In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent

Ibn Sina's Arguments Against God's Being a Substance

MUHAMMAD LEGENHAUSEN, QOM

It is reported that Imam Reza (peace be with him) said:

> "…by His giving consciousness to the conscious, it is known that He is not conscious, and by His giving substance to the substances, it is known that He is not a substance…."[1]

1. The Subject of Metaphysics

Aristotle taught that the subject of metaphysics is being, that beings are said in many ways to be, and that the primary sense in which a thing may be said to be is as a substance, that which is neither in nor predicable of a subject. Hence, for Aristotle, metaphysics is primarily concerned with substance, and secondarily with the other nine categories. However, Aristotle also described the topic of his *Metaphysics* as primary philosophy or wisdom concerned with the discovery of causes. He also states that the primary philosophy has the task of studying the essence and existence of what is separable from matter.

Ibn Sina rewrites metaphysics with a number of important departures from Aristotle: the inclusion in metaphysics of discussions about the intellect; the introduction of what were later called transcendentals; and the recognition that the discussions of the categories belong to metaphysics rather than logic. More important than these points, however, was the clear distinction between existence and whatness, already to be found in seminal form in the *Posterior Analytics,*[2] and further developed over the course of

[1] Al-Saduq*, Tawhid*, *Bab* 2, hadith 2. There is a rather philosophical commentary on this hadith by Qadi Sa'id Qummi.

[2] *Posterior Analytics*, Bk. II, Ch. 7, 92b 8-12. Note that Aristotle argues here that since being is not a genus, it cannot be the essence of anything. We can get from this to an argument that God is not a substance by restricting the consequent to "it cannot be the essence of a substance," and the premise that the essence of God is being.

centuries of philosophical work in both the Christian and Islamic worlds. In medieval Europe, the idea was elaborated by Aquinas, who wrote a treatise on the topic. In Islamic philosophy, the distinction led to the principle of the fundamental priority of existence over whatness in the work of Mulla Sadra.

Following Kindi, Ibn Sina expected Aristotle's *Metaphysics* to be more theological, and in his autobiography he claimed that it was only after reading Farabi that the purpose of the subject became clear to him. Accordingly, he took metaphysics to include theology only as a special part, and thereafter Muslim philosophers distinguished theology in a general sense from theology in a specific sense. (In the West the distinction was made between general and specific *metaphysics*). At different phases in his life, Ibn Sina divided the sciences in somewhat different ways, but he consistently considered metaphysics to be a theoretical science either including theology along with three other sections, or separating theology from general metaphysics as a distinct theoretical science. He divided theology proper into what we might call natural theology and metaphysics of the rational soul, while general metaphysics included discussions of the principles of the sciences and discussions of *being qua being*. The introduction of the metaphysics of the rational soul was innovative.[3]

He also transformed metaphysics by emphasizing attributes that transcend the categories. This gave rise to a long tradition in medieval Western philosophy of discussion of the *transcendentals.* He still held that the primary *essential beings* (*mawjudat bi al-dhat*) are the substances, but only in the sense that substance is prior to accident. He explains the priority of substance to accident in terms of the Aristotelian definition of substance according to which a substance is not in a subject. An accident *is in* a subject. Ibn Sina defines what it means for something to be in a subject with three clauses:

> (1) the subject has existence and is of a specific species regardless of its possession of what is said to be in it;
> (2) what is in the subject is not in it as a part of the subject; and
> (3) what is in a subject cannot exist apart from the subject; so that accidents are not separable from their subjects.

Notice that according to the first clause, a substantial form in matter is not an instance of something being in a subject. The subject in which an

[3] See Gutas 1988, 238-261.

accident resides will itself either exist in yet another subject or not. If not, the subject is a substance. If so, there is a regress argument to the effect that after a finite number of steps we have to arrive at subjects that are substances to ground all higher order accidents.[4] At times, Ibn Sina says that everything is either a substance or accident, but yet in other places he introduces God as being neither. It seems, then, that we should understand the first claim as implicitly qualified by contingent being. This is how the later Islamic peripatetic tradition understood him, and the qualification is made explicit in Ibn Sina's theological writings.

Two further points of difference should be noticed between the ways Ibn Sina and Aristotle looked at metaphysics. For Aristotle, the discussion of causality was largely imported to the metaphysics from the physics. For Ibn Sina, on the other hand, causality takes on a special role in metaphysics as that which brings something into existence—ontological as distinct from physical causation. Second, the distinction between contingency and necessity in Aristotle was primarily seen as a logical distinction, while in Ibn Sina it becomes the focus of metaphysical discussion. Aristotle interprets the necessary as that for which there is no change, no motion, while for Ibn Sina the necessary is that which needs no cause for its existence. In Aristotle the necessary and contingent are understood in terms of time and change, while in Ibn Sina they are interpreted independently of temporality. Metaphysics in the hands of Ibn Sina becomes at once richer and more abstract.

With regard to the substantiality of the rational soul and God, Aristotle and Ibn Sina take opposite positions: Aristotle holds that *theos* is a substance, while Ibn Sina denies that God is a substance; Aristotle holds that the soul is not a substance, while Ibn Sina claims that it is.[5] In both of these regards we observe the movement toward greater abstraction in Ibn Sina. The concept of God is more abstract when considered outside the categories, and the soul is understood more abstractly, not merely as the form of an organism, but as independent of any materiality. God is freed from the constraints of substantiality while the soul is freed from the constraints of corporeality.

---

[4] For a discussion of some of these points see Abe Stone, "Readings from medieval Aristotelians on substance and accident," URL = http://home.uchicago.edu/~abestone/readings4.pdf.

[5] See Morewedge 1973, 194-195.

Metaphysics as a universal science is concerned with beings, first divided into the necessary and contingent, and the latter into substance and accident. It is here that we find the most important reason why God is not to be considered a substance according to Ibn Sina: the division of beings into substances and accidents only applies to contingent beings. The reason for this is that only a contingent being can have a quiddity or essence, what Aristotle called *ti esti* (literally, *what it is*), translated into Arabic as *mahiyya* (also, literally, *what it is*), and which, following the lead of William Chittick,[6] I will call a *whatness*. The reasoning is given in Ibn Sina's *Remarks and Admonitions* (believed to have been written c. 1030-1034):

> *Wajib al-wujud* (*WW*),[7] does not share with things in whatness, for all whatnesses have in common that they imply contingency of existence. However, existence is not by the whatness of a thing, and it is not a part of the whatness of a thing. What I mean is that existence does not enter the concept of things for which there is a whatness; rather this is a state they can have. *WW* does not share with things in the meaning of a genus, or of a species, for *WW* is not in need of any allowance to separate from them in the sense of having a *difference* or accident [to differentiate *WW* from them]; rather *WW* is essentially different.
>
> So, there is no definition (*hadd*) for *WW's* essence, since there is no genus and species for *WW*.[8]

Here we find a view of existence as completely distinct from whatness. Whatness pertains to the concept of things, and describes the form that a thing can have. Existence pertains to causality and the generation of entities that animate the forms of whatness.

However, the first thing to which existence belongs other than itself is substance, which is identified with a sort of whatness in the *Shifa'* (believed to have been composed *c*. 1020-1027):

---

[6] Chittick 1998, xx; 389-90, n. 9. Morewedge uses "essence" and Marmura uses "quiddity". "Essence" will be used to translate "*dhat*," meaning that which possesses attributes.

[7] This is usually translated as *the Necessary Existent* or *Necessary Existence*, but existence is the possessive modifier of *the Necessary*, so a more precise translation would be: *the Necessary of Existence*, in the sense of that which is necessary with regard to its existence, that which is ontologically or existentially necessary, as opposed to that which is existentially contingent. I will abbreviate the phrase as *WW*.

[8] *Isharat*, Vol. 3., *Namt* 4, Ch. 24. Remark, 49.

> Although the existent, as you have known, is not a genus and is not predicated equally of what is beneath it, yet it has a meaning agreed on with respect to priority and posteriority. The first thing to which it belongs is the whatness that is substance, and then to what comes after it. Since it [has] one meaning, in the manner to which we have alluded, accidental matters adhere to it that are proper to it, as we have shown earlier. For this reason, it is taken care of by one science in the same way that anything pertaining to health has one science.[9]

The idea presented by Ibn Sina here will remind students of Kant of his famous argument that existence is not a predicate in his refutation of the ontological argument.[10] One also may compare the statement quoted above from Ibn Sina: "What I mean is that existence does not enter the concept of things for which there is a whatness; rather this is a state they can have." with the following statement from Kant:

> In the mere concept of a thing no characteristic of its existence can be encountered at all. For even if this concept is so complete that it lacks nothing required for thinking of a thing with all of its inner determinations, still existence has nothing in the least to do with all of this...[11]

This has, of course, as Kant saw, profound implications for the understanding of God and for the ontological argument. The ontological argument of Anselm or Descartes is invalid, as Kant shows, because it begins with characteristics internal to the concept, and existence does not, contrary to Anselm and Descartes, enter here. Ibn Sina has his own ontological argument which is designed specifically to avoid such problems. There is no whatness for God, and so He is not a substance, according to Ibn Sina. Hence, we cannot argue from the divine whatness to the divine existence. However, if we consider an existing thing itself, not its concept and not its whatness, we will find that it must be necessary in its existence or contingent, and if contingent, something necessarily existing is needed to avoid a

---

[9] Marmura 2005, 27. I have replaced Marmura's "quiddity" by "whatness," and have removed a comma to make clear that the relative pronoun is restrictive: "the whatness that is substance" rather than "the whatness, which is substance".

[10] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A598/B626 f.

[11] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. and ed. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), A225/B272: "*In dem bloßen Begriffe eines Dinges kann gar kein Charakter seines Daseins angetroffen werden. Denn ob derselbe gleich noch so vollständig sei, daß nicht das mindeste ermangele, um ein Ding mit allen seinen innern Bestimmungen zu denken, so hat das Dasein mit allem diesem doch gar nichts zu tun...*"

regress, and the necessary of existence is God. Ibn Sina dubs this the "proof of the sincere," (*burhan al-sidiqin*), and it has dominated the proofs for God in Muslim philosophy ever since with many variations.[12] What is important for us here is not to review the versions or to evaluate the validity of the argument, but to note that one avoids the sorts of worries expressed by Kant precisely when one considers God to be beyond the categories that classify whatnesses. Instead of considering the whatness of God and then proving that such a thing must exist, which Kant argued was futile, the Muslim philosophers following Ibn Sina started with the existing thing, and later with existence itself, regardless of considerations of whatness in which existence can play no part, and sought to prove that there is something whose existence is necessary.

A final point about metaphysics as understood in the tradition led by Ibn Sina should be emphasized: this tradition is called *peripatetic* (in Arabic *masha'in*) with attention to Aristotle, and metaphysics in the Aristotelian sense of the discipline differs in important ways from metaphysics as it is understood by many contemporary Western philosophers. After the *linguistic turn*, predicates have come to be used by some philosophers as suitable replacements for accidents, and substances are seen as the individuals to which predicates are applied and whose identity and persistence conditions are determined by sortal predicates.[13] When Muslim philosophers deny that God is a substance, however, this is understood in a more hylomorphic sense. The argument is not that God cannot serve as the subject of suitable predication so as to be designated a substance, but that God is beyond considerations of matter or form necessary for substances and accidents. The attributes of God are not like the accidents of a substance because they do not describe the form of God but rather are attempts to describe what is beyond form.

[12] See Legenhausen 2003.

[13] See Wiggins 1980. Of course, there are a variety of tendencies to be found in analytic metaphysics, and Wiggins should not be taken as representative for the entire field. Nevertheless, he does represent a widespread tendency. For a good overview of the field see Runggaldier and Kanzian 1998.

2. A Curious Argument

The main argument that Ibn Sina gives to show that *WW*, i.e., God, is not a substance is found later in the *Remarks and Admonitions*. Ibn Sina considers how someone might erroneously think that God is a substance because it would appear that God is not in a subject and is not predicable of a subject. Hence, it would seem that God fits the definition of primary substance. Ibn Sina responds that this way of reasoning depends on a failure to appreciate the significance of not being in a subject. When we say that a thing is not in a subject, this should not imply that the thing exists, for otherwise, we could infer the existence of a thing merely on the basis of its being a substance. God, however, necessarily exists, as Ibn Sina sought to demonstrate in his proof of the existence of God, the *proof of the sincere* (*burhan al-sidiqin*). Hence, we should not say that God, or *WW*, is not in a subject.

> Perhaps it is supposed that the meaning of "an existent that is not in a subject (*mawdu'*)" includes the First and others by inclusion in a genus, that *WW* falls under the genus *substance* (*jawhar*).
>
> This is an error. That an existent is not in a subject, according to the definition (*rasm*)[14] of substance, does not mean the existent as actually existing is not in a subject, for otherwise one would know that since Zayd in himself is a substance, that he actually exists! Not so, let alone the quality of that existence.[15]

Of course, Ibn Sina does not mean to suggest that since it is false that God is *not* in a subject, consequently God *is* in a subject. So, it would appear that bivalence is threatened. It is neither the case that *WW* is in a subject nor that *WW* is not in a subject. Ibn Sina does not propose a three-valued logic, however. Instead it is suggested in his logic that some predicates cannot be meaningfully applied to some subjects. The predicate "is in a subject" does not apply to "*WW*" in such a way as to produce a proposition that could be true, false, or have a third value. The example usually given is that it is mistaken to affirm or deny that a wall is blind, because a wall is not the sort of thing that can be seeing or blind. Both predicates "seeing" and "blind" imply the faculty of vision, in a healthy or impaired state. Of

---

[14] The common definition (*rasm*) is distinguished from a complete definition (*hadd*) because the former is not given by providing the genus and difference. Substance cannot be defined by genus and difference, for the genus would have to be *existence*; and existence cannot be a genus for much the same reasons that it cannot be a substance.

[15] *Isharat*, Vol. 3., *Namt* 4, Ch. 25. Admonition, 51.

course, we could artificially coin a broader sense for the predicate "seeing", equivalent to "not having impaired vision", and in this sense we could affirm that the wall is "seeing". However, this would be not only contrived but misleading because of the ambiguity in the ordinary meaning of "seeing" and the artificially coined meaning. Likewise, we could interpret "not being in a subject" in such a way as to include all things of which it cannot be truly said that they are in a subject; and in this sense we could say that God is a substance. Here too, the introduction of a broader sense of substance that would include God would be misleading, for substance is a category and the categories classify whatnesses. To say that God is a substance would hence imply that God has a whatness of the substance category, unless we call to mind that "substance" might be used in a way to apply both to whatnesses and to entities that fall outside the framework of the categories.

One might think that this latter sense is more natural, and that the contorted argument Ibn Sina gives for the more specific sense is highly artificial, for we find that "being in a subject" is defined by Ibn Sina in a seemingly *ad hoc* manner designed to exclude existence and *WW*. As such, it cannot be expected to convince anyone who thinks otherwise. Ibn Sina himself at one point admits that we could understand *WW* to be a substance in the negative sense of a denial of accidentality (understanding a substance to be whatever is not an accident), but he insists that this is not the sense of substance that would allow it to be considered a genus under which to include *WW* along with other substances.[16]

Furthermore, one could respond to Ibn Sina's point about how not being in a subject should not imply existence by holding that it is not *this* fact about *WW* that implies its existence. Even what necessarily exists can be considered as a thing—without regard to its existence—as not in a subject. We cannot infer that Zayd or *WW* or anything else actually exists merely *because* it is a substance, even if we allow that some substance necessarily exists. In view of this, we could reject Ibn Sina's argument, and allow that "is not in a subject" can apply to anything that fulfils the three clauses mentioned above, and if it also is not a predicable, it will be a substance. *WW* would clearly seem to violate the three part definition of being in a subject, and since it is not a predicable, it would be a substance. Indeed, some Muslim philosophers have taken the position that the dispute over whether God is a substance or not is largely verbal. If we take substance in a wide sense to apply not only to contingent beings, and if we understand

[16] Marmura 2005, 277.

the definition of substance as suggested here, we can say that God is a substance, and, indeed, that everything is either a substance or an accident. If we take substance more narrowly, as Ibn Sina did, then we will consider substance as restricted to contingent beings.

However, I think that what is at stake here is more than just an arbitrary choice of definitions. At issue is how to understand the categories, and how this understanding must take into account the fundamental difference posited by Ibn Sina between existence and whatness. This is why, in the place where Ibn Sina is ready to grant that in some sense one may say that God is a substance, he cautions that this is not a sense in which substance could be considered a common genus for all substances.

> Someone may say, "Although you have avoided assigning the name 'substance' to the First, you do not avoid assigning Him its meaning. This is because He exists in no subject; and this is the meaning of substance, which you have rendered a genus."
>
> We answer: This is not the meaning of the substance we have made a genus. Rather, the meaning of [the latter] is that it is the thing having an established whatness whose existence is not in a subject—for example, a body and a soul.[17]

In order for substance to be used in a generic sense that would apply to both *WW* and individual persons, horses, etc., *WW* would have to have a whatness the features of which would distinguish it from other substances, as man and horse are differentiated, for example. In order for substance to be considered a common genus, it must be defined in such a way that its instances each possess a whatness by means of which they can be classified.

What Ibn Sina is suggesting is that the categories are fundamental divisions, not of being, as Aristotle sometimes suggests, but of whatness. If this is so, then *WW* should not be considered as a substance, because substance describes that which possesses a *whatness* having the conditions of not being present in or predicable of a subject. The categories classify different formats in which being can be found or be absent. These formats impose conceptual limitations on being from which we suppose God to be free.

> Indeed, the meaning of "what is not predicated of a substance," as in the definition (rasm), and what is common to substances, that they are of a species due to

[17] Marmura 2005, 277.

> potential, like what is common in a genus, is a whatness and a truth (haqiqah); although their existence is not in a subject.
>
> This is the predication applied to Zayd and ‘Amr, etc., by their two essences (dhat), not by their cause.
>
> However, being actually existent, which is a part of their being existent in actuality as not in a subject, this is something that can only take place by a cause; for how could the compound be of it, and in the sense of something added?
>
> As for that which it is possible to apply to Zayd, such as the genus, it is not at all correct to apply it to WW, for WW does not possess a whatness to imply this judgment. Rather, existence is necessary for it, like whatness is for others.[18]

Here Ibn Sina is saying that Zayd and ‘Amr are to be considered substances because of their whatness, regardless of whether or not they exist. This example shows that Ibn Sina’s emphasis on *whatness* for substances is not due to the fact that he is speaking of secondary substances here (as some of the secondary literature would suggest). Zayd and ‘Amr are primary substances that are to be included in the category of substance because of the nature of their whatness, not because of their existence. The actual existence of an entity cannot be included in the whatness as something additional. What determines whether or not something exists in actuality is the cause of the thing, not its whatness. It is the whatness that determines whether something is a substance or not, and because *WW* has no whatness, it cannot be considered that Zayd and God are two instances of the more general concept of substance. Existence is to God as the whatness *humanity* is to Zayd only in the sense that existence is necessary for God as humanity is necessary for Zayd, not in the sense that existence is the form of God as humanity is the form of Zayd, for existence is not a form at all.

In the middle books of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle considers the problem of whether substance is to be considered as matter, form or a combination of the two. He raises problems that go unsolved for each of the solutions, but seems to favor the view of substance as form (although this much disputed by his interpreters). Existence, however, is not form or matter or any combination thereof. Hence, existence is not a substance. However, that whose existence is necessary, *WW*, is existence itself, and hence, according to Ibn Sina, existence itself is God. Therefore, God is not a substance.

Ibn Sina gives another argument for the idea that substance pertains to whatness rather than to existence or even any *type* of existence at the end of the section from which the above passage was cited. The argument is

[18] *Isharat*, Vol. 3., *Namt* 4, Ch. 25. Admonition, 51-52.

that even if we don't know whether Zayd exists or not, we still say that he is a man, and that he is a substance. If substance were a way of being, however, we would not be able to say the Zayd is a substance unless we knew that he actually has being or exists. Since we call Zayd a substance regardless of whether he exists or not, substance must pertain to whatness instead of pertaining to being or existence.

A revealing version of the same sort of argument can be found in the *Danish Nama-i 'Ala'i,* section 25, entitled "Finding that *WW* is neither a substance nor an accident." Here the phrase "not-in-a-subject" is hyphenated as a reminder that Ibn Sina is discussing the condition of the Aristotelian definition of a substance as that which is *not in a subject* and is not predicated of a subject. The basic idea is that *being not-in-a-subject* should not be read as implying existence, even if the word "being" is used in describing the condition.

There are a number of technical terms that occur in this text that require some explication. First, there is *haqiqah*, literally *truth*, used in Arabic translations for the Greek *aletheia*. Often times this is translated as *reality*, but this is misleading since something may have a *haqiqah* even if it does not actually exist in the external world. It is often used synonymously with *dhat*, the inner essence of a thing, and is contrasted with what is merely apparent. (Recall that essence in the sense of *dhat* must not be confused with *mahiyyah*, *whatness*.) A related term is *anniyyah*, about which there has been much scholarly debate. In Ibn Sina's writings it usually is used for the *individual existence* of a thing. Chittick suggests it originally meant something like "that-it-is-ness".[19] With these points in mind, we can turn to the text:

> A substance is that whose truth (*haqiqah*) has existence that is not-in-a-subject when it exists. It is not that which has existence that occurs not-in-a-subject. You do not doubt [propositions] of the sort as that a body is a substance, but you can be in doubt about whether this body which is a substance exists or not, and only then [after determining that it has existence] whether its existence is in a subject or not. So, a substance is that for which there is a whatness, such as a body, a soul, a human being, or a horse; and this whatness is the state of that which—until its *individual existence (anniyyah)* is not-in-a-subject—you do not know whether it has an *individual existence* or not. Whatever is like this has a whatness other than its

[19] Chittick 2001, 317. Marmura also uses "thatness" to translate this; see Marmura 2005, 383.

> *individual existence*. Hence, that which has no whatness other than its *individual existence* is not a substance.[20]

Here Ibn Sina first makes the point about the definition of substance that it should not be read as implying that all substances exist, despite the wording of the definition as that which *exists* not-in-a-subject. To prove the point, he argues that you can know that something is a substance even while doubting whether it exists, such as a particular body. The question of whether the actual existence of such a thing is in a subject or is not-in-a-subject only comes up after one discovers whether it has any existence at all, but its being a substance is never doubted. Hence the condition of being not-in-a-subject for being a substance should be understood conditionally, so that for any substance *x*,

> (*x* exists → the existence of *x* is not-in-a-subject).

(Obviously, the conditional here is not truth functional.[21]) If you know that an imagined body is a substance, then when you discover that it really exists in the external world, you know that its existence is not-in-a-subject, and conversely, if you do not know if it actually exists, you cannot very well know that its *existence* is not-in-a-subject, (although you can know that if it were to exist, its existence would be not-in-a-subject). This means that for substances, existence and whatness are distinct. For *WW,* however, there is no whatness at all, unless its existence is taken to be its whatness, and hence, *WW* is not a substance. The section from the *Danish Nama-i 'Ala'i* continues as follows:

> With regard to accident, it is evident that *WW* is not in something, and since the existence of *WW* is neither in the manner being univocal (*tawati*)[22] with other things nor of being a genus for the existence of other things, its existence not-in-a-

---

[20] *Danish Nama-i 'Ala'i,* translated in Morewedge 1973, 56. My translation differs substantially from that of Prof. Morewedge in several places.

[21] For a discussion of Ibn Sina's logic of conditionals, see Goodman 1992, ch. 4., 188-211.

[22] Predicates may be applied to a thing univocally or derivatively. We do not apply "rationality" univocally to a person, for this would mean that the person *is* rationality. Rather we apply it derivatively, so that it is said that the person is rational. Likewise, existence is not applied univocally to God and other things, for this would imply that they, as well as God, are existence. However, both may be derivatively called "existent" or "existing". See the discussion in the *Shifa,* Marmura 2005, 175-180.

> subject along with the existence not-in-a-subject of people and other things does not fall under the meaning of *genus*, because for the likes of existence, all fall under posteriority and priority,[23] neither as equivalent nor as a genus. But what is not in a subject is not always posterior or prior. Therefore, existence not-in-a-subject is not a genus for things, except in the sense we mentioned; and substance is a genus for those things that are substances. Therefore, *WW* is not a substance, and in sum is not in any category, because for all the categories existence is accidental and additional to whatness and outside of whatness, while existence is the whatness of *WW*. Therefore, from this much that has been said, it has been found that *WW* does not have a genus, so it does not have a differentia, and so it does not have a definition (*hadd*); and it has been found that it has no locus and no subject, so it does not have a contrary; and it has been found that it has no species, and so it has no helper or partner; and it has been found that it has no cause, so it is not receptive to change or division.

It is clear that *WW* is not to be considered an accident, because *WW* is not in a subject in the way that accidents are said to be in a subject. However, consider the following argument. Ibn Sina says that existence is accidental to whatness. Doesn't that mean that existence is an accident? But *WW* (i.e., God) is pure existence. So, doesn't that mean that Ibn Sina should consider God to be an accident? No. The fact that existence is accidental to whatness just means that for any given whatness its existence will be contingent, not that existence is an attribute or trope that is found in a subject, like the accident of whiteness is found in a table.

When a thing is considered as existing, we are not asking what it is and we are not asking which one it is; rather, we are considering it as causing or having been caused. As such, whatever exists can be placed in a ranking of causes. This is not the case for what is not-in-a-subject, because substances that do not exist are outside the causal chain altogether. Existence not-in-a-subject can be predicated both of God and substances, but the relation among the things to which this predicate is applied is not that of things that share a common genus or of different instances at the same level with relation to this existence. Rather, the relation is one of causal ordering. It is only in an artificial way of shared true predication that "being not-in-a-subject" can be seen as a genus. Genus is properly understood as indicating a common form shared by the things that fall under it and answering the question of "What is it?" In this sense, existence not-in-a-subject is not a genus. Substance, however, can be considered a genus for those things that are substances because what makes something a substance is that it has a

[23] See Morewedge 1973, 44-45.

whatness of a certain sort, regardless of whether it exists. Since *WW* does not have any such whatness, it cannot be considered a substance.

3. Aquinas on God and Substance

A similar form of reasoning is, not surprisingly, found Aquinas' discussion of the question of whether God is contained in a genus in the *Summa Theologica*. The first objection is like that to which Ibn Sina addresses himself, except that Ibn Sina is concerned with the condition of being not-in-a-subject, while Aquinas considers substance as that which subsists of itself.

> Objection 1: It seems that God is contained in a genus. For a substance is a being that subsists of itself. But this is especially true of God. Therefore God is in a genus of substance.[24]

Like Ibn Sina, Aquinas comes to the conclusion that God is not in the genus of substance. His argument is rather complicated, however, and I do not intend to review it in detail here. The main idea is that there are two ways in which a thing can be in a genus, and in neither of these ways is it appropriate to consider God as in a genus. He offers three ways of showing that God is not in a genus as a species is in a genus. The first is that there is no potentiality in God, but this would be necessary if God were of a species with a differentia from the genus. The second argument comes closer to Ibn Sina: God's essence is nothing but His existence, so if He had a genus, it would have to be existence, which is not suitable for being a genus, because there could be nothing to determine the individual from the general essence. Likewise, Ibn Sina argues that if God were in the genus of substance, there would have to be something in His whatness to distinguish His substance from other substances, but His whatness is nothing but His existence. The difference between Ibn Sina and Aquinas here is that Aquinas does not bring in the concept of substance at this point, and takes it that if God were to belong to a genus it would have to be existence rather than substance; but the rest of the reasoning is pretty much the same.[25] Aquinas'

---

[24] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*: "*Videtur quod Deus sit in genere aliquo. Substantia enim est ens per se subsistens. Hoc autem maxime convenit Deo. Ergo Deus est in genere substantiae*." Iª q. 3 a. 5 arg. 1.

[25] *Ibid.*: "*Secundo, quia, cum esse Dei sit eius essentia, ut ostensum est, si Deus esset in aliquo genere, oporteret quod genus eius esset ens, nam genus significat essentiam rei, cum praedicetur in eo quod quid est. Ostendit autem philosophus in III Metaphys., quod ens non potest esse genus alicuius, omne enim genus habet differentias quae sunt*

third argument is that different things that fall under the same genus must differ in existence, and so, for each thing that falls under a genus there must be a difference between its quiddity and its existence, and this is not the case for God. After this, Aquinas argues, somewhat obscurely, that God cannot be in a genus in the manner in which something can be said to belong to a genus if it is a principle that reduces to the genus, as unity is the principle that reduces to the genus of quantity. Following this, is the reply to the objection quoted above:

> Reply Obj. 1: The word substance signifies not only what exists of itself--for existence cannot of itself be a genus, as shown in the body of the article; but, it also signifies an essence that has the property of existing in this way--namely, of existing of itself; this existence, however, is not its essence. Thus it is clear that God is not in the genus of substance.[26]

Once again, Aquinas reasons in a manner similar to Ibn Sina, except that Ibn Sina focuses on the definition of substance as neither in nor predicable of a subject, while Aquinas speaks of substance as what "exists of itself". Also, Aquinas does not have what I have called the "curious argument" of Ibn Sina, to wit that we can know that the definition of substance applies to a thing without knowing whether the thing exists. However, both philosophers admit that the definition might make it look like God should be included in the genus substance, and both deny this on the grounds that the definition of substance signifies a whatness or essence that is distinct from existence with certain features. So, it would appear that Aquinas, like Ibn Sina, is arguing that God is not a substance.

In his *De ente et essentia*, Aquinas mentions that some philosophers have said that God does have any quiddity or essence, because God has no essence other than His existence:

> There are three ways in which substances may have an essence. First, surely, is the way God has his essence, which is his very existence itself, and so we find certain philosophers saying that God does not have a quiddity or essence because his es-

---

extra essentiam generis; nulla autem differentia posset inveniri, quae esset extra ens; quia non ens non potest esse differentia. Unde relinquitur quod Deus non sit in genere."

[26] *Ibid., "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod substantiae nomen non significat hoc solum quod est per se esse, quia hoc quod est esse, non potest per se esse genus, ut ostensum est. Sed significat essentiam cui competit sic esse, idest per se esse, quod tamen esse non est ipsa eius essentia. Et sic patet quod Deus non est in genere substantiae."*

> sence is not other than his existence. From this it follows that he is not in a genus, for everything that is in a genus has a quiddity beyond its existence, since the quiddity or nature of the genus or species is not in the order of nature distinguished in the things of which it is the genus or species, but the existence is diverse in diverse things.[27]

Despite the similarities, however, Aquinas, unlike Ibn Sina, finally asserts that God *is* a substance! He denies that God is in the *genus* substance, because of the argumentation mentioned above, which is broadly comparable to the reasoning presented by Ibn Sina; but despite this, Aquinas also maintains that God *is* a substance, indeed, the first simple substance (*substantia prima simplex*).[28] Aquinas does not maintain that God is a substance in the sense of that which underlies accidents, but only in the sense of subsistence, or existing of itself, as is implied in his discussion of the issue of whether God should be considered a person:

> Reply Obj. 3: The word "hypostasis" does not apply to God as regards its source of origin, since He does not underlie accidents; but it applies to Him in its objective sense, for it is imposed to signify the subsistence. Jerome said that "poison lurks in this word," forasmuch as before it was fully understood by the Latins, the heretics used this term to deceive the simple, to make people profess many essences as they profess several hypostases, inasmuch as the word "substance," which corresponds to hypostasis in Greek, is commonly taken amongst us to mean essence.[29]

---

[27] *See Thomas Aquinas, De ente et essentia, cap. IV: Invenitur enim triplex modus habendi essentiam in substantiis. Aliquid enim est, sicut Deus, cuius essentia est ipsummet suum esse; et ideo inveniuntur aliqui philosophi dicentes quod Deus non habet quiditatem vel essentiam, quia essentia sua non est aliud quam esse eius. Et ex hoc sequitur quod ipse non sit in genere, quia omne quod est in genere oportet quod habeat quiditatem praeter esse suum, cum quiditas vel natura generis aut speciei non distinguatur secundum rationem naturae in illis, quorum est genus vel species, sed esse est diversum in diversis.*

[28] *See Thomas Aquinas, De ente et essentia, cap. 1.*

[29] *Summa Theologica, I^a q. 29 a. 3 ad 3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod nomen hypostasis non competit Deo quantum ad id a quo est impositum nomen, cum non substet accidentibus, competit autem ei quantum ad id, quod est impositum ad significandum rem subsistentem. Hieronymus autem dicit sub hoc nomine venenum latere, quia antequam significatio huius nominis esset plene nota apud Latinos, haeretici per hoc nomen simplices decipiebant, ut confiterentur plures essentias, sicut confitentur plures hypostases; propter hoc quod nomen substantiae, cui respondet in Graeco nomen hypostasis, communiter accipitur apud nos pro essentia.*"

If Jerome thought there was poison lurking in the word "hypostasis," Ibn Sina seemed to think there was some of it connected with the word "substance," too. Despite the fact that Aquinas so generously cites the *Metaphysics* of Ibn Sina (*Al-Shifa'*), he does not follow him on this point: while for Ibn Sina it is dangerously misleading to call God a substance, even if we can define the word in such a way that it could apply to Him, for Aquinas what is important is only to deny that God belongs to the *genus* of substance. Aquinas leaves us, however, with the awkward position of maintaining that God is a substance who does not belong to the genus of substance, not because he finds anything wrong with the idea that substance could be a genus, but because a particular substance, God, cannot belong to any genus, and hence not to the genus of substance, despite the fact that He is admitted to be a substance.

Since *De ente et essentia* was an early essay written years before work was begun on the *Summa*, it is possible that in the later work Aquinas is actually closer to Ibn Sina than he was in the earlier work.[30] As far as I have been able to discern, however, we do not find an explicit denial of the earlier view (that God is a substance, the first simple substance), although the position that God does not belong to the *genus* of substance is maintained throughout.

The issue is complicated by the fact that the Church had used the term *ousia* in Greek and *substance* in Latin to express the doctrine of the Trinity. In Tertulian's formulation there are three persons in one substance. Greek theologians used *hypostases* for the persons. Etymologically, however, the Greek *ousia* corresponds to the Latin *essentia*, and the Greek *hypostasis* to the Latin *substantia*. Despite the etymology, Latin writers translated *ousia* as *substantia,* and when they did so, it was often with regard to an understanding of substance very different from that of Aristotle's. So, if Aquinas sometimes affirmed that God is a substance, as in *De ente et essentia*, while denying that substance is a genus that includes God, some of the awkwardness might be explained as due to his *philosophical* conviction that God is not a substance, for reasons not unlike those of Ibn Sina, while being committed to the claim that the multiplicity of the persons of the

[30] Thanks to Winfried Löffler for pointing out the chronology of the works of Aquinas, and that we ought not assume that the earlier and later words are consistent with one another. See I.T. Eschmann, O.P., "A Catalogue of St. Thomas' Works: Bibliographical Notes" in Appendix to Etienne Gilson's *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956) 381-439.

Trinity does not contradict unity of substance in some *theological* sense to be found in the creeds and patristic writings, about which there continues to be considerable controversy.[31]

Ibn Sina, has his own awkwardnesses. We will turn to a few of them when we consider how he seeks to treat things that don't exist.

There are a number of reasons why the position taken by Ibn Sina on this issue, namely that God is not a substance, is important. First, it sets the stage for much subsequent Islamic philosophical theology. By the time we arrive at Mulla Sadra, we find God identified with pure existence itself devoid of any whatness, and the proof of the sincere is transformed into a proof that it is existence itself that is necessary of existence, rather than that there must be something which is necessary of existence, as in Ibn Sina. Secondly, in Sufi theory we also find the identification of God with existence itself and a denial of the view that God is a substance. Substances are taken to be limited whatnesses in the external world, while God is unlimited existence. Several arguments are presented for the view that God is existence and is not a substance in the famous introduction to the commentary on the *Fusus* by Qaysari (d. 751/1350). Qaysari is a prominent Sufi theoretician whose work has had a profound impact on subsequent Sufi theology or theoretical mysticism. Qaysari's argument is stated as an argument that existence is not a substance, and after this it is shown that existence is not an accident and is to be identified with God.

> Nor is it a substance, for [a substance] is an existent in the outside that is not in a subject, or a whatness that is not found in a subject, if it exists, while existence is not like that; otherwise, like a determinate substance, it would be in need of an additional existence and what that implies.[32]

The basic point here displays the influence of Ibn Sina. God cannot be a substance because substance is a sort of whatness, and as such depends on something else for its existence.

Aside from the influence of Ibn Sina's arguments that can be traced in Islamic theology and mysticism, we find that the position taken, that God is not a substance, resonates with Islamic spirituality because of the emphasis on *tawhid*, divine unity, in Islam. The radical affirmation of the oneness of God leads, through a long association of oneness with being, to

---

[31] See Stead 1994, 160-172.
[32] Qaysari 1375/1996, 13.

a radical affirmation of divine being, that pure absolute being is God and as such God stands outside the framework of the categories.

The main benefit of such a claim is that it provides the chief framework principle for a speculative theological metaphysics that gives shape to such theological topics as the proofs for the existence of God, the nature of the divine attributes, the relationships between God and the world and between God and man, the problem of evil, and much else. The chief objection to this sort of theology is that it makes God so abstract that the believer cannot relate to Him. However, to conceive of God in a more personal way becomes an excuse for anthropomorphism, and belief in an anthropomorphic god is just not possible for those who see such belief as little better than superstition. On the other hand, the rich tradition of spirituality in Islam, especially the poetry of the Sufis, is ample testimony to the fact that a profound personal relationship to God is not hampered by a metaphysical theology that denies that God is a substance.

4. Appendix: Ibn Sina's Non-denoting Singular Terms

Ibn Sina's ontology is one that is populated by whatnesses that lack existence in the external world as well as those that actually exist. He uses proper names, such as Zayd, in order to refer to both existing and non-existing whatnesses. This would seem to indicate that one would need a free logic or a Meinongian logic in order to formalize the sorts of arguments he offers for the claim that God is not a substance.

If we consider the texts in which Ibn Sina discusses non-existent entities, we find that a Meinongian semantics is better suited than other forms of free logic, although certain qualifications must be kept in mind. According to Ibn Sina, everything that can be called a thing has its own "proper existence" whether or not it actually exists. Actual existence in the external world is called "positive existence." Proper existence seems to be like Meinong's *Außersein*. However, the Avicennan proper existence—when non-actual—is conceptual rather than Platonic:

> …the thing exists either in the concrete or in the estimative [faculty] and the intellect. If [this] were not the case, it would not be a thing.
> …when…it is said, "The thing may be absolutely nonexistent," this is a matter that must be looked into. If by the nonexistent is meant the nonexistent in external reality, this would be possible; for it is possible for a thing that does not exist in external things to exist in the mind. But if [something] other than this is meant, this would be false and there would be no information about it at all….

> …information is always about something realized in the mind. No affirmative information about the absolutely nonexistent is [ever] given. If, moreover, information about it is given in the negative, then an existence in some respect is given it in the mind. [This is] because our saying "it" entails a reference, and reference to the nonexistent that has no concept in any respect at all in the mind is impossible.[33]

Strictly speaking, it follows that there are no non-referring terms for Ibn Sina. Terms will either refer to things in the external world, or, failing that, to things that are merely in the mind; however, information is given in predication by applying one mental concept to another, and it is only accidentally that this may describe what exists positively in the external world. So, there is an ambiguity in the term "existence". It can mean actual existence in the external world, or it can mean existence in either the external world or in the mind. This ambiguity is mostly ignored in Ibn Sina's logical works, and as a result, the impression is given that Ibn Sina holds that all true predications must be made about actually existing objects in the external world.
Nicholas Rescher has claimed:

> Avicenna is thus committed to the thesis that if ϕ is a genuine predicate, then
>
> "ϕa" is true
> E!a [i.e., a exists]
>
> is a valid inference…[34]

The inference will be valid, according to Ibn Sina, only if existence is interpreted broadly to include both positive and mental existence. In the *Logic* of the *Isharat* Ibn Sina writes:

> The affirmative is not possible except for what is positive as represented in existence or *in the mind*.[35]

Clearly this implies that there can be true affirmative propositions about things that exist only in the mind, contrary to the standard interpretation of Ibn Sina as expressed by Rescher.

---

[33] Marmura 2005, 25.
[34] Rescher 1966, 73. The point is also corroborated in Morewedge 1979, 192.
[35] My italics (obviously). *Isharat,* Vol. 1, *Al-Mantiq* 1992, 244. Note that the meaning of "positive" here is not limited to the actually existing.

As we have seen, Ibn Sina is quite willing to affirm that Zayd is a man and that Zayd is a substance, and that "is a man" and "is a substance" are genuine predicates, while denying that the inference to "Zayd exists" would be valid in either case, (unless existence is understood to include merely mental existence). In the *Isharat*, Ibn Sina claims that we can know that Zayd is a substance without knowing whether he exists, and this implies that it can be true that Zayd is a substance even if Zayd does not have actual existence in the external world. Likewise, in the *Danesh nameh,* he asserts that we can have no doubt that a body is a substance while doubting whether it exists, again implying that a particular affirmative proposition about something that does not exist in the external world could be true.

Rescher refers to a discussion in Ibn Sina's logic in which he distinguishes between the negative proposition that Zayd is not a being-that-sees from the affirmative proposition that Zayd is a being-that-does-not-see. The latter has existential import, but not the former. Generally, Rescher is right, and particular affirmative propositions are taken to imply the actual existence of the subject. In fact, one has to dig fairly deep to find Ibn Sina accepting the truth of individual affirmative propositions about things that do not actually exist in the external world. Usually, the mental existents that he is willing to make affirmative assertions about are abstract entities such as numbers and kinds. However, Ibn Sina is willing to allow exceptions to this general rule where what is predicated is an essential attribute describing a nature, species or genus. In the case of "Zayd is a substance," for example, the subject, "Zayd", will refer to the proper existence of Zayd, that is, his individual whatness, to which the predicate truly applies, even if Zayd does not actually exist. In fact, even the statement "Zayd is a being that sees" might be true when Zayd does not exist, because according to Ibn Sina, one can make affirmative statements that describe the nature of a thing regardless of whether the thing exists in the external world or merely in the mind.[36] However, "Zayd is a being-that-does-not-see," will normally have existential import, because the predicate does not describe the individual nature, species or genus of Zayd, and so can only be true by describing an accident of Zayd in the external world with the implication that Zayd has positive extra-mental existence. Ibn Sina indicates that much depends on the intention of the speaker to determine whether an expression in a given format is to be interpreted with existential import or not, and whether what is predicated is to indicate the character of the species or ge-

[36] See Inati 1984, 83-86.

nus or something else.[37] We might accordingly speculate that if one were speaking of a person, Zayd, and asking whether or not that person happens to be blind, to respond with an affirmative statement, "Zayd is a being that sees," would have actual existential import. If, however, one means by this statement only to affirm that Zayd belongs to a species of sighted creatures, the affirmation could be true even if Zayd only exists in the mind.

Ibn Sina tells us that the proper existence of a thing is equivalent to its truth (*haqiqah*); and that each thing has a truth that is proper to it, namely its whatness.[38] A thing must exist either in the external world or in the mind, for otherwise it could not be meaningfully called a thing. But it seems that full determinacy only applies to actually existing objects, and mere mental existents remain indeterminate with respect to some predicates, so that neither the predicate nor its contrary can be truly applied to what has only mental existence. Exactly how much is to be included in an individual whatness remains unclear, but a merely mental existent *a* will be incomplete in the sense that for some predicate *F*, neither *F* nor its contrary *(-F)* are true of *a*. Incomplete entities are universal in the sense that different instances of the whatness of a merely mental entity could be realized in the external world. Individuality, conversely, is guaranteed by existence in the external world. It is in this sense that existence is the principle of individuality.

If we wanted to express Ibn Sina's views in terms of contemporary formal semantics, a rather complex sort of modeling would be needed. While this kind of exercise might illuminate some features of Ibn Sina's thinking, one must not forget that Ibn Sina's logic was Aristotelian rather than that of modern quantification: predicates apply to subjects rather than to variables. If we were to attempt to transpose Ibn Sina's views into a quantificational key, however, we could introduce two sets of quantifiers, "$\exists^{pro}$" for proper existence, and "$\exists^{+}$" for positive existence. For "there is exactly one" we will add an exclamation point to the quantifier.

(1) $\exists!x\ \mathrm{F}x =_{def.} \exists x \forall y\ (\mathrm{F}y \equiv x=y)$

The following propositions will then be considered true:

(2) $\exists^{pro}x$ (Unicorn x & has a horn x)

[37] Specifically, one might use either of the forms "Zayd is not a thing-that-sees," or "Zayd is a non-seeing-thing" to mean the other. See *Al-Najat*, 16.
[38] Marmura 2005, 24.

(3) $\sim\exists^{+}x$ (Unicorn x & has a horn x)

From an Avicennan perspective, this is somewhat misleading, because the term "proper existence" is used only for whatnesses insofar as meaningful information can be given about them, such as one being distinct from another, and not with regard to the possession of a type of existence other than that which is possessed by the things of the external world. However, Ibn Sina allows himself to use the language of "proper existence" for things that merely exist in the mind.

So, a sentence like:

(4) The phoenix is a bird.

would be ambiguous. It would be true if interpreted in terms of proper existence:

(5) $\exists^{pro}!x$ (Phoenix x & Bird x)

but false if interpreted in terms of positive existence:

(6) $\exists^{+}!x$ (Phoenix x & Bird x)

In fact, Ibn Sina does not consider the interpretation in terms of mental existence when he considers the assertion "The phoenix is non-seeing," which he takes to be false since the phoenix does not actually exist.[39]

If we were to scrap the Avicennan conceptualism, we would get a domain of "proper existence" consisting of everything to which one could possibly refer in a true proposition. A proper subset of this would be an "inner domain" of "positive existence". In this case, since everything would have proper existence, it would be trivial that whatever has positive existence has proper existence. Ibn Sina, however, is not willing to recognize the proper existence of every possible whatness, but only those that exist in the mind. He does not discuss the issue of whose mind, but it seems that he means the mind of the person who makes the assertion in question. There is no discussion of the mind of God in this regard.

[39] *Al-Najat*, 16.

If we want to be more true to Ibn Sina, we would have to allow that proper existence and positive existence determine two domains: things that exist in the mind and things that exist in the external world, such that the latter is still a subset of the former. There are things that exist in the mind that do not exist in the external world, like the phoenix, and it would seem that there are things that have positive existence but do not have proper existence, like things that actually exist but no one has ever thought about. At the very least, a speaker should be able to admit that there are things in actual existence about which the speaker is totally ignorant. Ibn Sina, however, would deny that we can meaningfully make assertions about things that have no existence in the soul, for as soon as we make the assertion, we posit a meaning in the soul. When we say that there are things about which we are ignorant, the term "things" has meaning for us and hence there is a whatness, no matter how incomplete, in the soul to give meaning to the assertion. Finally, there are things that exist in both the proper and positive senses. So, the set of those things that have proper existence exhausts the domain of all things about which meaningful assertions can be made. There is no room for Meinongian impossible objects in Ibn Sina's ontology, and the set of positive existents about which assertions can be made is a subset of the set of proper existents. The only existents that Ibn Sina considers at all are those about which some assertion might be made, so actually existing things that no one has thought about or mere possible objects that no one has imagined are beside the point of the sort of semantic or logical theory he is trying to develop.

When Ibn Sina speaks of substances, he sometimes describes the condition of existing not-in-a-subject as a conditional, when it exists, then what is counted as a subject exists not-in-a-subject.[40] Assuming that it exists, even if it doesn't, a substance exists not-in-a-subject. This could lead to something like a supervaluations approach to non-existent objects. According to that approach, *Fa* is true even when *a* doesn't exist, if and only if in every possible situation in which *a* does exist, *Fa* is true.

Sometimes, however, Ibn Sina speaks of mental existence and external existence as if these were two vessels: when something enters the mind, it gains one kind of existence, when it enters the actual world, it gains another type of existence. If that were the case, however, we could speak of two distinctions: between whatness and positive existence and between whatness and mental existence. There is no support for this in the texts, and it is inconsistent with the rationale for the introduction of mental exis-

[40] *Danish Nama-i 'Ala'i* 1973, 56; see above fn. 20.

tence. Ibn Sina comes to mental existence in order to find a locus of reference for terms and concepts that do not denote anything in the external world. The main distinction in the contingent existents is between existence and whatness. Informative true propositions are made about contingent existents that lack actual existence, so a referent is sought for what would otherwise be nondenoting terms.

The examples that Ibn Sina uses for things that exist only in the mind are things that exist only in the past and only in the future. This makes Ibn Sina what contemporary philosophers have called an *actualist*.[41] The following three formula may be used to describe *temporal actualism* in terms of positive and proper quantifiers. This is followed by the relevant passage from *Al-Shifa'*.

(7) $\forall^{pro}x$ ((Past x & ~Now x) → ~$\exists^{+}y(x=y)$)

(8) $\forall^{pro}x$ ((Future x & ~Now x) → ~$\exists^{+}y(x=y)$)

(9) $\forall^{pro}x(\exists^{+}y(x=y)$ → Now x)

> Thus, for example, if you said, "The resurrection will be, "you would have understood "resurrection" and would have understood "will be." You would have predicated "will be," which is in the soul, or "resurrection," which is in the soul, in [the sense] that it would be correct for this meaning, with respect to another meaning also intellectually apprehended (namely, one intellectually apprehended in a future time), to be characterized by a third meaning (namely, [the object] of intellectual apprehension: existence). This [pattern of reasoning] applies correspondingly to matters relating to the past. It is thus clear that that about which information is given must have some sort of existence in the soul. Information, in truth, is about what exists in the soul and [only] accidentally about what exists externally.[42]

A modal actualism could be characterized in the same manner. First, we should introduce two sets of quantifiers: one that covers the domain of all possible existents whether they exist in the mind alone, or in the mind as well as in the actual world, and another that has as its domain the things of the actual world.

The example used by Ibn Sina is not of just any non-actual possible object, but of a future object. Aristotle would have said that it has *potential being* as opposed to *actual being*. This suggests another example of the

[41] Menzel 2006.
[42] Marmura 2005, 27.

drift toward abstraction in the metaphysics of Ibn Sina: from potential existence to mental existence.

According to Ibn Sina, whatnesses can exist merely in the mind and/or they can exist in the external world, but the mind has a certain priority here, since (as stated in the above passage), "Information, in truth, is about what exists in the soul and [only] accidentally about what exists externally." Furthermore, to say that a whatness exists in the external world is only to say that it is instantiated or realized in an existing thing. As universals, whatnesses have no extra-mental existence of their own. Here we find a hint of a position with greater resonance in the mystical traditions of Islam: that whatnesses are mental constructs and that what is in the external world is only existence. This sort of development, however, cannot be attributed to Ibn Sina, and would have to wait six centuries to blossom in Islamic philosophy in the works of Mulla Sadra.

REFERENCES

Aquinas, Thomas, *De ente et essentia*. URL= http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/oee.html.

Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*. URL= http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth1003.html

Black, D. 2000 "Imagination and Estimation: Arabic Paradigms and Latin Transformations", *Topoi* 19, 59-75.

- 1993, "Estimation in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions", *Dialogue,* 32, 219–58.

Chittick, W.C. 1998 *The Self-Disclosure of God*, Albany: SUNY Press.

- 2001 *The Heart of Islamic Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Goodman, L. E. 1992 *Avicenna*, London: Routledge.

Gutas, D. 1988 *Ibn Sina and the Aristotelian Tradition*, Leiden: Brill.

Ibn Babawayh, (Shaykh Saduq), *Al-Tawhid*, Qom: A.H. 1416/1995.

Ibn Sina, *Daneshnameh 'Ala'i, Risaleh Mantiq*, Hamadan: 1383/2004.

- *Daneshnameh 'Ala'i, Ilahiyat, Hamadan*: 1383/2004.

- *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, 4 vols., Beirut: 1992.

- *Al-Najat*, Cairo: 1938.

- *Al-Shifa'*, see Marmura 2005.

Inati, S.C. 1984 tr., *Remarks and Admonitions*, Part One: Logic, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.

Legenhausen, M. 2003 "The Proof of the Sincere", *Journal of Islamic Philosophy*, Issue number 1, volume 1, Fall, Available on line at: http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/journal/is-01/Ms-Leg.doc

Marmura, M.E. 2005 tr., *Avicenna, The Metaphysics of The Healing*, Provo: Brigham Young University Press.

Menzel, C. “Actualism,” accessed May, 2006,
URL= http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/actualism/
Misbah Yazdi, M. T. 2003 *Sharh-e Illahiyat-e Shifa’*, 2 vols., Qom.
Morewedge, P. 1973 *The Metaphysics of Avicenna (Ibn Sina)*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 1975 “The Analysis of ‘Substance’ in Ìusi’s Logic and in the Ibn Sinian Tradition” in G. F. Hourani (ed.), *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, Albany: SUNY Press, 158-188.
- 1979 “A Third Version of the Ontological Argument in the Ibn Sinian Metaphysics” in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, Albany: SUNY Press, 188-222.
Qaysari, M. D. 1375/1996 *Sharh Fusus al-Hikam*, ed. Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, Tehran.
Qummi, Q. S. 1373/1994 *Sharh Tawhid al-Saduq*, Tehran.
Rescher, N. 1966 “Existence in Arabic Logic and Philosophy,” in *Studies in Arabic Philosophy*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
Rudolph, U. 2004 *Islamische Philosophie*, München: C. H. Beck.
Runggaldier, E. and Kanzian, C. 1998 *Grundprobleme der Analytischen Ontologie*, Paderborn: Schöningh.
Stead, C. 1994 *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Stone, A. “Readings from medieval Aristotelians on substance and accident,” URL = http://home.uchicago.edu/~abestone/readings4.pdf.
Wiggins, D. 1980 *Sameness and Substance*, Cambridge: Harvard.