

ARTÍCULOS/*ARTICLES*

AVICENNA'S PROOF FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE: THE PROOF FROM ONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Resumen

Se argumenta que, en Avicena, sólo existe una prueba de la existencia de Dios, y sólo un modo de establecer dicha prueba desde su sistema metafísico – derivada de nociones *a priori* entre las que juega un papel esencial la noción de existencia *wujūd*. La prueba configura un escenario de conocimiento discursivo *a priori*.

Palabras clave

Existencia; Dios; metafísica; consideraciones ontológicas.

Abstract

This paper argues that there is only one proof for God's existence in Avicenna, and only one way for establishing the proof within his metaphysical system. This metaphysical proof is essentially derived from *a priori* notions, among which the notion of existence (*wujūd*) has the central role. Avicenna's proof is structured in such a way that all its concepts are either derived from the meaning of 'existence' or are connected with this meaning. In this sense Avicenna's proof sets out a scenario of discursive *a priori* knowledge established purely on considerations of fundamental ontological meanings such as 'existence', 'existent', 'thing', 'necessary', 'possible', 'impossible', 'one' and 'cause'.

Keywords

Existence; God; metaphysics; ontological considerations

Introduction

It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is Avicenna who established metaphysics as a science, not only in the Islamic world¹ – his inquiry became a standard of Western later medieval metaphysical thought.² The name ‘metaphysics’ (*mā ba’da’t-tabīa*) as Avicenna sees it, stands for a science that deals with «that which is after nature» meaning something beyond the corporeal matter – the science that investigates what is prior to observable existence.³ In the short division of sciences at the beginning of his *al-Ilāhiyyāt* Avicenna, following his predecessors, places metaphysics within theoretical sciences, together with the natural and the mathematical sciences. The natural sciences deal with bodies as something that is subject to motion and rest, while the subject matter of mathematical sciences are quantities abstracted from matter as well as quantities of certain things that have quantities.⁴ In his *al-Madkhal* (Avicenna’s *Isagoge*) Avicenna makes the division within theoretical sciences into those that are mixed with motion and those that are not mixed with motion – among the latter are mind and God.⁵ This division has the same meaning as the one in *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, because in Avicenna’s philosophy whatever is mixed with motion is also mixed with matter and *vice versa*. What becomes immediately evident is that two theoretical sciences, natural and mathematical, have one thing in common: they are connected with the material world, this way or another. The first *specificum* of metaphysics, in comparison to other sciences in this category, is that it investigates «the things that are separable from matter in subsistence and definition.»⁶ Immediately after this statement Avicenna stresses that metaphysics deals with the first causes of natural and mathematical existence – with the Cause of all causes and the Principle of all principles.⁷ As we can see, at the very beginning of his greatest metaphysical work Avicenna prepares the terrain for the proclamation of the superiority of metaphysics. This is especially evident in *al-Madkhal*, where Avicenna makes the distinction between 1) those theoretical sciences that deal with matter in the definition and in existence, 2) those that deal with matter in the existence only, but in the definition are separated (*tujarrad*) from material, and 3) a science that is completely separated from matter in its definition as well as in existence; the first are

¹ Türker, Ö., «The Possibility of Thinking on Existence: An Analysis Following the Traditions of Islamic Metaphysics», *Nazariyat Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences*, 1/3 (2015), pp. 1-36.

² More in Verbeke, G., *Avicenna, Grundleger einer neuen Metaphysik*, Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, G 263, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1983, and Bertolacci, A., *Establishing the Science of Metaphysics*, in R.C. Taylor and L.X. Lopez-Farjeat ed., *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, London / New York, Routledge, 2016, pp. 185-197.

³ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Shifā al-Ilāhiyyāt*, (*The Metaphysics of The Healing*), trans. M.E. Marmura, Brigham Young University Press, Provo Utah, 2005, I, 2, (13); further on ‘*al-Ilāhiyyāt*’.

⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 1, (2)-(5); I, 2, (2)-(3) and Avicenna, *Dānish Nāma-I ‘alā’ī*, (*The Metaphisica of Avicenna*), trans. P. Morwedge, Columbia University Press, New York, 1973, I, p. 12.

⁵ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Shifā: al-Madkhal*, *Mantiġa Giriş*, trans. Ö. Türker, Litera Yayıncılık, Istanbul, 2013, I, 2, [11]; further on ‘*al-Madkhal*’.

⁶ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1, (6).

⁷ *Ibid.*, (7).

natural sciences, the second are mathematical sciences, and the third is metaphysics.⁸ Sciences that are mixed with motion are those that depend on motion, as it is the necessary condition for their existence, and those which are mixed with motion but do not depend on it.⁹ Hence all theoretical sciences can be divided into those that are mixed with motion/matter, and that special science that is completely separated from motion/matter.

Metaphysics has its subject matter (*mawḍū'*) in existent *qua* existent, or being *qua* being (*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd*),¹⁰ that is the concept of the widest possible extension¹¹ and its goal (*matlūba*) in the proof for God's existence. Therefore, metaphysics is based on the self-evidence of the meaning of 'existence' (*wujūd*). This means that in order to conceptually grasp anything the meaning of 'existence' must be presupposed. Thus, metaphysics starts as ontology that serves as the fundamental structure on which the philosophical theology is built. In this way Avicenna retains the theological conception highlighted by al-Kindī and, at the same time, he develops the line that al-Fārābī initiated by positing existent instead of God as the focus and goal of metaphysics as a universal science; in doing so, he gives his own original solution to a traditional question: how should Aristotle's metaphysics be defined.¹²

Metaphysics is unique in three senses according to Avicenna: 1) Its subject matter is the most general of all notions, it cannot be defined although it represents something well known – the notion of 'existence'–; every other science starts from something specific, that is admitted in that science, but proven in the higher science; only the subject matter of metaphysics is admitted exactly because it cannot be proven, but every proof rests upon it. 2) It is the only science that can provide the proof for the existence of God,¹³ because God cannot be body, He is not involved with matter, He has no parts, nor He be involved in motion.¹⁴ 3) Metaphysics relies on the very special method that consists in the pure analysis of the most evident notions – in particular, the notion of 'existent'–; it does not involve any inductive inquiry or observation whatsoever;¹⁵ for this reason it is the most perfect and the best knowledge.

What Avicenna has in mind when he talks about the goal of metaphysics and the proof for God's existence? His metaphysical proof is specific in several ways. It is an a

⁸ *Al-Madkhal*, I, 2, [12].

⁹ Marmura, M., «Avicenna on the Division of the Sciences in the Isagoge of his *Shifa'*», *Journal for the History of Arabic Science*, 4 (1980), pp. 239-251, here p. 243.

¹⁰ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1, (17); I, 2, (12).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I 2, (15).

¹² Bertolacci, *Establishing the Science of Metaphysics*, op. cit., pp. 185-197.

¹³ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1, (11).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 1, (12).

¹⁵ For additional argumentation on this point see Marmura, «Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence in the Metaphysics of *Shifa'*», *Medieval Studies*, 42/1 (1980), pp. 337-352, here pp. 337-345.

priori proof in the sense that it proceeds purely from rational concepts that are completely independent of perception.

However, there is a good reason why the proof is categorised as ontological, cosmological, metaphysical, or proof from contingency. As I explain below, unlike Anselm's, the proof is essentially ontological because it does not start from the nominal definition of God, but rather according to a long deductive process of analysis of the *a priori* meanings –too wide in their extension as to resemble reality in the sense of their implications and divisions.

In short, in this article I assume Marmura's thesis that Avicenna's proof does not involve any observation of external world,¹⁶ but with somewhat different explanation. Avicenna aims providing a demonstration that does not involve observation of any kind of things that are in motion, since the conception of motion is strictly physical, hence investigated in natural sciences. His idea is to show that the ultimate division of existence into necessary and possible implies that the absoluteness of existence cannot consist merely of beings whose essences participate in it as specific limitations (possibilities) by the means of their causes, but that all things depend on the cause that necessitates the absoluteness of existence through its own essence. Avicenna's metaphysical approach is based on the absoluteness of the meaning of 'existence' in a very specific sense: due to its extension, such absolute meaning must correspond with the absoluteness of reality, so any necessary implications of this meaning also reveal the necessary truths about the world. In this sense the proof is *a priori*.

1. Avicenna's metaphysical apriorism and the ultimate meaning of 'existence'

Metaphysics is the science which goal is to provide the proof for God's existence through the analysis of the notion of 'existence' and other primary concepts that cannot be defined. It also provides the general explanation of the world by showing how it comes from God. It is a standalone science that does not require any other scientific method or content except its own. And although its deductive method is completely independent of any other scientific approach and content, metaphysics alone can only provide limited knowledge of the world: because it is based on pure analysis, hence the proof itself would be improved if metaphysics also involves some notions and principles that are demonstrated in natural sciences. This is why metaphysics cannot stand alone as a science that deals with the world, but only as a science that proves the existence of God. In order to be the proper science about the world, metaphysics needs conceptual help from the natural sciences. Metaphysics itself offers only standalone proof for the existence of God, as well as proofs for the principles of other sciences. The basis of metaphysics is ontology –the science of existent *qua*

¹⁶ Marmura, «Avicenna's Proof from Contingency», op. cit., p. 338.

existent-, and due to the fact that realisation of existence and self is the basis of all knowledge, perception and conception.

The description of Avicenna's idea of metaphysics as science of existent *qua* existent is:

It is first philosophy, because it is knowledge of the first thing in existence (namely, the First Cause) and the first thing in generality (namely, existence and unity). It is also wisdom, which is the best knowledge of the best thing known. For, it is the best knowledge (that is, [knowledge that yields] certainty) of the best thing known (that is, God, exalted be He, and the causes after Him). It is also knowledge of the ultimate causes of the whole [of caused things]. Moreover, it is knowledge of God and has the definition of divine science, which consists of a knowledge of the things that are separable from matter in definition and existence. For, as has become clear, the existent inasmuch as it is an existent, and its principles and the accidental occurrences [it undergoes] are all prior in existence to matter, and none of them is dependent for its existence on [matter's] existence.¹⁷

Metaphysics is the highest science and wisdom because it deals with the ultimate causes, immaterial existents, and with the Cause of all causes. As we are going to see, this is possible only because this science is founded and established on the consideration of existent *qua* existent and all its general implications. Because it is based on consideration, i.e. analysis, it is «the best knowledge», or the most certain knowledge. This apriorism is based on the starting point that the meanings of 'the existent,' 'the necessary' (as well as possible and impossible) and 'the thing' are impressed in the soul; that they cannot be known or understood better than they already are.¹⁸ Because these notions are «common to all matters» they have «the highest claim to be conceived in themselves» and they cannot be proven and explained «totally devoid of circularity»,¹⁹ i.e. they necessarily lead to tautology. This tautology is not a typical logical circularity that must be avoided in science, but necessity that as such represents the ultimate foundation of all knowledge.

For Avicenna only metaphysics proves God's existence in a way that: 1) no other kind of scientific inquiry is needed; 2) any sort of inference from sensible things is excluded; 3) only universal premises are acceptable.²⁰ For this reason I argue that if 1), then it is a standalone metaphysical proof; if 2), then it cannot be based on any concept that originates from abstraction (although it can include such conception) – and therefore there must be an *a priori* conception –; and if 2) and 3), then the proof represents knowledge that is discursive *a priori*. This sort of knowledge is the exact

¹⁷ *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2, (18).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 5, (1).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, (5).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 3, (11).

ambition for the science that tends to represent «the best» and «the most correct and perfect knowledge».²¹

Avicenna's starting point is: not every meaning requires another meaning to precede it otherwise an infinite regress would occur,²² hence all conceptions must start from the most general notion of 'existence.' Through consideration of 'existence' we establish the division between essence and existence in every being as well as the division between necessary and possible in itself.²³ These divisions further imply the meaning of 'causality' – what is necessary in itself has no cause, what is only possible in itself has a cause. This way, after establishing the foundations of metaphysics as science that advances from *a priori* notions that cannot be better known than they already are, Avicenna reaches the ultimate goal of the First philosophy. The ultimate goal of metaphysics is thus achieved by a specific method, not demonstrative in the sense of the standards set in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* or in Avicenna's *Kitab al-Burhān*. Still, this metaphysical inquiry produces certainty as it relies on the 'clear implications' (*al-dalā'ilu al-wāḍiḥa*). In fact, this is the only way to prove the existence of a being that cannot be defined, has no genus, no difference, and no alike. Such being, Avicenna states, can be only implied by pure intellectual knowledge.²⁴

This explains why in *al-Ishārāt* Avicenna states:

Reflect on how our demonstration of the First's existence, oneness, and detachment from [accidental] qualities does not require reflection on anything other than existence itself, nor does it require consideration of its creation or its acts, even though such things give evidence of it. But [the former] way [of demonstration] is more solid and nobler [than the latter]. That is, if we consider the state of existence, existence attests to the First inasmuch as it is existence. After that, the First attests to all the things that follow it in existence...²⁵

The quotation from *al-Ishārāt* corresponds with the one from *al-Ilāhiyyāt* I, 3, (11). Here Avicenna also points out that metaphysical method 1) «does not require reflection on anything other than existence itself»; 2) it is more solid and nobler than the one that starts from consideration of what is observable; and 3) that it is strictly deductive due to the attesting or implication of the notion of 'God' in the notion of 'existence', as well as the notion of 'all things' in the notion of 'God'.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I, 1, (9); I, 2, (18).

²² *Ibid.*, I, 5, (4).

²³ See Lizzini, O., «Wuḡūd-Mawḡūd/Existence-Existent in Avicenna, A Key Ontological Notion of Arabic Philosophy, Quaestio, 3, 2003», or Lizzini, O., «Ibn Sina's Metaphysics», in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/ibn-sina-metaphysics/>.

²⁴ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-t-Tanbihāt (Remarks and Admonitions)*, trans. Sh. Inati, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014, IV, 27, p. 130; further on 'al-Ishārāt.'

²⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 29, p. 130.

As explained below, the most systematic version of the proof for God's existence is established in *al-Ilāhiyyāt* VIII, certainly the most 'Aristotelian' version – as it is not only established in accordance with the principles of Aristotle's logic, but it also involves proving the termination of causal chain. Here Bertolacci sees this proof as one of the several ways to prove God in Avicenna's thought.²⁶ Yet I think there is only one feasible way. In fact, the proof itself is not essentially Aristotelian and it does not simply rely on showing the termination of the efficient causal chain. As we see below, this is only part of the proof. The proof stands on the ontological division between necessary and possible existence and on considerations and implications that follow from this classification. In fact, Aristotle's proof attempts to show that the first incorporeal cause exists as the cause of motion of the world whose existence, in the terms of efficient causality, is self-sufficient. This is important because Avicenna is trying to provide the proof for the ultimate cause of existence, avoiding its combination with the ultimate cause of motion. In doing this, Avicenna departs from Aristotle's approach, yet disagreeing with Aristotle's conception of the cause of motion as the cause of existence,²⁷ as Davidson pointed out. Undoubtedly, Avicenna's approach is clearly under the influence of the theologians of his time,²⁸ especially his emphasis on the metaphysical efficient causality.

In any case, Avicenna's proof is not cosmological,²⁹ because cosmological argument includes observation, beside considerations of certain meanings.³⁰ It is based on the analysis of the most evident notions. Still, it is much more complex and essentially

²⁶ Bertolacci, A., «Avicenna and Averroes on the proof of God's Existence and the Subject Matter of Metaphysics», *Medioevo*, 32 (2007), p. 62.

²⁷ Davidson, H.A., *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 283.

²⁸ Alper, Ö.M., «Avicenna's Argument for the Existence of God, Was He Really Influenced by the Mutakallimūn?», in J. McGinnis (ed.), *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam: Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Avicenna Study Group*, Leiden / Boston, Brill, 2004, pp. 129-141, also in Gilson, E., *Being and Some Philosophers*, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952, p. 54.

²⁹ As in Craig, W.L., *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, London / Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1980, or in Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, op. cit.

³⁰ Various argumentation is offered on this point, for example see Hourani, G.F., «Ibn Sīnā on Necessary and Possible Existence», *Philosophical Forum*, 4 (1972), pp. 74-86, Morewedge, P., «A Third Version of the Ontological Argument in Ibn Sīnā's Metaphysics», in idem (ed.), *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1979, pp. 182-222, or in Johnson, A.S., «Ibn Sīnā's Fourth Ontological Argument for God's Existence», in *The Muslim World*, 74/ 3-4 (1984), pp. 161-171. These interpretations mainly rest on the idea that Avicenna's proof is ontological in the similar sense of Anselm's. I believe that such interpretation is not a correct one.

Also, for understanding Avicenna's proof as *a priori* see Michael Marmura's works: «Avicenna on the Division», op. cit.; «Avicenna's Proof from Contingency», op. cit.; «The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)», in ed. M.E. Marmura, *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, Albany, New York, 1984, pp. 172-187; «Avicenna on Causal Priority», in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, New York, Demar, 1981, pp. 65-83.

different from than that of Anselm.³¹ Actually, Avicenna's line of argument is ontological in the real sense, while Anselm's should be considered «onto-theological» –as his argument is based purely on nominal descriptions of the meaning 'God' and 'perfection,' while Avicenna's approach is based on an ontology that investigates implications of the most general and fundamental meaning. Having this in mind we could refer to Avicenna's proof as an 'ontological proof,' 'metaphysical proof,' 'a priori proof,' or 'a proof rooted in ontological considerations.'

2. Proving the Necessary Existent

2.1 The ontological starting point

Avicenna's proof starts at the beginning of *Metaphysics* I, 5 with his famous statement:

The ideas of 'the existent,' 'the thing,' and 'the necessary' are impressed in the soul in a primary way. This impression does not require better known things to bring it about. [This is similar] to what obtains in the category of assent, where there are primary principles, found to be true in themselves, causing [in turn] assent to the truths of other [propositions].³²

Avicenna continues: «Similarly, in conceptual matters, there are things which are principles for conception that are conceived in themselves» and «if, then, such a sign is used, the soul is awakened [to the fact] that such a meaning is being brought to mind».³³

Avicenna's intention is to use the meaning of 'existence' altogether with its implications to establish the proof for the existence of God by means of the mind alone. Due the fact that not every conception requires another one which precedes it – otherwise an infinite regress would occur –, all conception must start from the universal notion of 'existence', one from which nothing more general can be conceived. This is the first presupposition that is both epistemologically and ontologically fundamental. Epistemologically fundamental because the epistemological self is «awaken» by the notion of 'existent', and is able to grasp any other meaning through it (including the meaning of 'the self'), and ontologically fundamental because existence is the most general meaning that encompasses all reality –as 'meaning', it corresponds with the absoluteness of everything that *is*, every existing thing exists because its participation in the absoluteness of existence. A second presupposition is: everything has its own reality, which is different from its existence.³⁴ For Avicenna, this is evident through the

³¹ As already noticed by McGinnis, there is «nothing like an Anselmian ontological-style argument for the existence of God in Avicenna» (in McGinnis, *Interpreting Avicenna*, op. cit., p. 164). Yet this does not mean that we cannot characterise Avicenna's argument as ontological.

³² *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 5, (1).

³³ *Ibid.*, (2)-(3).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 5, (10).

fact that we can grasp the meaning of the concrete thing without the knowledge of its existence; we can understand what a thing is and, at the same time, we can doubt of its concrete existence³⁵ since the quiddity of a thing can be grasped even if that thing does not exist in reality³⁶ –here emerges Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence. Essence and existence does not include each other, they separately correspond with two different questions: 1) why something is and 2) what it is.

Besides the division between essence and existence, Avicenna draws another division between 'necessary in itself' and 'possible in itself'. 'Necessary in itself' means to have existence essentially, and 'possible in itself,' or contingent, means to have existence accidentally.³⁷ 'Necessary' also means an existent whose very consideration implies its existence –negation of its existence results in contradiction; 'contingent' means an existent that has existence as something superadded to it (to its essence), as well as that its non-existence can be considered without contradiction. Thus, the division between 'necessary' and 'contingent', and the consideration of this division, implies causality –'necessary in itself' has no cause, what is only 'possible in itself' has a cause.³⁸ This is why Avicenna does not involve the origin of the notion of causality *qua* such within the epistemology described in *Kitāb al-Burhān*; it only deals with the particular problem of acquiring causal connection between observable beings through induction and experience (e.g. the fact that scammony purges bile). The notion of 'causality' is among *a priori* notions implied by the division of existence into necessary and possible. This is why the intellect necessitates causal relationship even when senses cannot grasp the difference between the cause and the effect.³⁹

When talking about relationship between 'necessary', 'possible' and 'impossible' Avicenna claims that:

[...] of these three, the one with the highest claim to be first conceived is the necessary. This is because the necessary points to the assuredness of existence, existence being better known than nonexistence. [This is] because existence is known in itself, whereas nonexistence is, in some respect or another, known through existence.⁴⁰

Therefore, the notion of 'necessity' precedes the other two, which are derivable from it. In this sense all of them are *a priori*.⁴¹

³⁵ *Al-Ishārāt*, IV, 6, p.121).

³⁶ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 5, (12).

³⁷ This is strikingly similar with al-Kindī's argument that a being must either have its unity essentially or accidentally.

³⁸ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 6, (2).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, 3, (21).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 5, (24).

⁴¹ Marmura, «Avicenna's Proof from Contingency», op. cit., p. 343.

2.2. The proof in *al-Ilāhiyyāt* and *al-Ishārāt*

Once these premises have been established, all is set for Avicenna's proof: the existence of the 'necessary existent' (*wājib al-wujūd*) is postulated in the division between 'necessary' and 'contingent'. The existence of a thing whose non-existence can be imagined without contradiction is distinct from its essence, and the existence of a thing whose non-existence cannot be imagined without contradiction is not distinct from its essence; its essence is its existence. Therefore, if there is such an existent that is necessary in itself, its essence is its existence. But it seems that for Avicenna this is not enough- The proof continues on *al-Ilāhiyyāt* book VIII by establishing the finitude of the efficient and the receptive causes, something that must be first done in order to prove the existence of God⁴² – the fact that it is impossible for every cause to have a cause *ad infinitum* must be established.

In Avicenna's *al-Ilāhiyyāt* VIII, 1 (4)-(6) the argument runs as follows: if we take into consideration the relation between the effect, its cause and the cause of that cause, we will see that each has a specific characterisation: the first cause is only the cause, the last effect is only the effect, and the middle is both the cause and the effect. So we have the (a) uncaused cause, (b) caused cause and (c) the effect. (a) and (c) are kind of extremes, and (b) is the intermedium. Now we can assume that this chain is finite or infinite. If the chain is finite, it is evident that there is a first uncaused cause. But if we assume that the chain is infinite, the situation is not so obvious. The infinite chain can never be realised, so if we consider this option we should consider that the extremes either do not exist, or that they are just not yet realised. However, in both cases the particular aggregate within the chain can be realised, the aggregate of (a), (b) and (c) – no matter how many (b) we have in this aggregate. But in this case it will be also realised that the entire aggregate is in fact (b) – a cause and something that has been caused. The whole aggregate is depending on what is in itself caused, and the infinite chain that would consist of infinite number of such aggregates would be also caused. «Hence, it is impossible for an aggregate of causes to exist without including an uncaused cause and a first cause. For [otherwise] all of what is infinite would be an intermediary, yet without an extreme, and this is impossible».⁴³

Responding to this argument one could say that the infinity means the infinite number of causes and effect and therefore an infinite number of possible aggregates. The fact that we can extract one of this aggregate and consider it in itself as finite it does not mean that the infinite chain of causes is impossible. However, this critique works only if the argument is taken outside of its ontological context. The fact that Avicenna's consideration of 'existence' and his argument of the causal chain are interconnected is obvious in *al-Ishārāt* IV, 9:

⁴² *Ibid.*, VIII, 1, (2).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, VIII, 1, (6).

Every being, if considered from the point of view of its essence and without consideration of other things, is found to be such that either existence necessarily belongs to it in itself or it does not. If existence belongs to it necessarily, then it is the truth in itself and that whose existence is necessary from itself. This is the Independent Reality. If, on the other hand, existence does not belong to it necessarily, it is not permissible to say that it is impossible in itself after it was supposed existing. But if, in relation to its essence, a condition is linked to it, such as the condition of the nonexistence of its cause, it becomes impossible or, such as the condition of the existence of its cause, it becomes necessary. If no condition is linked to its essence, neither existence nor nonexistence of a cause, then there remains for it in itself the third option, that is, possibility. Thus, with respect to its essence, it would be a thing that is neither necessary nor impossible. Therefore every existent either has necessary existence in essence or has possible existence in essence.⁴⁴

Therein lies the foundation of the proof. Everything that exists cannot be 'possible' in itself, because the possibility in itself means non-existence. The proper way to understand the *ad infinitum* argument from *al-Ilāhiyyāt* VIII is that the totality of contingent things can never be a totality because there is clearly something 'above' it. This is important – Avicenna is not satisfied by the simple statement that causal chain cannot go *ad infinitum*, because that is a) not *per se* evident; and b) it depends in which context we are talking about causal chain. Avicenna's context is the relation between totality and its parts but also between a thing and its existence; if everything is caused, then the totality of such things is also caused by its parts, but «totality having every one of its units as caused requires a cause external to its units...». Therefore the totality of contingent beings «...requires a cause external to all its units»,⁴⁵ and because possible existence is in itself non-existence, no existence can occur from the possible existence alone. This sort of infinite regress is not acceptable and therefore there must be the existent that exists by itself.

Avicenna's proof is founded on his doctrine of the modality of existence, which is implied by the very meaning of 'existence': everything that exists, is either by itself or through another. There is no third option, and hence the disjunction is necessary. This necessity is implied in the notion of 'existence' and, due to this implication, ontological modality is deduced and represents necessary judgement of the mind of anything considered in itself. A thing can either be possible in itself, which means that one can imagine its non-existence without any contradiction, or necessary in itself, which means quite the opposite: one cannot imagine its non-existence without contradiction. Avicenna explains this idea in his *al-Ishārāt*:

That to which possibility belongs in essence does not come into existence by its essence, for, inasmuch as it is possible, existence by its essence is not more appropriate than nonexistence. Thus, if its existence or nonexistence becomes more appropriate [than

⁴⁴ *Al- Ishārāt*, IV, 9, p. 122.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IV, 12, p. 123.

the other], that is because of the presence or absence of a certain thing [respectively]. It follows that the existence of every possible thing is from another.⁴⁶

This simply means that the absoluteness of existence cannot be contingent; if we have an infinite number of causes «every one of the units of the chain will be possible in essence, [but] the whole chain [i.e. the totality of existence] depends on these units, so the chain too will not be necessary and becomes necessary through another».⁴⁷ The chain of causes that Avicenna talks about is the same chain that he mentions in his *Metaphysics* VIII. In both cases the context is ontological and based on the consideration of the divisions of existence: the totality of thing presented by the «chain» is in itself either possible or necessary; it is not necessary because it exist due to its parts. The totality is therefore possible, which means that its non-existence can be considered, its existence does not essentially belong to it. But in order for the absoluteness of existence to be, there must be something essentially existent – necessary in itself. Therefore, the meaning of ‘existence’ is sufficient to imply something that is necessary in itself – and whatever is necessary in itself its quiddity does not have a meaning other than its reality. In short, the meaning of ‘necessary existent’ must have a reality because it is *per se* the principle of every reality.⁴⁸

As we can see, the causal premise within the proof is derived from the division between two modes of existence. If existence does not belong essentially to a contingent being, then it accidentally belongs to it, and whatever provides that existence is a cause in its metaphysical sense. In this context, if everything that is possible in itself must have a cause, then it is non-existence in itself. Therefore, if everything existing is contingent, then everything existing is in itself non-existence. This is why the infinite causal chain is impossible, but if we consider the totality of things as contingent only, then we fall into absurdity. If everything is contingent, then it only deserves non-existence in itself, but this would mean that the absoluteness of existence is non-existence, therefore there must be something that is by itself necessary, uncaused. It is for this reason that Avicenna says: «It has [also] become evident that everything other than Him, if considered in itself, [is found to be] possible in its existence and hence caused, and it is seen that, [in the chain of things] being caused, [the caused existents] necessarily terminate with Him.»⁴⁹ He also states that:

everything, with the exception of the One who in His essence is one and the existent who in His essence is an existent, acquires existence from another, becoming through it an existent, being in itself a non-existent. This is the meaning of a thing's being created—that is, attaining existence from another. It has absolute nonexistence which it

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 10, p. 123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 11, p. 123; the translation is slightly modified.

⁴⁸ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 4, (7).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, VIII, 3, (6).

deserves in terms of itself; it is deserving of nonexistence not only in terms of its form without its matter, or in terms of its matter without its form, but in its entirety.⁵⁰

Consequently, all existence is necessary one way or another, either as something uncaused, in which case it is necessary by itself, or due to something else, in which case it is necessary due to its cause. Furthermore, whatever is first cause «it is a cause of every existence and of the cause of the reality of every concrete existence».⁵¹

Thus, we can see that in any metaphysical context, whether we speak about the meaning of 'existence,' the existence of a contingent being, or about the first cause of existence, existence implies necessity –and this implication is so general that it surpasses all division and hence must be applicable to all things as they are in themselves. Hence Avicenna's proof rests mainly upon two previously established ideas: a) existence implies necessity and b) all existence cannot be contingent. Only from these premises it follows that there must be an existent which is necessary in itself –an existent which exists by itself and has no cause.

The ontological foundation of Avicenna's proof is evident: when considered in itself a thing is, in fact, non-existent. For this reason, as we have seen, it is necessary that there must be something necessary in itself that bestows or guarantees its existence. Contingent existent has essentially no existence, but only accidentally – its existence must be 'attained', otherwise it will remain non-existent. On this foundations Avicenna's argument on causal chain has more sense: no matter if the chain is finite or infinite, every part of it is contingent, e.g. caused, ontologically dependent, deserving in itself only non-existence –hence, there has to be something else other than just this casual chain. Indeed, as Steve Johnson notices, Avicenna's proof moves from the knowledge of things as finite and contingent to that which is infinite and necessary.⁵² Yet prior to this it starts from the consideration of the necessary division of existence into 'what is by itself' and 'what is not by itself', e.g., the division between necessary and contingent –something which has nothing to do with the empirical evidence, but with intuitive knowledge that is awaken within the mind after it becomes aware of existence and the self.

As an existent whose essence is its existence, nothing can be on its rank: the necessary existent «is the principle of necessitation of the existence of everything, necessitating either in primary manner or through an intermediary».⁵³ As something whose essence is its existence, the necessary existent cannot be composed in any way.⁵⁴ In this sense the necessary existent is 'pure existence'.⁵⁵ As such, the necessary existent has no genus, nor

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Al-Ishārāt*, IV, 8, p. 122.

⁵² Johnson, «Ibn Sina's Fourth», op. cit., p. 164.

⁵³ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 4, (1).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 4, (7).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 4, (13).

differentia, and hence no definition; regarding it there cannot be question ‘what is it?’⁵⁶ – this means that there cannot be proposed a *propter quid* or *burhān lima* demonstration of the necessary existent’s existence –there cannot be a ‘why’ regarding its existence, nor ‘whyness’ regarding its acts.⁵⁷ However, the demonstration is neither *quia* or *burhān inna* in the real sense, as it does not start from the observable nature of contingent beings but from the consideration of the meaning of ‘contingency,’ which is previously derived from meanings of ‘existence’ and ‘necessary.’⁵⁸

If the proper Aristotelian *quia* demonstration of God would be possible in Avicenna the proof would not be the privilege of metaphysics, but it could be also provided by physics, or at least with the help of principles established in physics. Instead, the proof simply goes from the consideration of the division between necessity and possibility of existence. It does not fit into Aristotle’s division in *Posterior Analytics*. The only Aristotelian element mislead for quite a few authors is the argument for the finitude of causal chain, but as we have seen, this argument is not sufficient for the proof for the existence of God if taken outside of the context of the necessary-possible division/consideration of existence.

Due to the fact that the necessary existent «has no quiddity, no quality, no quantity, no where, no when, no equal, no partner and no contrary...», there is «...no definition and no demonstration...»⁵⁹ for its existence, except «the clear implications».⁶⁰ Therefore, there is no demonstration for the existence of God except by the means of ‘the clear implications,’ or «*al-dalā’ilu al-wāḍiḥa*» – the notion which I believe stands for ‘logical implications,’ which are in fact the logical implications of the notion of ‘existence.’ We

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, VIII, 4. (14).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, VIII, 4. (16).

⁵⁸ As Thomas Aquinas explains in his *Summa Theologiae*: «Demonstration can be made in two ways. One is through the cause, and is called *propter quid*, and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration *quia*; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.» (*Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 2. Art. 2. pp. 22-23, transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1920, the translation is slightly modified). This is why Avicenna says that there is no demonstration (*burhān*) of God (*al-ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 4, (16); 5, (14)), but there is proof (*dalīl*) (*Ibid.*, I, 1, (11), or «clear demonstration» (*al-bayyān al-burhān*) (*Ibid.*, I, 1, (16)). I believe that Avicenna wants to say that although there is no demonstration for God’s existence in the strict Aristotelian sense, we can still reach certainty about God in metaphysics. In Avicenna God’s existence is not demonstrated from God’s effect in the same sense like in Aquinas.

⁵⁹ Emphasis added.

⁶⁰ *Al-ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 5, (14). At this point I slightly modified Marmura’s translation. Marmura translated the term *al-dalā’ilu al-wāḍiḥa* as «the clear evidential proofs». However, as shown above, Avicenna talks about the implication of the notion of ‘existence’ – the same way he talks about this in his *Isharāt* IV, to which Marmura refers in the footnote 5 in his translation of Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*, VIII, chapter 5.

can find another supportive statement for this interpretation in Avicenna's *al-Ishārāt*, IV: «The First has no alike, no contrary, no genus, and no difference. Thus it has no definition and cannot be indicated except by pure intellectual knowledge».⁶¹

According to this interpretation it seems that Morwedge is right when claiming that in Avicenna «the knowledge of the Necessary Existent is discursive a priori»,⁶² but not quite so if we consider the notion of 'the necessary existent' in *al-Ilāhiyyāt* I, 6 of , as this is merely the conceptual preparation for the proof. The proof is based on logical implications of the meaning of 'existence'. Its first implication is the 'necessity' by which a limited essence participates in the absoluteness of existence – without a cause, essence is non-existence, but, without absoluteness of existence, essence would be pure nothingness.

2.3. *The necessary existent in al-Najāt*

Avicenna's *al-Najāt* offers a shorter version of his proof for the existence of the necessary existent. Still, the proof is founded on the meaning of 'existence,' its divisions and implications. Prior to the proof Avicenna clarifies the meaning of 'the necessary existent': again, existence implies necessity, through which possibility and impossibility is conceived. Existence of an existent cannot be otherwise, e.g., the postulation on non-existence of an existent either results in absurdity or it does not result in absurdity.⁶³ Possible existent becomes necessary «not through itself».⁶⁴ Yet whatever is not necessary does not exist.⁶⁵

Next step is the clarification that whatever is through-itself is not only the ultimate cause of everything that is not through-itself, it is also absolute simplicity –otherwise it would be dependent on its parts, e.g., composed, caused, not-through-itself. Hence it cannot be «a body, nor any matter of a body, nor a form of a body, nor an intelligible matter of an intelligible form, nor an intelligible form in an intelligible matter, nor divisible».⁶⁶

The starting point of the proof is the intuitively evident fact that «there is existence».⁶⁷ This is evident not only from our perception of existing beings, but primarily through our own participation in the absoluteness of existence; as we cannot deny our own self, we cannot deny that there is existence. In fact, in order to affirm our own self, we must understand the meaning of 'existence,' because only thorough this absolute meaning any affirmation if possible. However, if there would be no

⁶¹ *Al-Ishārāt*, IV, 27.

⁶² Morwedge, P., «A Third Version of the Ontological Argument », op. cit., p. 214.

⁶³ *al-Najāt*, II, 1: [546]; in J. McGinnis and D. Reisman (eds.), *Classical Arabic Philosophy, an Anthology of Sources*, Indianapolis / Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 2007.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, [547] and II, 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 5, 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 12, [566].

participation in the absoluteness of existence, essence of the possible/contingent would be not just a non-existing thing, i.e. not-yet-actualised-in-existence, but also pure nothingness due to the absolute impossibility to ever actualise. Once this is realised, we can start the search for being that necessitates the absoluteness of existence, revealing that «the possible terminates in a necessarily existent being».⁶⁸

If the totality of all existing things is contingent, Avicenna stresses, and there is no necessary being in itself outside this totality: «whether finite or infinite, [this totality] exists necessarily through itself or possibly in itself». In this case the totality is either a) necessarily through itself by means of its members –they are something possible, but this would mean that «necessary subsists by means of things that exist possibly, which is absurd»;⁶⁹ or b) something in itself possible, but then it must acquire its existence from what is necessary in itself, «either external or internal to the totality».⁷⁰ As the necessary existent must necessitate itself prior to the totality, it cannot be an internal cause, because as internal it would participate in the absoluteness of existence instead of necessitating it. This way it would be «a cause of the totality as primarily a cause of the existence of its members, of which it is one».⁷¹ Thus, what gives existence to the totality must be external to the totality, hence it cannot be a possible cause as it would be part of the totality –therefore, there must be the cause of all contingent existence necessary in itself and external to the contingent totality.⁷²

The reasoning in *al-Najāt* seems a cosmological approach at first glance, yet this is not the case. This is revealed if we contemplate the fact that according to Avicenna there cannot be a cause necessary in itself which is internal of the totality of all contingent existence. For example, let us postulate that the world consists of indivisible eternal particles (atoms), and that these particles are the causes of the totality of existence. From the perspective of Avicenna's ontology, this explanation of the world is unacceptable –beside numerous reasons established in physical science– because every cause (like every being) that participates in the absoluteness of existence by the limitation of its own essence must be contingent, e.g., its existence cannot essentially belong to it. In other words, it is non-existence in itself. If we take this into consideration, atoms would be also beings that participate in the absoluteness of existence by the limitation of their essences. Therefore, no matter if atoms exist or not, the cause which Avicenna is looking for must be a being whose essence is sufficient for the need of its existence, e. g., a being whose very consideration of essence implies the necessity of existence –as a result of the ontological consideration of the implication of necessity by the meaning of 'existence.'

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, [567].

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 12, [567].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, [567]-[568].

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, [568]. Translation is slightly modified.

⁷² *Ibid.*

In metaphysics the cause we are looking for does not participate in the absoluteness of existence by the limitation of its own essence on the contrary, it necessitates the absoluteness of existence. In this sense it is external to the contingent totality. This is exactly why it is important to distinguish between the efficient cause investigated in metaphysics and the efficient causes of physics; between the cause that bestows existence, whose effect is ontologically completely dependent on its cause during its entire existence, and the cause of motion and existence through motion; between the Principle of existence and all other things that just participate in existence. Therefore, the necessary/possible distinction in *al-Najāt* and the proof that follows from it represent the same approach that Avicenna establishes in *al-Ilāhiyyāt* and *al-Ishārāt*: the one and the only possible proof, the proof based on the ontological considerations. The proof is established on the consideration of the meaning of 'existence.' Eventually this consideration implies not only that a contingent being in itself deserves non-existence, but also that if we would assume God's non-existence, that would imply that a contingent being is pure nothingness, which is absurd. Only if we have this in mind the argument from the causal chain implies the existence of the necessary existent.

3. The Necessary Existent as God

As already stated, Avicenna was deeply aware that proving existence of the necessary existent is not the same as proving the existence of God. In order to do so, one has to continue the line of arguments, proving that it is needed (not just that the necessary existent exists), but also that it has all the attributes by which it can rightfully be called 'God'. Like the previous section of the proof, the method continues following the analysis of the meaning of the Necessary Existent in order to show that the so-called Divine attributes must be implied by this meaning. Because the Necessary Existent is not a substance, except in the broadest sense of 'it is not in a subject',⁷³ it cannot have any attributes in the classical Aristotelian sense. In fact, attributes as something that depends on a substance would mean that the Necessary Existent is composed, e.g. caused, something which turned out to be absurd. Therefore, the meaning of 'attribute' here is not similarly related with its meaning in regard with a substance, since every divine attribute means the same as the divine essence, which is the 'necessary existence'. The necessary existent cannot have genus or species because it is unique as necessary in itself.

Therefore, when we talk about Divine attributes we talk only about the implications of the meaning of 'the necessary existent'. These meanings reflect in positive and negative relations which are necessary concomitants of Divine essence.⁷⁴ Thus, in order

⁷³ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 4, (18).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 4, (2).

to accomplish the goal of metaphysics, Avicenna intends to continue his long deduction until he shows that the necessary existent implies all attributes making it God:

[...] the primary attribute of the Necessary Existent consists in His being a 'that [He is]' and an 'existent'. Then, [respecting] the other attributes, some will include the meaning of this existence with [something] additional, [and] some [will include the meaning] of this existence with a negation. Not one of [the attributes] necessitates at all either multiplicity or difference in His essence.⁷⁵

As the necessary existent is an existent, it is something specific. However, its very specification is existence, so it is such a unique being that there cannot be nothing like it.⁷⁶ Therefore, the necessary existent must be one: «the conclusion of this is that that whose existence is necessary is one in accordance with the specification of its essence and in no way can it be stated of many».⁷⁷ Beside this the necessary existent must be also unity, or indivisibility, otherwise it would be caused by its parts.⁷⁸ Such a unique being:

[...] does not share a generic or a specific idea with anything. Therefore, it does not need to be distinguished from anything by a differential or an accidental idea. Rather, it is distinguished by its essence. Hence its essence has no definition, since this essence has neither a genus nor a difference.⁷⁹

Avicenna's deduction follows several directions. The notion of 'the necessary existent' implies that some meanings imply relations regarding its effect, lacking certain features. Depending of the aspect, attributes or meanings, it can be divided into positive and negative, while keeping in mind the divine absolute simplicity and uniqueness.⁸⁰ The main specification of the necessary existent is that it is one with its essence which is its existence. As such, there is nothing like the necessary existent, and there is not thing that could share the meaning of its essence.⁸¹ Therefore, every so called 'attribute' mentioned in this section is just a meaning implied by the divine essence/existence, e.g., it is something deduced by the intellect –not actual plurality that somehow exist in Him. As stated above it is clear that the necessary existent has no genus, no quiddity, no quality, no quantity, no 'where,' no 'when,' no equal, no partner, no contrary-may, and no similar.⁸² In fact, as a being necessary in itself whose essence is its existence, the necessary existent is «nothing but existence».⁸³

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII, 7, (12).

⁷⁶ *Al-Ishārāt*, IV, 18, p.125-126

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 20, p. 127.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 21, p. 127.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 24, p. 128

⁸⁰ For more details on the deductive process from the 'necessary existence' in Avicenna see Adamson, P., *From the Necessary Existent to God*, in idem, *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 170-189.

⁸¹ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 5, (2)-(3).

⁸² *Ibid.*, VIII, 4, (14) and IX, 1, (1).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, (12).

The main positive attributes of the necessary existent is that it is one, an uncaused cause, and the principle of all things. It is one because its specification is existence; it is uncaused cause because it bestows existence and the causal chain terminates with it. As such, the necessary existent is the ultimate cause of all things, it is what bestows existence by the act of emanation from itself.⁸⁴ As such it is pure good and hence something that everything desires, –this is the reason why existence is desired rather than non-existence.⁸⁵ In this sense, the necessary existent is Truth in real sense, and the ultimate reality.⁸⁶

Next qualification of necessary existent is extremely important, the ‘bridge’ that connects two meanings, ‘the necessary existent’ and ‘God’: according to Avicenna it is clear that the necessary existent is something intellectual due to the fact that it cannot be composed and yet it has to be a single entity, e.g. a single existent. A short argument is provided in *al-Ishārāt*:

The essence of the First is intelligible and independent. Thus, the First is self-subsistent, free from attachments, defects, matter, and other things that make the essence in a state additional [to itself]. It has been learned that that of which this statement is true intellects its essence and is intellectured by its essence.⁸⁷

In *al-Ilāhiyyāt* Avicenna states that «the necessary existent is pure intellect because he is an essence dissociated from matter in every respect».⁸⁸ For the same reason the necessary existent is also the pure intelligible.⁸⁹ However, this idea is not the kind of truth demonstrated in psychology, but something that is evident from Avicenna’s famous ‘flying man’ experiment in *Shifā’*: *al-Nafs* (I. 1, 16), which is equally applicable to psychology as well as metaphysics. However, as no science can demonstrate its own subject-matter, the ‘flying man’ experiment does not represent the demonstration of the existence of human soul, but the metaphysical starting point of psychology. Besides, we can only infer the existence of ourselves from self-awareness if we understand the meaning of ‘existence.’ Avicenna’s pre-Cartesian meditation shows that intellectual self is a non-material entity, and confirms the idea that a substance is either a material or intellectual –an idea also stressed in *al-Ilāhiyyāt*,⁹⁰ a fact which is admitted in metaphysics as well as in psychology as self-evident. This is something further investigated in psychology and represents the very starting point of psychology; whereas in metaphysics it serves as an important part of the proof for God being the necessary existent. In short, it is a metaphysical truth that the necessary existent must be a ‘Self’ that affirms the existence of itself, otherwise it would not be a single

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 6, (1).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, (2).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, (5).

⁸⁷ *Al-Ishārāt*, IV, 28, p. 130.

⁸⁸ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 6, (6).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* (6)-(7).

⁹⁰ For example in II, 2, (10) or III, 2, (10).

uncomposed entity. And because it cannot be composed and must exist, it follows that the necessary existent is an intellectual entity.

It is important to note that the necessary existent is not an intellectual being in the ordinary sense of the word, otherwise it would have genus and differentia. What Avicenna wants to say is that intellect as we know it from the meditation on the self is the closes thing to that whose essence is its existence. When we say that the necessary existent is an intellect, it is so because it knows and apprehends itself and all being that emanates from it. By being 'intellect' here does not mean 'to be affected by intelligible', in this context the necessary existent certainly is not an intellect. On the contrary, it is an intellect in the similar sense as it is a substance—not something that can be categorised, but something that is not in a subject and something devoid from matter. In this sense its essence is its existence, which is intellect, intellectual and intelligible.⁹¹ As such, the necessary existent knows all things through apprehension of its own essence, because it is the principle of all existence and hence apprehends its effect⁹² inasmuch as it is the effect and not as something that changes.⁹³ This specific Intellect knows all things in a very specific way: «the necessary existent apprehends intellectually all things in a universal way; yet, despite this, no individual thing escapes his knowledge. Not [even] the weight of an atom in the heavens and the earth escapes Him». ⁹⁴ Also, the knowledge of the necessary existent is such that it apprehends all things at once in a way that does not cause any multiplicity in its essence, and through its essence it knows essences of all things.⁹⁵ In this way the Necessary Existent's apprehension is the cause of all things that its essence necessitates in the form of emanative creation.⁹⁶

As being intellectually aware of itself, the necessary existent is alive and willing.⁹⁷ Still, as with the other attributes, here life and will have an equivocal meaning and represent something that cannot be compared with anything to which these words are used in ordinary language. Life and will are, again, only meaning implied by its being intellectual, which is eventually implied by the necessary existent's essence/existence. Same goes for other attributes like 'the good,' 'the powerful' and 'the munificent'.⁹⁸ With all these and other attributes that are implied by His essence, it is proven that the necessary existent is God, the Necessary Existent, that He is in the relationship with His creation as God and that He should be worshiped as God.

⁹¹ *Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 6, (6)-(7).

⁹² *Ibid.*, VIII, 6, (13).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, (14).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, (15).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, (1).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, (4).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, (10)-(12).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, (13).

4. Reinterpreting Avicenna's metaphysics

We could say that the analysis of Avicenna's proof for God's existence reveals two dimensions within his metaphysics: a) we can approach metaphysics from the consideration of his entire philosophical corpus, where the first philosophy is the continuation of the natural sciences –while the ultimate end, purpose of theoretical inquiry, actualises in the doctrine of the Uncaused Cause; b) with the strict focus on the relationship between the subject-matter and the goal of metaphysics, e.g., with the focus on the proof for God's existence itself.

The first perspective reveals that the totality of contingent being to which we can refer as 'the world' represents a complex eternal entity that emanates from the First Cause and consist of things 'possible in themselves' (in the sense of their own essences), and 'necessary through another' (in the manner of the four causes). While the existence is necessitated from God, essence represents *per se* the pure possibility, or the ultimate condition for the contingent being to exist. In this sense existence is eternal, and nothingness is an absurdity. There is no creation out of nothing, only eternal emanation from the First. Thus everything is something and not nothing, and our understanding of the world is based on the ontology of substance upon which any other science rests. In this context metaphysics should be learned after the natural sciences, as all variation of substantial existence and change should be grasped prior to anything else.

However, the second perspective is more fundamental and reveals the foundational place of metaphysics in Avicenna's scientific corpus. Here the focus is on the proof itself, and the meaning of 'possibility' is 'in-itself-nothing.' Thus we could say that the creation here has a conditional meaning of '*ex nihilo*' in the sense that 'if there is no God, existence is impossibility.' The proof shows the absurdity of existence if we postulate that God does not exist; only in this sense everything but God is nothing. Thus, in order to avoid this absurdity, e.g., the impossibility of existence, we must accept the existence of God. In this sense Avicenna's *a priori* proof, or as I call it 'the proof from the ontological considerations' has two sides: it shows that if anything at all exists, then God exists; but 'if God does not exist, existence is impossibility.' To prove that something does exist is not a condition here. We have no need to point at something in an *a posteriori* approach, because the meaning of 'existence' is not grasped from the world like any other concept, but is the intuitive meaning realised through our participation in the absoluteness of existence –this participation is a consequence of «the first impression». Through this meaning we grasp the knowledge of the world no matter if we assume that the absoluteness of existence reflects in: a) the world that we perceive and experience; b) the world which we cannot prove that exists outside of our mind; or c) our single intellect detached from all the senses (like in the case of the «flying man» experiment).

We participate in the absoluteness of existence this way or another and we grasp it as 'existence' before we understand anything else including ourselves (in order to grasp self-existence we must understand the meaning of 'existence'). We do not prove, or

need to observe that some entity exists in order for the proof for God's existence to have a starting point. Existence as the most general and *per se* evident meaning is the starting point from which the proof is developed – existence implies necessity, necessity implies causality, etc. This is why, although metaphysics should be learned after other sciences, it is prior to them in the sense that it demonstrates their subject matters – all sciences depend on metaphysics as ontology and have their ultimate purpose and guidance in it as philosophical theology.

When we talk about essence, it certainly is not absolute non-existence, as it can receive existence – the absolute non-existence cannot receive anything. But, if there would be no God, essences would not be able to receive existence, and what cannot receive existence is the absolute non-existence. Essences would disappear in their pure possibility as they would become 'impossibilities-to-ever-actualise' –one should notice how absurd, but unavoidable, is the use the verb 'to become' in this context. Yet this is the exact implication of Avicenna's *a priori* proof: it shows that nothing makes sense if we postulate God's non-existence; the language itself becomes absurdity. In this sense, we can consider essences as well as contingent beings as something that deserves non-existence, even as something that is in itself pure nothingness. Therefore, to say that contingency is in itself pure nothingness simply means that it is 'the impossibility without God' or 'that-which-non-existence-without-God-is-the-necessity.'

Contingent being is always something, as there is always some cause up to the first uncaused cause to prevent its absolute non-existence. But if there is no first uncaused absolute cause, the absolute non-existence cannot be prevented. However, as the immediate intuitive *a priori* knowledge of existence implies that the absolute non-existence is prevented, this reasoning eventually implies the necessity of God.

Conclusion

According to my interpretation, Avicenna's *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, *al-Ishārāt* and *al-Najāt* argumentation can stand alone –apart from natural sciences and *a posteriori* inquiries– as metaphysical argument for the existence of something in itself necessary; from where all divine attributes can be developed by a purely analytical method of deduction in order to prove that the Necessary Existent is God. However, Avicenna obviously includes certain 'cosmological' elements within his *al-Ilāhiyyāt* metaphysics and consequently into his proof:⁹⁹ if metaphysics is devoid of other sciences it would not have any value for the explanation of the world as the totality of all things, except in the most general sense –all we could say is that the world is contingent and its existence is somehow due to the Necessary Existent.

⁹⁹ These elements are not described in this article because our sole purpose is to show that the proof is essentially *a priori* and can be established independently of all physical and empirical notions.

If metaphysics aims to give an ultimate meaning to other sciences by providing them with the proofs of their subject-matters –as well as to give a proper explanation of the world–, it has to involve certain concepts on which it will develop the proof for the existence of God further on –beyond mere considerations, so it can be connected to natural sciences. These concepts are *matter*, *composition* and, above all, *the general classification of causes* –although the very notion of ‘causality’ does not originate in natural sciences, but is implied by the ultimate division of ‘existence’.

All the concepts taken from natural sciences serve as a preparation for metaphysics. This is why metaphysics is to be learned after natural sciences –although natural sciences essentially depend on metaphysics. Yet in order to be of any significance for the whole Avicennian scientific corpus, the proof for God’s existence needs a sort of expansion as well as the inclusion of certain concepts from other sciences. In the process, the proof itself is connected with some cosmological elements usually applied in *quia* demonstration and, because of this, often misguided for the cosmological proof.

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