceiver"; that is, "external".[72] The second sense of the "external" is thus a much broader concept than the former and is therefore of greater extension.

Now, in his remarks on what the definitions of knowledge and ignorance are, Ṭūsī uses the term "the external" to refer to the sensible particular; that is, he employs the term in the first sense of its meaning. To appreciate the reason why this must be the case and why Ṭūsī cannot be referring to the broader notion of whatever exists independently of the knower's mind will only become clear in our discussion of *nafs al-amr*. The main point for the here and now is that *both* knowledge and ignorance are predicated on the *existence* of "the external" thing which *per se* acts as the condition of a statement's truth-value, what in modern parlance might be referred to as the statement's "truthmaker".

This is an important principle and needs to be explained in order to bring out the full import of Ṭūsī's argument. In the arguments which he puts forward against mental existence, it will be recalled that Rāzī formulated the problem of correspondence as a way of confuting the necessity of mental forms. But this argument, as I have shown, has two different aspects: one pertaining to our knowledge of nonexistents and another pertaining to whether or not our knowledge of things in the understanding corresponds "in the totality of essence" with the thing itself. Our discussion here pertains to the correspondence of non-existent things.

To recapitulate, Rāzī's argument against Avicenna was that *if* the proof of mental existence is based on our knowledge of these so-called "non-existent" things (*al-maʿdūmāt*), then it shall prove to be an ineffectual argument given that knowledge *per definiens* is "the correspondence of a mental form *with the*

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[72] Ṭāshküprīzāde, *Shuhūd*, p. 31.

external thing". But since Avicenna himself admits that the argument for mental existence is premised on our knowledge of things which *do not exist* in the external world, then he, according to Rāzī, would not as such have proffered a theory of *knowledge* but rather a theory of *ignorance*, since true knowledge "must correspond to something in the external world".[73]

Accordingly, in Rāzī's system of thought the only way out of this problem is to posit the necessity of the Platonic Forms. But this is hardly a solution to our problem since it provides no way of accounting for our knowledge of things which are genuinely nonexistent, given that ultimately every known-thing (whether immediately within our sensory reach or far-off in an absent body beyond our phenomenal awareness) is an object of *extramental* existence to which the relation (i.e. our "knowledge") must occur. As far as I can tell it is clear that Rāzī has shifted the meaning of what "the external" is from the first sense of its meaning (namely, the entitative particular) to the second sense of its meaning (namely, whatever exists independently of our minds whether as an entitative particular or as a Platonic Form).

Thus Ṭūsī is faced with the double task of first disproving the Platonic "solution" which Rāzī thinks resolves what he thinks are "anti-realist" tensions within Aristotle's and Avicenna's theories of apperception, and defending second the Aristotelian-Avicennan notion of true knowledge. Having already dealt with Ṭūsī's response to the first challenge above, let us now focus our attention on what he says *vis-à-vis* the Aristotelian notion of correspondence in knowledge.

To start with, Ṭūsī makes an important distinction between a form capable of existing as (or in) an entitative particular—that is, in "the external"—and one which is not. The Avicennan proof of mental existence is based on our assured knowledge of forms *incapable of entitative existence*, of knowledge items such as the idealised forms of mathematical objects of the type described in Euclid's geometry, the truth and falsehood of which cannot depend on their correspondence—or lack thereof—with things in the concrete. In this particular instance, the lack of an entitative referent does not automatically entail the falsity of Euclid's geometry since the entitative mode of existence can only serve as a truthmaking principle of forms *capable* of entitative existence. As al-Taḥtānī, the author of the *Muḥākamāt*, makes abundantly clear:

> We do not accept that a mental form is ignorance whenever it fails to correspond with the external since this would only be true if there were a mental form *and an entitative reality* (*ḥaqīqa khārijiyya*) [that fail to correspond with one another]. If, however, there is a mental form of that which has no

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[73] Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt: De Anima* III.7, p. 235[17–19].

> realisation in the external, as in the case of *beings of reason* (*al-umūr al-iʿtibāriyya*), it would not follow that this is ignorance.[74]

I shall prove toward the end of this chapter that al-Taḥtānī appropriates this idea directly from the writings and teachings of Ṭūsī, who to me it seems has made some enormous contributions to the way scholars of the later middle period understood the notion of correspondence in their realist conceptions of truth. Rāzī's automatic judgment that the forms of non-existent things are false (i.e. "ignorance") is naïve and hastily premature. Forms that are *incapable* of extramental existence do not have their truth-making principle in the external thing itself. So while entitative particulars cannot make *iʿtibārī* concepts true, it is important to realise that they cannot make it false either.

We have had to touch on Ṭūsī's defence of the correspondence theory of truth in connection with negative existentials for the simple reason that it appears in the vicinity of his response to Rāzī's contention that the true modality of knowledge is the relation (*iḍāfa*). To see why it has been necessary to discuss this aspect of Ṭūsī's thought becomes clearer if now we consider why 'knowledge' in particular cannot be a relation; and that is because both concepts, knowledge and ignorance, contain the notion of correspondence within their meaning; whereas the relation *per se* does not.

As Ṭūsī says, "one cannot consider the notion of correspondence or its lack thereof for the relation because of the impossibility of its existence in the external world. And so apprehension (*idrāk*) in the sense of a relation cannot be either 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*) or 'ignorance' (*jahl*)".[75] This—an excellent observation—settles the argument as to why the relation *per se* cannot be the true-nature of knowledge. The point can be summarised by noting that every relation (or relational term) is something with an "in-between" status, and nothing having this as its complete description could ever possibly correspond to anything else, for the simple reason that if it were to do so then it would itself have to be a relative *within* a co-relative pairing and would thus no longer be a relation—i.e. something with an "in-between" status—anymore. The truth of this is only further compounded given Ṭūsī's arguments in the *Tajrīd* for why the relation cannot be something whose existence is a mind-independent affair.

So while, on the one hand, he has demonstrated why relations are incapable of existence save in mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), Ṭūsī has also demonstrated why knowledge *per se* must be something relational (*iḍāfī*). As Ḥillī observes, "knowledge is always knowledge of something" and

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[74] Al-Taḥtānī, *Muḥākamāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 315^{8-10}

[75] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 316^{2-3}.

therefore must be related to an object of knowledge.[76] This is to say just that the form of a thing in the mind is precisely the form of *that thing* to which it is related, where the relation in question—like all relations—is *iʿtibārī*.

To summarise this section, we have touched on some of the reasons why knowledge cannot be a relation and explained why, from Ṭūsī's perspective, Rāzī's "epistemology" is "ontologically" flawed and inherently untenable. The truth of the matter (*taḥqīq*) is that every relation (*iḍāfa*) is *iʿtibārī*; yet nothing of this nature can explain or be the cause of something real (*amr wujūdī*) like knowledge. By disassembling the theories that Ghazālī and Rāzī put forward as a reaction to the infelicities which they perceived to be apparent in Avicenna's theory of knowledge, Ṭūsī has demonstratively shown why their alternative theories are much the worse. He has therefore completed the first part of the dialectic, which is to point out the vestigial nature of Avicenna's opponents' counter-theories. The second task which Ṭūsī must now face is the task of defending the original thesis, namely Avicenna's theory of mental existence, which, as we shall now see, he handles expertly.

The Nature and Function of Mental Forms

For heuristic purposes it had been expedient for us consider Rāzī's criticisms of mental existence in the form of individual objections to Avicenna's theory of knowledge (*idrāk*). The truth of the matter, however, is that each and every one of these criticisms stems from a single attack on the nature and function of mental forms; for ultimately it is their necessity in the cognitive process which Rāzī is out to undermine. Rāzī's objections can therefore be dealt with in one of two ways: either at the level of the particular wherewith each individual objection is considered and rebutted one by one, or at the level of the universal insofar as a single principle will suffice to counteract each of the specific criticisms. Ṭūsī employs both of these techniques and oftentimes in a fashion that is intermingled, which leaves the task of separating the pure principle from its application to the individual criticisms to us as commentators on his philosophy, a philosophy in which the principles that govern his thinking always play a more significant role and are invariably therefore the more important.

Previously, I enumerated some of the principles of knowledge in Ṭūsī's commentary on the *Ishārāt* and did so in order to demonstrate, among other things, that 'knowledge' (*idrāk*) is a term which is *ism mushakkik*—meaning that it is predicated analogously and can therefore be said "in many ways", which is

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[76] Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 207[14].

going to prove significant as we shall see. In this section I want to consider those general points in Ṭūsī's thought that relate specifically to the *nature* and *function* of mental forms (*al-ṣuwar al-dhihniyya*), and especially the intelligible form that is uniquely characteristic of intellectual understanding (*al-taʿaqqul*); since after all it is this degree of knowledge that is by far the most relevant to the construction of apodictic knowledge. I will discuss these—the *nature* of a mental form and its *function* in knowledge—individually at first, and then show how in combination with one another and the principles at the top of this chapter, Ṭūsī has a principled theory of knowledge which can be applied to each of the individual criticisms of Rāzī against mental existence.

The Nature of Mental Forms

We must begin with the *nature* of the form and its relation to the external thing of which it is that thing's form, attending thereafter to the crucially important question as to which of these exactly is the proper object of knowledge (*al-mudrak*). However, this is no easy matter, and as I shall now explain, Ṭūsī's opinions have been criticised by a range of personalities including the likes of al-ʿAllāma Ḥillī for their suggestion (at least *prima facie*) that the object of knowledge in our minds is not one and the same as the realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*) of things themselves but something else unequal to them, either their forms, likenesses, images or what have you.

The upshot of these criticisms is this: *if* Ṭūsī asserts that the forms of things are *unequal* to their realities, then he would not have defended the theory of mental representation against those criticisms based on the problem of correspondence, and thus he would have failed to provide a realistic account of our knowledge. Personally, I think these objections are off the mark because of their failure to observe a hugely significant distinction in the history of ideas which is—and to the best of my knowledge, for the first time—found within Ṭūsī's thought between precisely the *nature* of a form and its *function*. And to state upfront what I am going to try and prove in the remainder of this section, though Ṭūsī does not think there is an equality between the *nature* of a thing's form (*ṣūra*) in the mind and its extramental reality (*ḥaqīqa*), he does nonetheless mark out the function and purpose of a mental form to be precisely one of making the *reality* of a thing known. This of course is also the position of Avicenna for whom, it will be recalled, knowledge is "the *representation* of a thing's *reality* with the knower" (*Ishārāt* III.7), it being superfluous to mention *tamaththul* if what occurs in mental existence is the *ḥaqīqa* itself. Now, as Ṭūsī says in *Sharḥ al-*

Ishārāt, the likeness (*mithāl*) of a thing is its form (*ṣūra*)[77] and both he and Avicenna confirm that the *ḥaqīqa* of a thing is *known* albeit through the facilitation of the mental form. Unlike Rāzī, Ṭūsī differentiates between two very important questions: (1) "What is the *function* of the mental form?"; and (2) "What is the *nature* of the mental form?". And it's this difference that makes his commentary on Avicenna's pointer a much more nuanced and balanced commentary than Rāzī's.

Before discussing the function of a form, however, we must first correctly establish the meaning and import of Ṭūsī's remarks about the nature of the form itself and the relation this term has to other terms occurring alongside it in the context of these discussions. So given that Avicenna says the likeness (*mithāl*) of a thing is a representation (*tamaththul*) of its true-nature or reality (*ḥaqīqa*), and keeping in mind Ṭūsī's comment that the likeness of a thing is just its form (*ṣūra*), then the conclusion to be derived from this is just that the multiplicity of terms alone would suggest that the *mithāl* (or *ṣūra*) of a thing and its *ḥaqīqa* are in some sense different, and that each of them in turn is different to the thing (*shay'*) itself. Our primary task, then, is first to understand how the individual terms within this ternary—namely, *ḥaqīqa*, *ṣūra* or *mithāl*, and *shay'*—are interrelated. What we have in effect is a semantic triangle with *shay'* as the apex and *ḥaqīqa* and *ṣūra* each positioned at the two other vertices on the base of the triangle (see Figure 1).

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[77] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 313.[7–8].

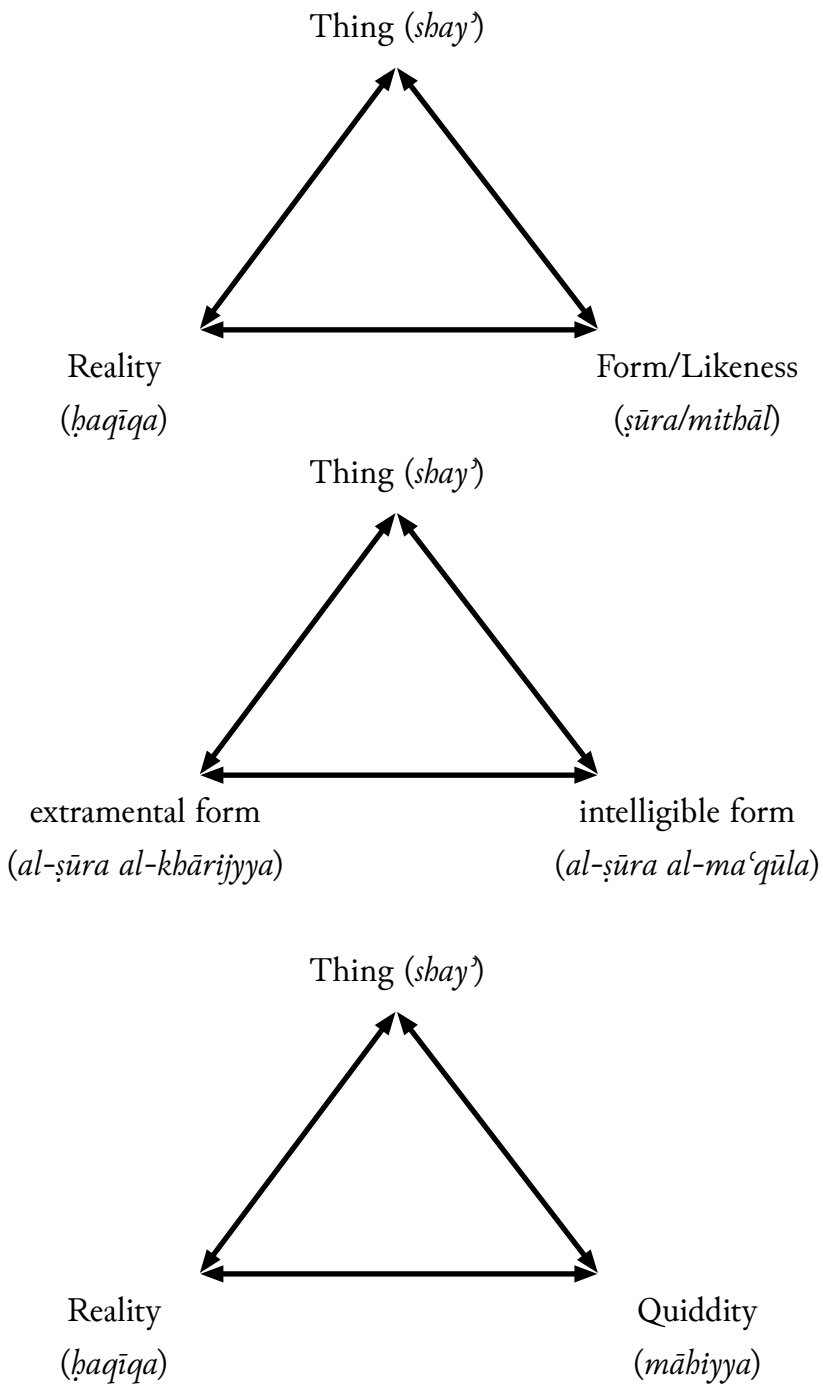

Figure 1: The relation between a thing (*shay'*) and its form (*ṣūra*) and reality (*ḥaqīqa*)

These diagrams, ordered sequentially from top to bottom, may appear simple enough at face value, but I should warn the reader that in order to derive them I have had to scour at least a dozen texts to make sense of Ṭūsī's explanations in light of the criticisms made by later thinkers in the hope of separating those objections which have no validity to them whatsoever from those which may be on the mark. For the

remainder of this section I shall explain what it is I am trying to convey by constant reference to these diagrams.[78]

Recall that one of the objections to mental existence was Rāzī's so-called 'problem of attribution' (as we have labelled it), whereby if the form or likeness which occurs in the mind is identical "in the totality of essence" (*fī tamām al-māhiyya*) to the extramental thing then all of the properties or attributes that occur to it—that is, the thing—in extramental existence would have to accrue upon the object of knowledge in mental existence. For example, the mind has to become hot whenever it "thinks" the form of heat, cold whenever it "thinks" the form of coldness, … etc. Ṭūsī's answer to this problem is that the *thing* itself—for example, heat *per se*—does not occur in the mind, since in this case our knowledge would not be a *representation* of heat but merely *heat* itself in the mind. Therefore, since it is the *form* of heat that occurs in mental existence and not heat itself there must be a real distinction of sorts between them.

As he says when responding to this problem in *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*,

> It is incorrect to attempt a disproof of the theory of impression [i.e., of forms in mental existence] by arguing from the [supposed] necessity of the knower's knowledge of heat making them hot, since they [the ancient philosophers] do not advocate the impression of a form which is identical to heat. And there is a difference between the *form* of a thing and *that thing*; for a human-being is rational but his form is not.[79]

This passage gives us a clear reason why the problem of attribution is false. Because a form is not the same (*muṣāwiyya*) as that of which it is the form there is no equality between them, and since their existences are not the same the adjuncts of one existence cannot occur to the other mode of existence.

In our first diagram, then, Ṭūsī maintains that a form in the mind (bottom right vertex) is not identical to the actual thing (apex). This is because the form of a thing is its representation; and if the thing itself were in the mind—which is obviously impossible for it to be—then any talk of forms and likeness and representations would have been superfluous. But if this is true then an obvious question arises and that is whether the mental form (*al-ṣūra al-dhihniyya*) corresponds to the thing itself. But if, as Ṭūsī himself mentions, they are unequal to one another, this it seems would only reinforce the objection of their non-correspondence. This is where I should like to urge some caution, however, for at numerous places in this thesis I have said that Avicenna and Ṭūsī are "representational realists" who affirm that our knowledge corresponds to things themselves albeit not directly. The question, then, is not as simple as whether or not

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[78] I shall refer to each of the diagrams from top to bottom as the 'first', 'second' and 'third' diagram.

[79] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 156^{20-22}

the mental form corresponds to the extramental thing; but in which sense they are corresponding and which sense they are not. We need to specify, in other words, how the mental form and the extramental thing are the "same" and how they are "different".

Dealing first with the aspect of difference, we should start by pushing this point even further by noting Ṭūsī's insistence that not only is the mental form different from the thing itself (*dhāt al-shay'*) but also its true-nature or reality (*ḥaqīqat al-shay'*). Firstly, like Avicenna, Ṭūsī holds knowledge to be the representation of a thing's reality (*Ishārāt* III.7), and so, as I have said already, the representation of a thing cannot be equal to the thing itself or its *ḥaqīqa*. Hence in our first diagram none of the vertices is *completely* identical to any of the others. Secondly, it could be retorted that the *ḥaqīqa* of a thing is just the thing itself, that they are synonymous terms, and thus the form is only distinct to one thing in actuality not two. But I have shown already in our discussion of quiddity (*māhiyya*) that the *ḥaqīqa* of a thing is *that by which* it is *what it is*, and so it must be different to thing itself in a similar way to how the immanent cause of a thing is different to the thing itself. Otherwise, everything would be its own nature and there would necessarily only be one of each kind of thing. If, therefore, the form of a thing in the mind is different to its *ḥaqīqa*, then none of the adjuncts occurring to it outside of the mind would occur to it inside the mind.

The point is stressed by Ṭūsī in *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal* as follows:

> The correct opinion is that [the form] is not the same [as the essence of the externally known thing] in the totality of essence (*fī tamām al-māhiyya*), because whatever is the same [as the essence of something] is just that essence itself or one of its individual particulars. Therefore, if between the essence [of a thing] and its form there is a twoness in kind, the form and the essence would be different.[80]

I have translated the term '*māhiyya*' as essence here even though previously I said it was an unhelpful translation insofar as discussions of this nature are concerned. This is because the term '*māhiyya*' either means quiddity ("whatness") or true-nature ("reality"), and it is always necessary to first decide which of these meanings is the one which the form is said to be non-identical to. Historically speaking this is where it gets controversial. If, on the one hand, Ṭūsī denies the realities of things occurring in mental existence, then it goes without saying that our knowledge would not be of realities themselves but of mental objects which are merely their imitations. If, on the other hand, he denies our knowledge of their quiddities, then he shall have denied our knowledge *tout court* since to know a thing is—scientifically speaking—is just to

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Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, pp. 156^{23}–157^{2}. Thomist philosophers concur with Ṭūsī on this point; see e.g. Maritain, J. (1959: 124) who says that "The concept and thing make two from the point of view of entity; but as formal sign, and in the pure line of knowing rather than being, we must say that it and the object do not make two".

know its "whatness". Could it be then that Ṭūsī is an anti-realist—dare I say "sceptic"—when it comes to our knowledge of external things as some have claimed?[81] The short answer is that he is not; the long answer is much more complicated but which I must admit involves some degree of interpretation on my part which others may disagree with.

Personally, I think the problem has to with the equivocation of certain key terms. Remember that according to Ṭūsī the term '*māhiyya*' in the strict sense is "the thing made intelligible" (*al-amr al-mutaʿaqqal*) and therefore, properly speaking, only exists in the mind. A quiddity *sensu stricto* is an **idea**, and there are no ideas (unless you're a Platonist) outside of the mind. In an even stricter sense still, the *māhiyya* qua *māhiyya* is a meta-concept, a "secondary intelligible", which is even more assuredly of an intentional character than the previous.[82] Similarly, the term '*ḥaqīqa*' in the strictest sense is a nature "considered with extramental existence" (*maʿa iʿtibār al-wujūd*), and therefore properly speaking only exists outside the mind. By being attentive to the technical definitions which Ṭūsī has in mind the quiddity of a thing *sensu stricto* cannot be identical to its reality, *and neither of them can be identical to the mental form*. I have tried to illustrate these points in the second and third diagrams: the intelligible form *qua* something mental cannot be one and the same as the reality (or extramental form) of a thing *qua* something extramental, since the mental and the extramental are not the same—unless of course you are Rāzī and think every "mental" object is just something reducible to something extramental. Hence the quiddity of a thing is not the same as its reality.

This may be well and good but it only goes so far in providing an answer to the question why the form in the understanding is not identical to the form in nature. The more correct response will make mention of the fact that these are two distinct ontological modes of existence: extramental existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*) and mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*). This distinction, the full implications of which are nowhere better illustrated than in the philosophy of Ṭūsī, means that whenever the word 'existence' (*wujūd*) is predicated of them it is done so by way of analogy; one of the consequences of which is that the subjects of which this term is predicated needn't necessarily have anything in common apart from their common accident which is that they are "existents". The analogy of being (*tashkīk* of *wujūd*) thus straightaway resolves the problem of the external mind since "being is said in many ways". In one sense the mind is an external thing; but in another sense it is not. More importantly, however, since 'existence' is

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[81] In the modern period, see al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Niḥāyat al-ḥikma*, p. 62^{6-8}.

[82] See Ṭūsī/Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 50^{4-8}.

predicated analogously of the mind's contents and of entitative objects themselves, neither mode of existence can be exactly the same as the other since identity implies the negation of every possible difference. As a result, 'existence' would have to be predicated of them *equally* as a univocal term, just as Rāzī maintains. The *extramental* form and the *mental* form cannot, therefore, be identical in terms of their *existence*, since otherwise there would be no distinction to speak of between them in terms of what is in extramental and mental existence.

It is for this reason, therefore, that al–Ṭūsī says the things of which 'existence' is predicated may differ in kind (as when, for example, 'man' differs from 'horse') or—should they happen to share a common nature (as when, for example, Zayd and 'Amr share a common nature)—in their non-essential concomitants and adjunct properties (*lawāzim*). As far as the discussion of knowledge-forms is concerned it is the latter of these which is more significant given that a thing's nature *qua* nature is the same regardless of whether it is in extramental or mental existence. As pithily stated in a line of the *Tajrīd*, Ṭūsī writes that: "[…] what exists in the mind is only the form differing in many concomitant adjuncts" (*wa-l-mawjūd fī l-dhihn innamā huwa l-ṣūra al-mukhālifa fī kathīrin min al-lawāzim*).[83] That with which this mental form is "differing" is the *ḥaqīqa* or extramental form of whatever thing is known extramentally, and the aspect from which they are different is the aspect of their *lawāzim*. In other words, the form as it exists in the mind and in the external object is the *same* form in itself (*min ḥaythu nafsihi*). Yet since from the point of view of its *existence* the form of a thing can never be without adjunct properties (*lawāzim*) clinging to it because of the necessary influence exerted on it by its underlying substrate, be that substrate the mind or matter, neither form is strictly speaking the same form *qua* existence. Hence even an intelligible form is never truly speaking "abstracted" from all the concomitants of existence since 'being in the mind' itself is a concomitant property which is true of every intelligible form. It is only after the form in the mind is *considered* in itself and purified from everything else apart from itself in mental existence that a form is a truly "abstracted" object of thought.

To put it differently, "what" a form is *as an object of mental existence* is not the same intensionally speaking as "what" it is *as an object of knowledge*. In the former sense, an intelligible form is something joined with the *lawāzim* of "mental matter", whereas the intelligible form in the latter sense is purified and abstracted from all foreign coverings in such a way that one sees only the "whatness" in question and nothing else besides. Thus, depending on which of these aspects is being considered, the intelligible form

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[83] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 64[1].

(*al-ṣūra al-maʿqūla*) both is and is not the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of a thing. The problem of correspondence thus boils down to a question of whether one considers the mental form from the aspect of its *existence* on the one hand, or its pristine *self* on the other; of its existence *as an object of extramental and mental existence* or its existence *as an object of knowledge*. Since 'existence' is not a univocal term, the existence of a form in the mind is not the same as its existence outside of it. Yet a form which is considered from the aspect of itself and only itself, of its "whatness" and nothing else besides it, is the same form *qua* itself both in the mind and externally. Ṭūsī summarises this in his famous remark that "a quiddity *qua* itself is only itself" (*wa-hiya min ḥaythu hiya laysat illā hiya*).[84]

Thus when responding to Rāzī, Ṭūsī explains:

> The quiddity of a thing is whatever occurs in the mind from that thing itself albeit without its extramental accidents. Hence the reason why the term 'quiddity' (*māhiyya*) has been derived from 'What is it?', for the response to this question is given by it [i.e. the quiddity]. Whenever, therefore, a person states that the thing intellectually apprehended from the sky is not equal to the sky itself existing externally, what is meant is that the intellectually apprehended form of the sky abstracted from concomitant attachments is not equal to the sense-perceived form of the sky conjoined with such attachments. If, then, what he [i.e. Rāzī] intends by 'non-equality' [i.e. non-correspondence] is the difference between being-abstracted and not-being abstracted, then that would be correct. But if his intention is that the concept (*mafhūm*) of the sky itself is not common to both the abstracted and conjoined forms, then that is false. If a person were to add to his statement and say that the intellectually apprehended form of the sky is not identical to the external sky in the totality of essence (*fī tamām al-māhiyya*), as is the want of this noble commentator [Rāzī], then his intended meaning is that the intellectually apprehended form of the sky is not identical to the externally existing sky *in the totality of its intelligibility* (*fī tamām al-maʿqūliyya*), i.e. it is not identical to it in the state of being something intelligible, then this—as you have heard—is senseless talk; for what is apprehended intellectually from the sky is nothing else but the quiddity of the sky itself as it exists [externally] never mind [the question whether these are] equal. As for blackness not being identical to whiteness in the totality of essence, well that is obvious; just as it is obvious that drawing a comparison between the two cases [that is, the case of the external sky and its intelligible form and the case of blackness and whiteness] is incorrect. The difference between the intellectually apprehended form of the sky and the sense-perceived form is that one of these is an accident inhering in a non-sensible substrate abstracted [from matter] while the other is a sensible substance not in a substrate, which difference is the same as the realised species-nature which is sometimes taken with accidents and sometimes with their opposites. By contrast, the difference between blackness and whiteness is a difference between the non-realized generic-nature which is sometimes taken with a differentia that makes it subsistent in the form of a species and at other times is taken with another differentia that makes it subsistent in the form of another species contrary to the first. If, then, what is intelligibly apprehended from the sky is taken from the aspect of it being an accident which subsists through

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[84] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 73[7].

> some soul, then it would not be the [external] quiddity of the sky but its quiddity from the aspect that it is a *form* occurring in the mind and corresponding to it.[85]

The mental and extramental form of a thing are non-correspondent then insomuch as and to the extent that the former is entirely abstracted from matter and its attachments (*al-tajarrud*), while the latter is not (*al-lātajarrud*). But insofar as these attachments are ignored and what is considered is just the form *qua* itself, the form which is present in the mind is identical to the form present in the external thing itself. And it is only in this respect that the term 'correspondence' has been used by the *falāsifa*, since what is ultimately at stake in discussions about knowledge is not whether the *existences* of the forms conform but whether or not the forms themselves *qua* themselves correspond.

Some later thinkers have accused Ṭūsī of holding to an anti-realist position here given his explicit statement that the two forms—the one in the mind and its external counterpart—are different; that they have a "twoness" (*ithnayniyya*) instead of complete uniformity. But it is important to stress that this difference for him is with respect to them "being abstracted" (*al-tajarrud*) and "not being abstracted" (*al-lātajarrud*) rather than with respect to the form *qua* itself. He holds that the same quiddity *qua* itself—i.e. the natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*)—is present in the mind and in things themselves. If, therefore, he seems to be denying the "complete correspondence" of quiddities then it is only because the term *māhiyya* is equivocal.

The form of a thing is therefore the form of its *nature* (*ṣūra ṭabīʿiyya*) and the form of its species (*ṣūra nawʿiyya*), and *sensu stricto* **it** is what is said to be correspondent between the two modes of existence. The 'quiddity' of a thing is this form in the understanding, but this itself has two possibilities since one may either speak of the form being the object of knowledge, in which case the mind's attention is focussed on a mental object together with the attachments concomitant to its mental existence; or the object of knowledge is the quiddity itself, that is, the form *considered* not as *mental form* but as the pristine object of understanding, the "whatness" and only the "whatness" of a thing. From different points of consideration (*iʿtibār*) the intelligible form both is and is not the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of a thing.[86]

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[85] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* VII.5, vol. 3, pp. 281^{9}–282^{10}.

[86] Of all of Ṭūsī's commentators it is al-Lāhijī who I think has understood this better than others. As he explains, Ṭūsī's commentators accuse him of denying the occurrence of realities in the mind, and that in the subsequent periods after Ṭūsī scholars are divided into two camps: (1) those who, when they affirm mental existence, intend by it the existence of mental forms and mental likenesses but not the realities of things themselves; and (2) those who, when they affirm mental existence, intend by it the actual occurrence of the realities of things themselves in the mind. For al-Lāhijī, these are not two separate schools of thought: "The truth is that since the quiddities of things when entering the mind do not manifest their traces (*āthār*) nor produce their properties (*aḥkām*), the term 'likenesses' was applied

The Function of the Mental Form

This conveniently brings us to the discussion of the *function* that cognitive forms have in mental existence. What Ṭūsī has to offer in this regard is—I believe—of genuine merit to him as a thinker and carries great significance for his critical philosophy. It is an aspect of his thinking which shows marked resemblance with the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, whose commentators, such as John of St. Thomas and Jacques Maritain, celebrate as a major feat of Aquinas's critical realism.[87]

The problem here can be introduced by repeating what Rāzī has said concerning the mental form and what relation, if any, this has to the external thing. This, as we have seen, is part of a strategy aimed at confuting Avicenna's theory of mental existence. According to Rāzī, if what is known is the form of Zayd and not Zayd himself, then this would be tantamount to a scepticism *vis-à-vis* the existence of actual objects. The claim here dovetails with the argument which by now is quite familiar: either the form is identical "in the totality of essence" to Zayd himself or not. For Rāzī, neither of these options is of any avail to Avicenna: the first entails the problem of attribution; the second the problem of non-correspondence; and both of these being unacceptable to Rāzī lead him to the denial of mental existence.

While Rāzī may have been quick in his assertions on the first point he might actually have a point *vis-à-vis* the problem of correspondence. In the *Taʿlīqāt*, Avicenna twice states that the object of knowledge is the *form* of a thing and not the thing itself, which he claims is only "accidentally known" (*maʿlūm bi-l-ʿaraḍ*). The immediate temptation here is to interpret him as saying that the form of a thing—and not the thing itself—is the *first* object of knowledge. But this can hardly be Avicenna's true opinion not least because it would imply there are two objects of knowledge in a single act of understanding: the form which is known first and the thing which is known subsequently—which means getting to the true object of knowledge is a somewhat jolted process. Furthermore, given our uncertainties about the historical context of the *Taʿlīqāt*'s composition, I personally would hesitate in attributing this idea to Avicenna himself. Be this as it may the problem has been countered by Ṭūsī who offers a uniquely subtle understanding of what exactly the *function* of a form is; and as far as I am aware there is no exact counterpart in Avicenna's thought to the idea which we are about to explain.

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by the ancients [to describe this situation]; for the likeness of a thing does not produce that thing's trace [in the mind]. They do not say that what occurs in the mind is [only] the likenesses of things [and not their realities or quiddities]; these are not two schools of thought" (Al-Lāhijī, *Shawāriq*, vol. 1, p. 218).

[87] See, for example, Maritain, J. (1959, 71ff)

In *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, Ṭūsī responds to Rāzī's sceptical thesis—that what is perceived is the likeness or form of Zayd and not Zayd himself—by drawing our attention to a crucial distinction between the *object of perception* on the one hand and the *act of perception* (or the *process of perception*) on the other. The response he gives is applicable to each of the degrees of knowledge (*marātib al-idrāk*) albeit that in this particular instance it is focussed on whether it is Zayd that is the object of sight (*mubṣar*) or his likeness (*mithāluhu*).

As Ṭūsī explains:

> The object of sight is Zayd and there is not a doubt nor any disagreement about this. As for the *act of seeing* this happens when his likeness occurs in the instrument of the perceiver, and the failure to distinguish between the *object of perception* and *perception* itself is what has caused this objection to arise.[88]

In the act of seeing Zayd, therefore, the *form* of Zayd is not the object of sight (*al-mubṣar*) but rather Zayd himself. But in order for Zayd to be known his likeness or form needs to be represented with the perceiver, there being a crucial difference between the thing itself which is the proper object of knowledge and the means by which it is made known. This important clarification is not only representative of the general tenor of Ṭūsī's ambidextrous conceptualism—of his ability, that is, to see things from different conceptual perspectives (*i'tibār*)—but the harbinger also to one of his main contributions to post-classical philosophy in Islam. He is identifying a principle according to which a distinction must be drawn between the *what* of knowledge, that is, the object of knowledge, and the *how* of knowledge, that is, the means or process by which something is made known to the knower.

To repeat my earlier contention, I maintain that Ṭūsī is an epistemological realist but not of the type which is referred to in contemporary philosophy as "naïve realism". He considers the external object to be really known and that it—properly speaking—is the primary and *per se* object of knowledge. But this for him is the *end* of our knowledge and not its *means*; it is the result of a process which assumes a particular cognitive framework in which mental forms facilitate the actualisation of that end. The function of a mental form is therefore instrumental; it is not the conscious object of knowledge, but the unconscious instrument of knowledge which facilitates the perceiver's interaction with those external objects which are the true objects of her perception. Whenever a perceiver looks at Zayd, they are unaware of the fact that they are using their visual apparatus to do so. The form is thus an instrument which enables the perceiver to sense,

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[88] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.7, vol. 2, p. 322$^{3-4}$.

imagine and understand the object of perception. Perhaps, in light of this observation, it would not be inappropriate to follow the path already trodden by the Thomist philosophers and say, without it being unwarranted, that Ṭūsī's description of the function of cognitive forms is that they are *formal signs* as opposed to *instrumental signs*.[89] Let us repeat that this is a Ṭūsīan distinction save for the the terminology itself. By specifying the function of a form and contrasting it with the true of object of knowledge, Ṭūsī has pinpointed Rāzī's mistake. Rāzī mistakes precisely the *means* by which a thing is known—that is, the cognitive form—for the object of knowledge itself, mistaking the *formal* concept for the *objective* concept, and as a result inadmissibly judges the Peripatetic view of perception as being either anti-realist or tantamount to scepticism *vis-à-vis* real objects of existence. In other words, w*hat* we know and our explanation of *how* we know it are distinct epistemological inquiries, and despite its brevity the aforesaid remark of Ṭūsī concerning this distinction possesses a depth of philosophical meaning and deftness that needs to be attended to. Indeed, what is said in these few lines is expanded and developed into a complete theory concerning the *function* of the mental form in other parts of Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* and elsewhere such as in the *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*.

For example, consider the case of the *Ishārāt* in which Avicenna outlines the theory of abstraction (*tajrīd*) and summarises the various degrees of knowledge (*marātib al-idrāk*) that occur as a result of the initially sense-perceived form of sensible objects being denuded from matter and its concomitant attachments. The ostensible aim of abstraction is ultimately directed toward the formation of the intelligible concept, the quiddity (*māhiyya*) of the known object, which, says Ṭūsī, "are not forms transferred from

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[89] As Maritain (1959: 119–120) explains: "Thomists distinguish between two kinds of essentially different *signs*: what they call *instrumental sign*, and what they call *formal sign*. An instrumental sign is anything that, being itself first known, makes some other thing known consecutively: a streak of smoke we see rising into the sky, a portrait painted on canvas that we see in a gallery—both are objects upon which our knowledge first bears, only to pass from thence to other objects that are known thanks to them—to the fire of which the smoke is the effect, to the sitter of whom the portrait is the image and the sign. A formal sign is a sign whose whole essence is to signify. It is not an object which, having, first, its proper value for us as an object, is found, besides, to signify another. Rather, it is anything that *makes known*, before being itself a known object. More exactly, let us say it is something that, before being known as an object by a reflective act, is known only by the very knowledge that brings the mind to the object through it mediation. In other words, it is not known by 'appearing' as object by 'disappearing' in face of the object, for its very essence is to bear the mind to something other than itself. All that we have established up to this point enables us to understand that the *species expressae*, or the elaborated presentative forms which intervene in knowing, are formals signs, not instrumental signs." As I am going to show, Ṭūsī's understanding of the function of mental forms or "species" is perfectly in line with the Thomistic theory inasmuch as he also posits the role of forms to be that akin to the *formal sign* and not an *instrumental sign*. In addition to Maritain, see J. Piefer (1952) for an especially brilliant study and in-depth survey of the Thomistic theory of the function of *species intelligibilis* and the nature of the concept in general.

particular objects themselves but impressed upon the soul by the Active Intellect".[90] Abstraction in other words is not a "process"; it is not the contiguous movement of a single form beginning at the senses and terminating at the intellect, but rather the upward movement of a sensible form raised to the imagination which, by creating the conditions suitable for its reception, prepares the soul for the downward emanation of the intelligible species from the Active Intellect.[91] The *sensibilia* do not *per se* become the *intelligibilia*, but without them the soul could not be prepared for their reception in the rational faculty. Avicenna does not however explicitly differentiate between the form *as an object of knowledge* and the function of a form *as a formal sign*. Perhaps the commentator is burdened with this responsibility and it is Ṭūsī, not Rāzī, who duly completes this task:

> The meaning of its abstraction is that this nature to which the notion of community is joined is stripped from external attachments due to matter, even though considered from a different perspective it is covered by individuating mental attachments. The nature considered from one of these perspectives is that *by* which another thing is observed and known, while considered from the other perspective is *that which itself* is observed and known.[92]

He elaborates on this truly remarkable point in the *Talkhīṣ* by explicitly noting the instrumentality of the mental form, stating:

> There is a point here whose truth ought to be verified, *viz.* that a thing *being an object of understanding* which the intellect observes and whose existence and non-existence it considers is something other than it *being an instrument* for the intellector who, whenever she observes that which is an instrument for her understanding, does not observe [the thing itself]—which thing she observes by the facility of that instrument—such as when, for example, an individual apprehends the sky *by* a form in her mind (*ʿaql*) for which the object of her understanding is the sky. At the time of this happening she does not observe the form which causes her mind to apprehend the sky. She makes no judgment concerning the form but merely understands that the object of her apprehension by that form is the sky and that it is a substance. If, thereafter, she subsequently focuses her attention on that form and makes it the object of understanding so that it is then no longer an instrument for observing something else but itself the thing observed, she will then find the form to be an accident which exists in a substrate, namely her intellect […].[93]

Similarly, in *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, he writes:

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[90] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.15, vol. 2, p. 368^{2-3}.

[91] This opinion, it has been argued, is also the belief of Avicenna, most notably argued by Michot, Y. (1986) and Black, D. (2014).

[92] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* III.8, vol. 2, p. 327^{4-7}.

[93] Ṭūsī, *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 107^{12-18}.

> The consideration (*iʿtibār*) of the occurrence of human in the mind from the aspect of it being the *quiddity* of the human is different to the consideration (*iʿtibār*) of the occurrence of human in the mind from the aspect of it being a *mental form*. The former is to know the human; the latter is the form which is understood as belonging to the human, and it requires another act of understanding such as the first. If the mind makes an assertion about human in the first consideration then it is incumbent that it be correspondent with the external thing, or else every confidence in the mind's ability to judge objectively would be lost. If, however, the mind forms a judgment of human in the second consideration then it is not incumbent that it be necessarily correspondent with the external thing. For it has not judged the external human but rather asserted something pertaining to the mental and mental alone.[94]

The key point which is being communicated in all of these separate remarks is that a single object in the mind (*dhihn*) can be *considered* differently from various intensional perspectives. These are considerations (*iʿtibārāt*) which only the intellect (*ʿaql*) is capable of performing. The objective concept is that thing whose nature (*ṭabīʿa*) is the proper object of knowledge in the intellect's observance and consideration: it is the *quiddity* of a thing in the specific sense of this word. By contrast, the formal concept is the self-same nature considered as a *mental form*: it is the *reflexive* object of knowledge which the knower "makes into an object of understanding" by introspecting on the knowing process itself. The formal concept is therefore unbeknownst to the knower in the act of knowing the objective concept. It is a *formal sign* whose sole purpose and function is to facilitate our knowledge of things themselves without itself being disclosed to us in the process. If, then, the intellect considers the mental form, then it is only because it has turned on its own operative function to reflect and consider the very instrument which enables it to understand the objective concept.

Ṭūsī has thus established the following principles:

1. The mental form is the principle or "instrument" *by which* the mind knows things.
2. The mental form is unbeknownst to the knower whenever she apprehends things themselves.
3. The mental form is an indirect object of knowledge which is made known to the understanding through reflex knowledge.
4. The thing itself—of which this mental form is its likeness and similitude—is the primary and per se object of knowledge.

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[94] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt: De anima* III.19, p. 390[4–10].

Despite their *intensional* differences it is worth repeating that the form of a thing and its quiddity are not *two separate things* in mental existence, but one thing *considered* differently albeit from different perspectives. In one sense (the *extensional* consideration) the intelligible form (*species intelligibilis*) of a thing and its quiddity are identical; in another sense (the *intensional* consideration) they are distinct. The failure to note this distinction is what has caused Rāzī to slip and make—from Ṭūsī's perspective—a howler of a mistake. The problem of categories ultimately reduces to a conflation of these different aspects of consideration in mental existence. As Ṭūsī says, some things are substances from the aspect of their *quiddities* but accidents from the aspect of their *mental forms*—there being no contradiction here because the particular *intension* under which the subject is being considered in each of the judgments is not the same.

Ṭūsī's explication of the nature and function of forms in mental existence not only adds considerably to our understanding of Avicenna's theory of knowledge (*idrāk*) but also effectively defends that theory against Rāzī's criticisms. The key to this analysis has always been to emphasise the adroitness in Ṭūsī's ability to separate different intensional perspectives from another, of his ability that is to demonstrate the power of critical self-understanding and putting into application the full potential of the intellect's capacity to reason at different levels within the hierarchy of understanding. Ṭūsī's full appraisal and thoroughgoing implementation of the *al-iʿtibār al-ʿaqlī* in relation to Avicenna's metaphysics is the *conditio sine qua non* of this thought-system, and not surprisingly perhaps his greatest contribution to the history and development of post-classical philosophy in Islam.

I shall end this section by demonstrating just one instance of Ṭūsī's influence on later thinkers which also happens to be conveniently related to the discussion of mental forms and their function specifically as intermediaries of knowledge. This influence occurs in the towering figure of the fourteenth century scholar al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, one of the great minds of later Scholasticism in Islam and a commentator (directly and indirectly) on a number of Ṭūsī's works. Al-Jurjānī composed a small treatise entitled *Risāla fī 'ilm al-shay' bi-l-wajh* in which he effectively seized on Ṭūsī's dichotomisation of the mental form as an *instrument* of knowledge and an *object* of knowledge itself (albeit without mentioning his source). Because of its striking resemblance to Ṭūsī's remarks in the *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Jurjānī's treatise has been translated here in full.[95]

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[95] The following translation is based on a copy of the treatise located at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (MS Arab e. 236). I am grateful to Alasdair Watson for drawing my attention to this treatise.

Al-Jurjānī writes:

> An individual looking into a mirror may at times direct himself toward the impressed image therein so as to be completely preoccupied with it, observing it with the purpose of investigating its states in such a way that he becomes unaware of the mirror and its properties—such as its clarity, its brightness, and the proportion of its parts and other properties. In this instance the one looking into the mirror will have made the mirror an instrument (*āla*) for observing that image and its properties, in a manner such that the mirror is that by which he sees the image and the means by which he attains the object of sight. In such circumstances the object of sight and vision in truth is that impressed image and not the mediating instrument since no attention has been paid to it. Hence it is not possible to know anything concerning its state nor is it possible to form any judgment about it. On other occasions, however, the looker may take the mirror itself as the object of his sight and the thing which his vision is intent on seeing, without paying any attention to anything else besides itself—such the images imprinted in it. And now the looker gains knowledge of the mirror, the beauty of its manufacture and the quality of its material. There is no doubt concerning this matter.
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> By this analogy the difference between *knowing the means* and *knowing a thing by facility of that means* has been made clear. For man's insight (*al-baṣīra*) may at times be directed towards a concept (*mafhūm*) which it has sought and whose states it is capable of knowing without attending to the states of the particulars that fall beneath that concept; while at other times man's intellect will make it [the concept] an instrument by which it gazes on those particulars and a mirror in which it observes them in a summary fashion, thus enabling man's insight to gain knowledge of their properties. An example of the first is our statement 'The *comprehension* of a thing is commensurate with the contingent being in the general sense (*al-mumkin al-ʿāmm*)'. An example of the second is our statement 'Every thing is so and so'. In the first, the intellect observes the comprehension (*mafhūm*) of a thing and makes it the object of inquiry in itself. When observing it in this way the intellect cannot make any judgment whatsoever about the particular instances of this comprehended meaning.[96] In the second, the intellect makes that comprehension [of a term] and instrument (*āla*) and mirror (*mir'āt*) for the observance of the individual particulars (*al-juz'iyyāt*). In this way the intellect is able to observe particularities in a comprehensively detailed way and therefore judge them [as particular instances]. So in the first way the object of knowledge is the comprehended meaning which is a means (*wajh*) [or aspect] for [our acquaintance] with the particulars, while in the second the objects of knowledge are the particular things themselves which are known through that means. [*Digression*:] You ought to verify the topic in this way and ward off other opinions or what anyone else might say. Through this explanation the answer to certain objections in this regard will also become clear, namely, the objection that if—assuming knowledge is of the *means*—what occurs in the mind is the form of the means, and if—assuming knowledge is of the thing through that means—what occurs in the mind is also the form of the means, then the object of knowledge in both cases is the means and only the means, there being no difference whatsoever between either of the situations. If, however, it is another form—namely, a form of the thing—then knowing it would not be through that means [but through that form]. But if two forms occur in the mind, one of the means and one of the thing, then the first will be knowledge of the means and the second knowledge of the thing unfacilitated by the means. Suppose you were to say that knowing the thing itself through that

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[96] For example, when considering the meaning (*mafhūm*) of the term (*lafẓ*) 'human' the intellect cannot perform any judgments about Zayd *qua* Zayd or ʿAmr *qua* ʿAmr, but only of Zayd *qua* human and ʿAmr *qua* human.

> means is a collection [of both forms taken together]. In that case, you would be forced to admit that either the definition of knowledge through a means is identical to the definition of knowledge by its essence [thus conflating the distinction]; or that its definition depends on knowledge through another means either *ad infinitum* or in a viciously circular fashion. Should you be inclined to think that knowledge is knowledge of the means with the condition that it is joined to the form of the thing, then it shall be retorted that this would be knowing a thing and the means. Hence there will be two kinds of knowledge of two kinds of known-objects. It would not be [a single] knowledge through that means. It would further imply that it would no longer be possible to know something by some means unless that knowledge were joined to the knowledge of that thing's essence or another means, and so knowing a thing by a single means would regress to infinity and that is false.[97]

What al-Jurjānī says here is really just an elaborated version of Ṭūsī's original distinction. The mirror (or mental form) is an instrument or tool *by which* the observer sees the image (or *māhiyya*) of the object of sight (or knowledge). When observing the reflection of a thing's essence in the mirror the observer pays no attention to the mirror itself, their attention being focussed singly on the represented image or object of knowledge. However, by a slight shift of *iʿtibār* the observer can change the desired object of scrutiny in the mind's focus and attention, now turning away from the image cast on the mirror to focus on the mirror itself. These are two different objects of knowledge which vary because of their dissimilar intensionalities, even though at the level of existence there is only one ontological reality in the mind which is just the mental form itself. The mirror or mental form is not only therefore that *by which* the external object or image is known but also that *in which* its representation or *māhiyya* exists. A single nature (*ṭabīʿa*) in the mind can be considered (*iʿtibār*) at one time as a mental form (*ṣūra dhihniyya*) and at another time as a quiddity (*māhiyya*).

Truth and Correspondence with *nafs al-amr*

Avicenna defines logical truth as "the correspondence of the mind to external things".[98] As a correspondence theory of truth, it holds that a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds with things or states of affairs in extramental existence. As such, every logical truth must be grounded upon an ontological truth, that is to say, some mind-independent existence. That mind-independent reality is what thinkers in the Islamic tradition refer to as the "corresponding correlate" (*al-muṭābaq*) of a mental judgement, and it in their view is what *makes* the mental judgement true or false. Hence every truth must

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[97] Al-Jurjani, *Risāla fī ʿilm al-shayʾ bi-l-wajh*, MS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arab e. 236, fol. 12b-13a.

[98] Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ*, *Ilāhiyyāt* (VIII.8), p. 103. Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* 1030b39–58.

have a truthmaker, something that is which grounds that truth in being.[99] Truth is thus the correspondence which a mental judgement has with its extramental truthmaker. But this—as previously noted—raises a problem, and that is that purely rationate being has *per definiens* nothing to correspond to in the external world. This being so, immediately the whole of Ṭūsī's philosophy—which places almost all of its emphasis on the fecundity of beings of reason— is covered by a pall of heavy metaphysical clouds. His entire philosophy, it seems, is just waiting to be washed down the gutter. This is where the concept of *nafs al-amr* enters the scene in the history of Islamic philosophy.

At this juncture, let us quickly recap some basic points. First, it is propositions which are said to be true or false in the logical sense of truth and falsehood.[100] We shall therefore follow common practice in contemporary western philosophy and refer to propositions as 'truthbearers'. Second, every proposition is true in virtue of a 'truthmaker': some externally existent thing which makes the proposition true. Third, truth is the correspondence between a truthbearer (*viz.* a proposition) and its truthmaker (*viz*. the thing itself), and so is ultimately grounded on the latter's existence. As a relation, both sides of the correspondence need to be considered. Thus we have to consider the nature of propositions and their types on the one hand, and the nature and existence of their truthbearers or 'corresponding correlates' (sing. *al-muṭābaq*) on the other.

Propositions and their types

By reflecting on the existence of the subject-term in a proposition, Avicenna's successors introduced a threefold division for the categorical proposition (*al-qaḍiyya al-ḥamliyya*). Two of these were introduced by Rāzī and are known as the "extramental proposition" (*al-qaḍiyya al-khārijiyya*) and the "essential proposition" (*al-qaḍiyya al-ḥaqīqiyya*);[101] a third type known as the "mental proposition" was introduced by Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī. The motivation that led these thinkers to make these distinctions would appear to be related to Avicenna's threefold characterisation of the so-called "considerations" of quiddity (*iʿtibārāt al-māhiyya*). Recall, that according to Avicenna, a single quiddity can be considered in one of the following three ways:

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[99] This is the reason why the mediaeval scholastics refer to truth as a "transcendental" of being, since every existent thing is, by virtue of being an existent, ontologically "true".

[100] See Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* [*nahj*] III.1, vol. 1, p. $112^{12\text{-}13}$: "Properly speaking, 'truth' and 'falsehood' are the essential accidents (*al-aʿrāḍ al-dhātiyya*) of propositions."

[101] See Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ʿUyūn*, [vol. 1], p. $128^{11\text{-}21}$; cf. Street, T. (2010).

(1) as a pure idea considered in and of itself *without* the consideration of existence;

(2) as an idea *with* the consideration of its extramental existence; or

(3) as an idea *with* the consideration of its mental existence.

In the context of quantified propositional statements (*al-maḥṣūrāt*), therefore, a statement like "Every J is B" can be interpreted in three distinct ways:

(1*)	Every J *in and of itself* is B.	(the **essential** proposition)
(2*)	Every J *extramentally* is B.	(the **extramental** proposition)
(3*)	Every J *mentally* is B.	(the **mental** proposition)

The subject of an extramental proposition is an essence considered from the perspective of its instantiation *in re*, and therefore contains a judgment whose scope is restricted to actual existents. For example, if the statement "Every human is an animal" is construed as an extramental proposition, then this would mean that "Every human *extramentally* is an animal", which can only be true as long as there are actual humans in extramental existence. However, suppose God had not yet created Adam and there were no human beings either in heaven or on Earth. In that case, since there are no actual human beings to speak of, the statement "Every human *extramentally* is an animal" would turn out to be false.

Al-Abharī, by contrast, defines a mental proposition as one in which the subject-term is only capable of mental existence. It is important to stress the word "only" since even extramental things exist mentally as well as extramentally once they conceptualised. But this is not what is being intended: a proposition is only referred to as a 'mental proposition' when its subject cannot exist extramentally. For example, in the proposition "Every universal is either essential or accidental", the subject-term 'universal' denotes a meaning which can only exist in the mind, and for that reason has been referred to as a mental proposition.

In contrast to these, however, a proposition is referred to as an 'essential proposition' if the existence or non-existence of the subject-term is irrelevant to the truth of the proposition. For example, the statement "Every body is either temporally originated or not" is true regardless whether or not an actual body exists. Indeed, in certain cases a statement is true in spite of its extramental existence. The square-root of nine, for example, cannot exist in the form of an extramental object, yet the statement "The square-root of nine is three" is axiomatically true. What differentiates the essential proposition from the others, therefore, is the fact that the judgement—meaning the predicate—is true (and necessarily so) of the subject in and of itself; that is, it applies to "the thing itself" (*nafs al-amr*) *qua* itself and not *qua* its existence here or existence

there. Thus essential propositions are necessary truths, and have a truth which is independent of the consideration of their subject's existence. This also implies that their truth is an "objective" truth independent of any particular individual's perception, since "to think a proposition" means just to give it mental existence. But since an essential proposition's truth-value is independent of its subject-term's existence, the fact that it just so happens to be "thought" in mental existence in no way implies that its truth is merely suppositional. These are truths which, in the truest sense of the word, are completely mind-independent. In other words, "the square-root of nine is three" is true in spite, and not because, of anyone's thinking it.

This, however, raises a fascinating problem in the history of ideas in post-classical Islam concerning the nature of permanent truths. Since truth *per definiens* is the correspondence which a proposition has to its 'corresponding correlate' (*al-muṭābaq*), it goes without saying that every true statement need must correspond to one such correlate outside of itself, for no proposition, whatever its type, is its own truthmaker. So the question arises as to which "entities," if any, an axiomatic proposition consisting of *iʿtibārī* terms corresponds. Put differently, given that every true statement has a truthmaker, the question that Islamic thinkers have needed to grapple with is this: "What is the truthmaker for an essential proposition?" What, in other words, is the 'corresponding correlate' (*al-muṭābaq*) of true propositional statements whose subject-terms are incapable of extramental existence?

Before getting round to answering this question it is important to recognise the historical context of how this question appears to have arisen in Ṭūsī's lifetime. All thinkers from Ṭūsī through to the modern period agree that an essential proposition's truthmaker is '*nafs al-amr*', which although literally translated means "the thing itself" is better understood as some kind of "realm of factuality." Scholars disagree, however, on (*a*) the *epistemological* scope of *nafs al-amr* (i.e. whether *nafs al-amr* is a truthmaker for essential propositions only or all three propositions generally) and (*b*) the *ontological* nature and identity of this so-called realm of fact. For a variety of reasons these are not unrelated topics: whatever response one scholar gives to the question 'What is *nafs al-amr*?' directly impacts his understanding of the scope of *nafs al-amr* itself. Furthermore, beneath all discussions about the exact "place" or "whereabouts" of *nafs al-amr*—the realm "where" true facts are forever and eternally represented as "being true"—lurks the problem of the modality of God's knowledge; arguably the most vexatious problem in the entire history of Islamic philosophy. But one cannot make head or tail of the problem without at least some awareness of the historical reasons which prompted the discussion to arise in the first place, which I have shown originate in Rāzī's criticisms of mental existence. For Rāzī, the sole criterion that would validate the theory of mental

existence is if our knowledge of things corresponded "in the totality of essence" with things themselves. But this demands that every true mental form has an exact and actual referent in extramental existence with which to correspond. Yet this criterion itself is what undermines the theory of mental existence, since the proof on which it relies assumes that we know things which are *nonexistent*, which precisely fail to correspond with anything in extramental existence, such as our cognition of universals or absolute existence or, for arguments sake, God's partner. Since none of these things has an extramental referent, our so-called "knowledge" of them in mental existence is really just a form of compound ignorance.

Ṭūsī has a neat solution to this argument which we shall repeat shortly. But in the meantime, it might be argued that a similar problem faces Ṭūsī himself given the ubiquitous role which secondary intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-thāniyya*) and mental constructions (*al-iʿtibārāt al-ʿaqliyya*) play in his critical philosophy. As shown previously, though each and every being of reason (*amr iʿtibārī*) is fashioned in mental existence by an act performed by the intellector's rational faculty, they are not, in spite of being creations which the knower himself creates, mere fabrications that are false. Unlike the faculty of imagination, therefore, which has free reign to create as many and varied mental concoctions as it pleases, the rational faculty's creation of beings of reason is "objectively" grounded insofar as they are true judgments made of the primary intelligibles. The statement "Humans are possible of existence" is not only true when there are no actual human beings but in spite of their existence also. That is because even if there is an actual human in entitative existence there is still no such thing as 'possibility' (*imkān*) itself outside of the mind in human beings since 'possibility' is *iʿtibārī* and thus non-referring. In this and other similar cases there is nothing to which our *true* judgment corresponds in extramental existence. So the problem of correspondence is a legitimate one and applies paradigmatically for propositions containing *iʿtibārī* terms.

This brings to the fore another controversial aspect of Ṭūsī's position, which is that he only considers it necessary to invoke *nafs al-amr* for propositions consisting of non-referring terms (i.e. *iʿtibārī* propositions). *Nafs al-amr* is not a truthmaking principle for propositions involving extramental terms, since entitative things themselves will adequately serve as truthmaking principles for propositions in which an *extramental* term is predicated of an *extramental* subject. The problem of correspondence which Rāzī believes threatens the theory of mental existence can therefore be shown to be a badly postulated criticism since not every true mental form or judgment need have an entitative object to correspond with, but only those in which the extramental existence of an entitative object is necessary for the truth of knowledge.

As Ṭūsī says,

> If whenever the mind makes a judgment about extramental things with whatever else is similar to them [i.e. another extramental term], then correspondence with those extramental things is necessary in those judgments that are correct, but otherwise not. For in the latter case a judgment is correct by consideration of its correspondence with what is in *nafs al-amr* given that it is possible to conceive of things which are false.[102]

Accordingly, there are two categories of mental judgement:

(1) those in which both the subject and predicate-terms of a proposition denote something in extramental existence (i.e. proposition with referring terms); and

(2) those in which either one or both of the subject and predicate-terms of a proposition does not denote something in extramental existence (i.e. propositions with at least one *iʿtibārī* term).

Now, as Ṭūsī remarks, the thing itself (as an entitative object in extramental existence) serves as a truthmaking principle for propositions in the first category, whereas *nafs al-amr* is the truthmaking principle of propositions in the second category. A crucial point of note here is that the term 'extramental' is being used equivocally, in one sense referring to material objects like Zayd which occupy space and time and in another completely different sense to *nafs al-amr* as a way of highlighting its mind-independent subsistence. Both therefore are correctly referred to as things in "extramental existence" since neither Zayd's existence nor the existence of the 'realm of factuality' are contingent upon another mind's cognition for their subsistence in being.

Ṭūsī emphasises this in two ways. First, he mentions two types of truthmaking principle, namely, entitative objects for extramental propositions and *nafs al-amr* for non-extramental propositions. But since every proposition whatever is something "mentally affirmed"—judgements are mental—the thing to which they must correspond must therefore be "extramental". This shows that even though entitative objects and *nafs al-amr* are not overlapping truthmaking principles, but rather two separate categories of truthmakers, they are nonetheless both "extramental" in the sense of being mind-independent. Second, he highlights the "possibility of conceiving false things", which is another clear indication that *nafs al-amr* is "outside the mind". The reason for this is that if the only criterion for truth was the mental representation of a thought, then *any* thought would have to be true. But we regularly encounter falsehoods (e.g. the square-root of nine is six) which we know with certainty are false, and in order for these to be differentiated

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[102] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 70[4–5] (*idhā ḥakama l-dhihnu ʿalā l-umūr al-khārijiyya bi-mithlihā wajaba al-taṭābuq fī ṣaḥīḥi wa-illa fa-lā wa yakūnu ṣaḥīḥuhu bi-ʿtibāri muṭābaqatihi fī nafs al-amr li-imkān taṣawwur al-kawādhib*').

from true judgments their mere representation in the mind will not provide the sufficient condition for fulfilling the distinction between truth and falsehood. Hence there must be something subsisting of itself outside of minds which, serving as a truthmaking principle, not only fulfils the task of differentiating our cognition of true and false thoughts from one another, but also gives man's intellectual faculty the objectivity which man himself attributes to it. In other words, in order to have any truth and falsehood there has to be something which guarantees the objective character of our rational judgments, especially those involving *iʿtibārī* terms. This necessarily cannot be the mind itself or another embodied mind. Otherwise, there would be no such thing as a false thought (since any thought, by virtue of "being in the mind", would be true); or truth and falsehood would depend on two people thinking the same thought at the same time, which is just pure arbitrariness.

The only option that remains, then, is that the truthmaking principle of *iʿtibārī* propositions is something of a mind-independent status. It must be something which exists "extramentally" in the equivocal sense of being truly objective, such that without it there could never be any truth or falsehood. Epistemic certitude thus yields the ontological necessity of some sort of mind-independent truthmaking principle; or else the mind itself could never have known the difference between what is true and what is false. As Ḥillī says *vis-à-vis* propositions with *iʿtibārī* terms:

> The true judgment in each of these subdivisions [of the *iʿtibārī* proposition, those with one *iʿtibārī* term and those with two *iʿtibārī* terms in each of the subject and predicate positions] cannot be considered as being due to their correspondence with things in the extramental world [in the sense of entitative objects] nor due to their correspondence with objects in the mind. For the mind, at times, conceives things falsely such as when we conceptualize the human being as something whose existence is necessary, even though [in truth] his existence is merely possible. If, therefore, the truth of a judgement depended merely on its correspondence with things in the mind, then judging a human being as necessary of existence would have been true given that there is a mental form corresponding to this judgment in the mind.[103]

Therefore, as Ḥillī concludes, the truth of *iʿtibārī* propositions must not be due to their correspondence with entitative objects or their correspondence with cognitive forms in mental existence, but to things which are in this curious thing called *nafs al-amr*.

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[103] Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 53[17–22].

Truth and Mental Existence

If truth and falsehood are labels which we give to propositions—they are, as Ṭūsī rightly observes, "essential accidents" of categorical statements—then it follows that nothing properly speaking could be either true or false without mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*). In other words, every truthbearer in the strictest logical sense of the term is an object of mental existence, and whoever denies this mode of existence from their general metaphysics does so at the risk of denying truth and falsehood their underlying ontology. Before turning to the question of *nafs al-amr*, I should like to stress—albeit briefly—the connection that truth and falsehood have with mental existence. Another way to appreciate this is to consider what Ṭūsī has said in his rebuttals of Rāzī's relation-based based theory of knowledge. By claiming every occurrence of knowledge to be a "relational state", Ṭūsī demonstrates why Rāzī has metaphysically barred the notions of truth and falsehood. That is because truth is a form of correspondence, and correspondence is the relation which a truthbearer has to its truthmaker. Now, if knowledge *per se* is a relation, then knowledge itself would have nothing to correspond to, since a non-categorical relation cannot itself be related to anything. To put this differently, if the truthbearer and its truthmaker are corresponding correlates, and their correspondence *per se* is the relation, then the relation itself cannot be part of *another* correspondence relation, or else it would not be a relation but rather a correlating term. If knowledge, therefore, were a relational state as Rāzī claims, then it would have nothing to correspond to—which thus entails the denial of the notions of truth and falsehood.

Aside from those remarks in which these points are highlighted in Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* (mentioned above), there is a succinct statement with words to this effect in the *Tajrīd*, one that holds especial importance for the debate on *nafs al-amr* throughout the post-classical period. He writes:

> Existence divides into the mental and the extramental; were it not to do so, then truth would have been annulled.[104]

وهو [الوجود] ينقسم إلى الذهني والخارجي، وإلّا بطلت الحقيقة

There are two parts to this statement (separated in the Arabic by a comma, and a semicolon in the English). The first part summarises in just one line the entire purpose of this thesis; and that is that "existence divides into the mental and the extramental". As I have tried to show, Ṭūsī's metaphysics depends on this division

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[104] Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 63[11–12] (*wa-huwa yanqasimu ilā al-dhihnī wa-l-khārijī wa-illa baṭalat al-ḥaqīqa*).

being true, namely, that being *qua* being can be divided into mental and extramental existence. I will not say anything more about this division. It is the second part of the sentence that concerns us here. The entire import of the point which Ṭūsī is making hinges on the last word (i.e. *ḥaqīqa*), and it is here that we run into a problem: different manuscripts (we do not currently have a critical edition) provide us with two different possibilities:

وإلّا بطلت الحقيقة　　وإلّا بطلت الحقيقيّـــة

The difference is one small letter *yā'* (ـي), the presence or lack of which means that the final word is either *ḥaqīqa* or *ḥaqīqiyya*. This makes a huge difference to the meaning of the sentence: if the *yā'* were not present, the clause would read: "… were it not to do so, then *truth* would have been annulled"; but if the *yā'* is present, the clause would read: "… were it not do so, then *the essential proposition* (*al-qaḍiyya al-ḥaqiqiyya*) would be false". Both interpretations can be justified but the consequences of one interpretation are not the same as the other. I translate the term as if it were *ḥaqīqa* ("truth") and do so in full awareness of the fact that all four of the major commentators on the *Tajrīd* interpret the line as if the final term were *ḥaqīqiyya*, i.e. the abbreviated form of the expression *al-qaḍiyya al-ḥaqiqiyya* or 'essential proposition'.[105]

Personally, however, I am inclined to think that the final term which Ṭūsī intended is *ḥaqīqa* not *ḥaqīqiyya*. Firstly, his point would be all the more emphatic if the annulled thing were truth itself rather than just one type of proposition. In other words, regardless of the type of proposition we consider (i.e. extramental, mental, and essential), all propositions—which are just forms of mental judgement—exist in the mind; their subsistence is mental. Hence all three propositions would fail to exist if being (*wujūd*) did not divide into extramental and mental existence; and thus truth and falsehood rejected since (*a*) there would be no propositions to attribute with a truth-value, i.e. no truthbearers; and (*b*) nothing as such to correspond with extramental existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*). And if there are no correlates to correspond with one another, then by definition there is no (logical) truth or falsehood to speak of either.

Secondly, there are no contextual indicators within Ṭūsī's thought which warrant the use of the term *ḥaqīqiyya* as a designation of the so-called essential proposition (*al-qaḍiyya al-ḥaqīqiyya*). It should also be recalled that a proposition being identified as an essential proposition only makes sense in the specific context in which it was introduced by Rāzī. Rāzī believed that categorical propositions of the type "Every J

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[105] See Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p. 10^{17}-11^{5}; al-Isfahānī, *Tasdīd*, vol. 1, pp. 206^{10}-208^{4}; al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ al-Tajrīd*, vol. 1, pp. 123^{5}-167^{6}; al-Lāhijī, *Shawāriq*, vol. 1, pp. 194^{1}-207^{7}.

is B" could be interpreted in two ways, either *essentially* or *extramentally*, which is why the need to make an explicit distinction between them arose. According to Rāzī, the statement "Every J is B" could therefore be interpreted as meaning either "Every J *in its essence* is B" or "Every J *in extramental existence* is B". As shown above, the difference between them is that the proposition "Every J *in extramental existence* is B" is true if and only if there are actual Js in extramental existence, whereas the truth of the proposition "Every J *in its essence* is B" in no way depends on whether or not there are actual Js.

From an Aristotelian perspective, however, this distinction is wholly unnecessary if what concerns us is demonstrative science or "certain knowledge" (*al-ʿilm al-yaqīnī*), forms of apodictic judgement which are acquired through syllogisms whose premises are not only true but *necessarily* true—and whatever is necessarily true is true regardless of whether it exists in extramental existence or not. For example, if *p* is the statement "The sum of the angles in a triangle is equal to the sum of two right angles", and suppose even that it is interpreted as a so-called extramental proposition, then it would only be true if there are actual triangles in extramental existence. The *existence* of a triangle in the external world thus becomes a necessary condition for the truth of *p*, and as a consequence makes *p* necessarily false given that mathematical objects like triangles *cannot* exist extramentally—that is, their extramental existence is impossible. In Avicenna's terminology their existence is purely "mental existence" which, as we have shown, is also the proof of this mode's reality.

For Ṭūsī, the correct interpretation is that a proposition like "Every J is B" has a subject which is unconditioned—meaning "is not considered along with"—with respect to either extramental or mental existence. Thus any proposition which is used for the purpose of demonstration (*burhān*) has a subject-term that is neither contingent upon its extramental existence (i.e. it cannot be of the type "Every J *extramentally* is B") nor the consideration of its mental existence (i.e. it cannot be of the type "Every J *mentally* is B"). This means that the distinction between so-called extramental and mental propositions is unnecessary.

> It is not the case that the subject of a proposition be conditioned by "being in extramental existence" (since one is able to judge upon a subject which is nonexistent *in re* with affirmative judgements never mind negative judgement, e.g. such as when we make judgements about geometrical forms whose extramental existence is not possible) or "not being in extramental existence" (since one is also to make judgements about existent things like the world and whatever is included in it). Rather, the only condition is that the subject be represented in the mind and "posited as something actual",

> such as, e.g. our saying "Human". All that is required here is that one suppose there is "human" in the mind actually […].[106]

If what he says here coincides with what Rāzī's is calling an "essential proposition", then it is the only one that Ṭūsī thinks is required in demonstrative syllogisms. In that case, perhaps there is some justification in reading the final term as *ḥaqīqiyya*. If, however, Ṭūsī wants nothing to do with the threefold division in categorical statements, then there is perhaps better reason to think that he is simply talking about the more general notion of truth (*ḥaqīqa*) rather than a particular category of propositions.

Nafs al-amr and the Universal Intellect

Ṭūsī holds that there are some judgments the truth of which cannot be doubted; propositions which, whenever the combination of their subject and predicate-terms is reflected on, yield epistemic certitude (*yaqīn*); facts which can never not be the case. For example, the judgment that "one is half of two" or "the diagonal of a square is greater in length than its side" are statements which are true in the truest sense of the term, namely, they can never not be true, hence implying that they can never be doubted . But the truth of a statement cannot be reduced to just a state of mind (of which certitude (*yaqīn*) is one), for this would mean that a person who is certain about the truth of the statement "the diagonal of a square is *shorter* than its side" possesses certain *knowledge* (*al-ʿilm al-yaqīnī*). From Ṭūsī's perspective this is not knowledge, but rather a form of compound ignorance (*al-jahl al-murakkab*), since true knowledge is that which corresponds with facts, and the statement "the diagonal of a square is *shorter* that its side" fails to do this. So despite the certainty which an individual might have in this statement being true, their belief is false objectively speaking. So while certitude is undoubtedly a necessary condition for scientific knowledge (*ʿilm*)—as al-Fārābī argues, for scientific knowledge one must know that what they know corresponds with reality[107]—it by itself is not a sufficient cause, since purely *epistemic* conditions cannot fulfil the task of making a belief actually true. Rather there needs to be an added *non-epistemic* condition that beliefs correspond with reality. This is an ontological condition which entails that the truth of a proposition be independent of the knower's internal states; in other words, all true propositions are true not by virtue of internal psychological states (although these are needed for epistemic certitude) but because of the external condition that there is some fact, state of affairs, or entitative existent—a "truthmaker"—which makes it

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[106] Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* [*nahj*] III.2, p. $116^{1\text{-}6}$.

[107] See Black, D. (2006; 2013)

true. *Nafs al-amr*, which according to Ṭūsī is the ontological truthmaker of propositions containing *iʿtibārī* terms, is thus by dint of this general precept something existing "out there" independent of the mind giving it its subsistence. The question then is "What exactly is it?".

Ṭūsī answered this question in a treatise known as *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*. It was probably written for al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī as a response to the question which he asked concerning the quiddity of *nafs al-amr*. Ṭūsī begins the treatise by first explaining that propositions like "one is half of two" and "the diagonal of square is not commensurate with its side" are of the type which yield immediate assent, i.e. they are known with epistemic certitude by mere contemplation of the terms involved. The truth of such statements depends on their being correspondent with *nafs al-amr*, which he says must be something with a mind-independent existence. The first clue about the identity of *nafs al-amr* is that it is mind-independent, and therefore an externalist condition of truth.

> [(P1)] We do not doubt that there are some judgments which our minds judge with certainty, like, for example, the judgment "one is half of two" or the judgment "the diagonal of a square is not commensurate with its side", and other such-like judgments which, not having been previously known to any mind, we come to recognize as being absolutely certain, and that is because they correspond to what is in *nafs al-amr*. Nor do we doubt that those judgments which the ignorant think are true, but which in actual fact are not true, is because they do not correspond with what is in *nafs al-amr*. For example, if someone believes that "the diagonal of a square is commensurate with the side" or believes in something else [which is not true], we would not doubt that such beliefs do not correspond to what is *nafs al-amr*. [(P2)] We also know with certainty that correspondence cannot be conceived unless it occurs between two things which are individually distinct but are nevertheless united in respect of that aspect in which there is correspondence. [(P3)] Furthermore, there is no doubt that in the two previously mentioned judgments[108] being mentally affirmed (*fī l-thubūt al-dhihnī*). [(C1)] Thus the first of these judgments [a true judgment] must be something with an affirmation which is independent of our minds, and with which there is correspondence between itself and what is in our minds; and that [mind-independent thing] is what is known as *nafs al-amr*.[109]

The argument commences with three initial premises and a conclusion:

P1: Our epistemic certitude in the truth of propositions containing non-entitative terms is a result of the fact that our beliefs correspond with *nafs al-amr*.

P2: Every correspondence occurs between two correlates that are individually distinct; i.e. nothing can correspond with just itself.

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[108] Namely, "The diagonal of a square is not commensurate with its side" (a true judgment) and "the diagonal of a square is commensurate with its side" (a false judgment).

[109] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 479[3-12].

P3: All judgements are propositional objects affirmed in the mind.

C1: Hence the corresponding correlate (i.e. *nafs al-amr*) of our true beliefs must be mind-independent (i.e. not affirmed in a particular mind).

The conclusion which Ṭūsī derives from the initial stage of the argument is that *nafs al-amr* is something mind-independent. If the premises and the conclusion are granted, then the next question Ṭūsī considers is whether *nafs al-amr* is (*a*) self-subsistent or (*b*) something represented in another, the first of which can itself be divided into two further possibilities since whatever is self-subsistent is either (*a*1) confined to a position in space or (*a*2) not.

> [P4] That thing which we have affirmed outside of the mind is either a self-subsistent thing or something represented in another. If it is self-subsistent, then it will either be one which [*a*1] has a spatial position or one that does [*a*2] not have a spatial position. The first [*a*1] is impossible given that these judgements are unrelated to any specific direction (*jiha*) in the world or any specific time. Yet everything that possesses a spatial position is [necessarily] connected to both [i.e. space and time]. [C2] Thus not a single one those propositions possesses a spatial position.[110]

Since the necessary propositions we are concerned with have no relation to either time or place but are, so to speak, everywhere true and always true, their corresponding correlate, Ṭūsī argues, must also be of a similar nature—that is, *nafs al-amr* cannot be in a spatial position or bounded by time. The second conclusion, therefore, is that *nafs al-amr* cannot be a body. This leaves the second disjunct (*a*2) which is that *nafs al-amr* is a substance but not in a spatial position.

> As for it being something self-subsistent but not in a spatial position [*a*2], that is also impossible because it is equivalent to the doctrine of the Platonic Forms.[111]

Like Avicenna, Ṭūsī rejects the Platonic Forms.

Since both possibilities in the first disjunct are disproven, *nafs al-amr* cannot be something self-subsistent, but rather must be something which is represented in another. However, this other thing in which *nafs al-amr* is now represented can itself be considered along the same lines as before; which is to say that one may also ask concerning it whether or not it too has a spatial position. Yet if—as previously argued—the truthmaking principle (*nafs al-amr*) of eternal truths itself has no spatial dimension, then that in which these eternal forms are being represented *a fortiori* must be non-spatial. Indeed, it would hardly make any sense to say that *nafs al-amr* which does not have a spatial position exists in something else which

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[110] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 479[13-17].

[111] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 480[8-9].

is bound by a position in space. Hence the substrate in which *nafs al-amr* is represented, is a non-spatially confined substrate.[112]

Having established thus far then that *nafs al-amr* is a mind-independent truthmaking principle for scientific propositions [C1] and shown that the correlating forms of necessary truths must be represented in a substrate not having a position in space [C2], Ṭūsī now probes into the quiddity of that substrate:

> [(P5)] That in which [these forms] are represented cannot be in a state of potentiality even though some [forms] may exist potentially in the mind. The reason for this is that it is impossible for there to be an actual correspondence between that which exists in actuality (or which at a certain time is capable of existing in actuality) and that which exists in potentiality. [(P7)] Nor is it conceivable that [the substrate of *nafs al-amr*] could cease to exist, or be capable of undergoing any change, or entering into a state of actuality after it been in a state of prior potentiality. None of this is possible given that [the existence of] those aforementioned propositions is necessary (*wājib al-thubūt*) *a parte ante* and *a parte post*. They cannot undergo change or modification, nor can they be qualified by a particular time or place. [C3] Their substrate must necessarily therefore be of this nature too, or else it would have been possible to affirm the existence of an inhering form without a substrate in which to inhere.[113]

The third part of the argument has two premises (themselves in the form of two hypothetical syllogisms):

P5: If correspondence is always between two actual correlates, then *nafs al-amr* must be something actual whenever things correspond to it..

P6: But necessary truths are *always* true and therefore *always* corresponding with *nafs al-amr*.

C3: Hence the **substrate** of *nafs al-amr* must always be in state of actuality.

The statement "one is half of two" is a necessary truth, and therefore corresponds with *nafs al-amr*. Since it is necessary, however, it must correspond with *nafs al-amr* for all times and places. As the eternal truthmaking principle of necessary judgments, therefore, it must be the case that the *existence* of this eternal Truthmaker is "necessarily affirmed" (*wājib al-thubūt*). Thus the reason why it can never be subjected to change or motion, or else the forms that are "carried" by it and made subsistent through its existence would also necessarily have to change. But "one is half of two" has an indubitable truth-value, it is *always* true, and according to Ṭūsī this is because the substrate in which these forms exist has an ontologically "fixed" nature that is insusceptible to change

As Ṭūsī concludes:

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[112] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 480[10-13].

[113] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 480[14-19].

> Hence it has been established that [C1] there is a being (*mawjūd*) in the extramental world which is self-subsistent (*qā'imun bi-nafsihi*) and [C2] without a position in space, and which also [C3] comprises all of the intelligible forms of things (*al-maʿqūlāt*) in a state of actuality. Such forms can never become actual [after non-actuality] given that neither they nor this being [whose existence has now been established] could ever possibly undergo change or modification or [have their existence] renewed or ceased. Each of them [the intelligible forms and their substrate] must therefore be characterized by these properties eternally *a parte ante* and *a parte post*.[114]

Clearly, this implies that the substance which bears the existence of true intelligible forms (i.e. *nafs al-amr*) is an INTELLECT whose existence is necessary (*wājib al-thubūt*) and therefore eternal. It is this eternally transcendental Intellect which performs the function of truthmaking for necessary judgments. In other words, Ṭūsī has just proven the necessary existence of an eternal Intellect by an argument in which the first premise is the fact that "there are some propositions which are necessarily true" (e.g. "one is half of two"). Furthermore, as an Intellect, the substrate of *nafs al-amr* "thinks" the forms as well; and thinks them not only for what they are (i.e. just their quiddities) but also "thinks" every meta-concept associated with that form. If, therefore, one of us thinks of the quiddity of a genus and reaches the true *iʿtibārī* conclusion that "every genus is a universal which is a secondary intelligible", the transcendental Intellect must also be doing that because it, by definition, is what is making my judgement true. As al-Jurjānī says, "in the commentary of Ḥillī it says that every [true intensional] distinction in the mind must necessarily correspond to a distinction in *nafs al-amr*".[115] This is a crucial point because it solves the problem of correspondence that may be raised against Ṭūsī's intensionalist metaphysics. If all the primary notions (*viz*. existence, necessity, possibility, impossibility, etc.) are conceptual terms distinct from one another in the understanding (*ʿaql*) but not in entitative things themselves, then distinctions of this type are not false in true statements like "human beings are possible of existence" since the terms of this proposition correspond with *nafs al-amr*, i.e. that Intellect which also is capable of making these intensional meta-constructions.

The final part of the treatise is now naturally geared towards finding out the identity of this eternal Truthmaker and specifically whether or not the existence of this eternal substrate can be identified as the Necessary Being. This means having to deal with the thorny issue of the modality of God's knowledge again which, for the reason outlined above, Ṭūsī says cannot be facilitated by intelligible forms. Recall that Ṭūsī's position here is that the knowledge of the Necessary Being cannot be of the type which is either "active" or

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[114] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 480[20-23].

[115] See al-Jurjānī's gloss on Mīr al-Bukhārī, *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*, p. 41, lines 16-18 of the marginal gloss. This is proof, incidentally, that al-Jurjānī was familiar with Ḥillī's commentary on al-Kātibī's *Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*.

"passive" since both of these are premised on the inherence of forms. And yet necessary truth is *per definiens* the correspondence which a form in the mind (i.e. mental existence) has with the form of "the thing itself" (*nafs al-amr*) in an eternal Truthmaker.

> We say that it is inconceivable for this being [the eternal Truthmaker] to be the absolutely First being (*awwal al-awā'il*)—I mean the Necessary of Existence; for the simple reason that this being [the transcendental Truthmaker] must within itself comprise multiplicity [*viz.* the intelligible forms of things] for which there is no limit. Now the absolutely First being can never have multiplicity occur to It, nor can It ever be the first principle of multiplicity, nor can It be a substrate which is the receptive cause of a multiplicity which is represented in It.[116]

Ṭūsī's comments are in keeping with what is by now a familiar procedural principle: absolute divine aseity entails absolute divine simplicity, which in turn demands a total negation of the different sense of multiplicity occurring within the divine essence. Yet there must nevertheless be an eternal Truthmaker; Ṭūsī has proven this and necessary truth demands it. And since it cannot be God, it must be another eternal Intellect.

It is therefore established that there must be an existent other than the First Necessary Existent which is characterized with this property [i.e. being a substrate and locus for intelligible forms], and this we shall call the Universal Intellect[117] which in the Glorious Qur'an is sometimes referred to as "The Preserved Tablet" (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) and at other times "The Clear Book" (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*).[118]

Not only has Ṭūsī proven the existence of an eternal Truthmaker, he has also proffered a completely novel proof for the existence of an eternal Intellect alongside the Necessary Being.[119] Perhaps not unsurprisingly the debate on *nafs al-amr* would continue for a long time yet, but that is a story for another day. Our contention is simply that Ṭūsī marks the beginning of that story, and there is no story without a beginning.

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[116] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 481[1-4].

[117] The Universal Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-kull*) is the first cosmological intellect to emanate from the Necessary Being.

[118] Ṭūsī, *Risāla fī ithbāt al-jawhar al-mufāriq*, p. 481[5-8].

[119] In fact Ṭūsī rejected the earlier arguments of the *falāsifa* to prove the existence of immaterial Intelligences beside the Necessary Being, referring to them as "feeble" (*madkhūla*); see Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 95[3-10].

CONCLUSION

وهذا الإعتراض وأمثاله حصل بسبب عدم التحقيق في المسائل العقليّة،
وقد كان شيخنا الأعظم نصير الملّة والحقّ والدّين محمّد بن الحسن الطّوسي قدّس الله سرّه
يقول: « إنّ فخر الدين وأتبّاعه كانوا لا يحقّقوا شيئاً »

> This objection and others like it arise because of a failure to verify accurately topics of an intellectual nature. Our Shaykh, the great Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ṭūsī—may God sanctify his spirit—used to say that "Fakhr al-Dīn and his followers did not verify a single thing."
>
> AL-ʿALLĀMA AL-ḤILLĪ[1]

This dissertation has taken the long historical journey through two important streams within the post-Avicennan tradition, the aporetic tradition consisting of Avicenna's main theological disputants, and the philosophical tradition of figures having no obvious external affiliation to any religious tradition or school of thought. This has been achieved by touching on one small albeit very important corner of Avicenna's metaphysics, namely, his notion of necessary existence. By adopting what I have called an 'intensionalist approach' to Avicenna's metaphysics, I believe we have shown the importance that Ṭūsī holds for the post-Avicennan tradition. 'Necessity' and 'existence' are both beings of reason (*iʿtibārī*) and as such cannot impinge on the essence of anything *in extensio*, least of all a being that is "sheer oneness". They do not refer *in extensio* and thus do not cause a multiplicity within the essence of the Necessary Existent. As pure rationate beings they subsist in mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), a veritable category of being which Ṭūsī demonstrates is absolutely essential for the possibility even of metaphysical science. The significance of this mode's ontology and the discovery of pure rationate being—that is, the being of reason (*al-iʿtibār al-ʿaqlī*)—I claim are the most important philosophical achievements of post-classical scholars in the mainstream Avicennan tradition in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They are notions which are ubiquitous in the language of later post-Avicennan philosophy. Of course, having touched on only a small

[1] Ḥillī, *Īḍāḥ*, p. 50[16-18].

number of topics we have not been able to show how these concepts developed both during and after Ṭūsī's lifetime. But if we can understand and appreciate what he has done, then we are going to be better placed at continuing any future research into the history of post-classical thought in Islam. The Akbārian response is perhaps the next major chapter in this story, but if given the opportunity to work on this in the future, I will show that it too is infiltrated with Ṭūsī's ideas and is, to a large extent, a directly discernible rebuttal of Ṭūsī's ontology. Figures such as Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī, Ibn Turka—all key figures in the Akbārian tradition—cite the writings of Ṭūsī verbatim albeit without mentioning his name.

Ṭūsī championed two key concepts to resolve a wide variety of post-Avicennan aporiae: (1) the analogy of being (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) and (2) the being of reason (*al-iʿtibār al-ʿaqlī*). The first of these is a critical part of Avicenna's own philosophy, but was for whatever reason(s) underappreciated by some of his later theological interpreters in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Ṭūsī rejuvenated this concept to show that 'existence' is unequally predicated of different existents and cannot therefore be a true species. As a notion which is purely mind-dependent, the common notion of 'existence' cannot be a nature, and cannot therefore be a part of the essence of any existent thing. It is not *inniyya*, and thus not the essence (*māhiyya*) of the First principle. The analogy of being is thus fundamental to Ṭūsī's resuscitation of Avicenna's general metaphysics, but it shouldn't be thought that the concept is unanimously agreed on after him. Even a figure like al-ʿAllāma Ḥillī—a Twelver-Shīʿī like Ṭūsī and one his greatest students—rejects in some of his writings the analogical predication of the term 'existence' for God and possible beings, thereby equivocating a crucial concept within first philosophy in fashion almost identical to Shahrastānī.[2]

Following Ṭūsī's systematic identification and application of which concepts are purely mind-dependent, there seems to be almost widespread agreement among post-classical authors that each of Avicenna's modal categories should be interpreted intensionally as a being of reason. This significantly is a move away from Avicenna's own position, but for the *muḥaqqiqūn* this is a minor point. In this connection, Ṭūsī shows that every true propositional statement which has an *iʿtibārī* term corresponds to a mind-independent and eternally affirmed transcendental Truthmaker known as *nafs al-amr*, thereby proffering a proof for an eternal Intelligence unfamiliar to his Islamic predecessors. By adopting a history of ideas methodology, I have shown that the motivation for this theory actually emerges from an engagement with Rāzī's criticisms of mental existence, and in particular the objection which we have called the 'problem of (non-)correspondence'. Due to the limitations of space I have not been able to demonstrate the noticeable

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[2] See Ḥillī, *Minhāj*, p. 259[12-14].

influence of other key figures, most notably Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, on Ṭūsī's thinking. This influence can only be noticed through extensive textual comparison given that Ṭūsī himself nowhere mentions Suhrawardī in any of his writings, and thus requires a lengthy discussion all by itself. However, before concluding this dissertation, I should like to openly express my firm conviction that Ṭūsī without any doubt in my mind has appropriated certain solutions to the problems presented by Avicenna's detractors from the pre-Illuminationist writings of Suhrawardī, namely his *Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt*, *Kitāb al-Muqāwamāt*, and to a lesser extent his *Kitāb al-Mashāri' wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*. As someone whose primary goal seems to have been the attainment of truth (*taḥqīq*) in different areas of learning, Ṭūsī did not hesitate in borrowing liberally from different thinkers and their traditions. His theological and philosophical works display a clear amalgamation of Avicennan and non-Avicennan ideas. Perhaps what makes him unique in his philosophical 'defences' of Avicenna is his willingness to take positive developments—that is, ideas which he considers to be true, objectively speaking—from both the (aporetic) theological and Illuminationist schools of thought, and thereafter reworking them back into Avicenna's own writings wherever possible. As a commentator, it seems Ṭūsī envisaged his own role as being akin to that of someone who tells his readers what Avicenna "actually meant to say" even though he did not actually say it. The interplay that takes place between Avicenna's actual words and Ṭūsī's explanation of them is arguably, from a literary perspective, the most interesting part of Ṭūsī's hermeneutics. Indeed, the difference between what Avicenna actually says and what Ṭūsī commentary tells us is intended by those statements is oftentimes so subtle that it is hard sometimes to notice any difference between the two. From Ṭūsī's perspective, the question whether his interpretation of Avicenna is actually Avicennan or not does not seem to matter. What matters for him is that Avicenna *interpreted in this way*, the "intensionalist" way as we have called it, is the correct philosophy. According to Ṭūsī, therefore, even though the man himself may not have known it, Avicenna *can* be read in this way. The success of Avicenna's philosophy in the later medieval period, that is after Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, is ironically the success of a cumulative Avicennan tradition, one forged by the combined dialectical force of the positive and negative influences operating on Avicenna's thought in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Ṭūsī shows how each of these competing forces can be reconciled into a single interpretation of Avicenna's philosophy which thereby ensures the posterity of the truth found in both Avicenna, the protagonist, and his antagonising dissenters.

I began this study by suggesting that this dissertation would be a four-hundred-page commentary on the following proposition: *there is a being that is necessary of existence in itself, the essence of which is identical to its existence*. It is hoped that the reader will now appreciate how Ṭūsī has answered the

objections to both sides of this proposition. It is true because it corresponds to *nafs al-amr*, not because it corresponds to the Necessary Existent Itself.

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