

One Way of *Being* Ambiguous: The Univocity of ‘Existence’ and the Theory of *Tashkīk*
Predication in Rāzī and Ṭūsī’s commentaries on Avicenna’s *Pointers and Reminders*

Abstract

Debates between adherents of a Thomistic theory of analogy and Duns Scotus’ univocal concept of being were not only historically significant in the Christian West but remain of philosophical theological interest today. Predating the western debates, however, was a parallel exchange in the Islamicate East. In this study we offer translations of and extensive notes to the two most foundational and seminal texts in the East related to this debate. The Exchange is between Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1210), who defends a theory of the univocity of being, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–1274), who defends and develops an Avicennan theory of *tashkīk*, a term variously translated as ‘analogy,’ ‘modulation’ and, as we prefer, ‘ambiguity’. These texts, while of historical interest, also remain of philosophical and theological value today.

Among contemporary western philosophers of religion, when the notions of the univocity of being and a theory of analogy are discussed, the historical context is inevitably taken to be the thirteen-century debate between John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) and Henry of Ghent (1217–1293), and then later Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534).¹ In fact, a parallel debate was already taking

¹ See Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus and Analogy: A Brief Note,” *Modern Schoolman: A Quarterly Journal of Philosophy* 89 (2012): 147–154 and id., “Are Names Said of God and Creatures Univocally?” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 92 (2018): 313–320;

place in the Islamicate East between Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149–1210), who defends a theory of the univocity of being, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (1201–1274), who defends and develops an Avicennan theory of *tashkīk*, a term variously translated as ‘analogy,’ ‘modulation’ and, as we prefer, ‘ambiguity’.² In this article, we provide translations of and extensive explanatory footnotes to the two seminal texts for this Eastern version of the debate.

Garret R. Smith, “The Analogy of Being in the Scotist Tradition,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 93 (2019): 633–673; Domenic D’Ettore, “Being as First Known and the Analogy or Univocity of Being: Scotus versus Cajetan,” *Review of Metaphysics* 73 (2020): 741–770.

² Avicenna’s doctrine of *tashkīk* remains a contentious topic among Avicennan scholars. We do not intend to enter that fray but merely to present one of the historically more important and first interpretations of it. For contemporary studies see: Harry Austryn Wolfson, “The Amphibolous Terms in Aristotle, Arabic Philosophy and Maimonides,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 31.2 (1938): 151–173; Janis Ešots, “The principle of the Systematic Ambiguity of Existence in the Philosophy of Ibn Sīna and Mulla Sadra,” *Afkar: Journal of ‘Aqidah and Islamic Thought* 6 (2005): 161–70; Alexander Treiger, “Avicenna’s Notion of Transcendental Modulation of Existence (*taškīk al-wuġūd, analogia entis*) and Its Greek and Arabic Sources,” in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, ed. D. Reisman and F. Opwis (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012), pp. 327–63; Thérèse-Anne Druart, “Ibn Sīnā and the Ambiguity of Being’s Univocity,” in *Views of the Philosophy of Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Sadrā Shīrazī*, ed. M. A. Mensia (Tunis: Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts *Beit al-Ḥikma*, 2014), pp. 15–24; Daniel D. De Haan, “The Doctrine of the

The debate takes place between two competing interpretations of Avicenna's (980–1037) philosophical summa, *Pointers and Reminders*. *Pointers*, which was not translated into Latin, is an elliptical, even enigmatic, recitation of Avicenna's more complete presentation of his philosophical system found in his monumental philosophical encyclopedia, *The Healing*. Precisely because of *Pointers*' terse presentation it lent itself to being commented, and indeed received multiple commentaries.³ As for the context of the Rāzī-Tūsī debate the issue is ostensibly whether a thing's quiddity can in some sense be the reason or cause of that thing's existence, but as intimated the issue became much broader. In the present articles, it is not our intent to adjudicate between the two positions, but simply to present accurate translations and let both sides speak for themselves. To this end we begin with a brief presentation of the historical context and philosophical significance of the debate followed by the translations and notes.

History and significance

Analogy of Being in Avicenna's Metaphysics of the Healing," *The Review of Metaphysics* 69 (2015): 261–86; Damien Janos, *Avicenna on the Ontology of the Pure Quiddity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 434–77; Rosabel Pauline Ansari, "The Ambiguity of 'Being' in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy," Ph.D. Diss., Georgetown University, 2020.

³ For a list of medieval Arabic commentaries on *Pointers* see Robert Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope of Arabic Commentary in Post-Classical (ca. 1100–1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations," in *Philosophy, Science & Exegesis: In Greek, Arabic & Latin Commentaries-II*, ed. P. Adamson and H. Baltussen (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2004), 149–91.

As his final philosophical summa, Avicenna's *Pointers and Reminders* presented his most mature and definitive philosophical system. Yet, by design its succinct form was intended to *point* to and *remind* the student of philosophical theories without expounding them in detail. As a result, commentaries on the text proliferated in the Islamic world over many centuries. The two most foundational commentaries were those of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, a celebrated Sunnī theologian of the Ash'arī school and exegete of the Quran from Rayy (in modern day Iran), and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, an equally famous Shī'ite theologian, philosopher and astronomer from Ṭūs (also in modern day Iran). Although Ṭūsī's commentary has traditionally been considered the more sympathetic defense of Avicenna against Rāzī's famed critiques, recent scholarship by Robert Wisnovsky has argued that Rāzī's commentary was a closer embodiment of Avicenna's method, while Ṭūsī's was more doctrinally consistent with Avicenna.⁴

It was in their commentaries on *Pointers and Reminders*, *namaṭ* 4, 17 that points of contention are raised concerning the status of existence, the problem of predicating 'existence' of both God and creation and the identification of God's essence with his existence. Both Rāzī and Ṭūsī's commentaries on this passage are significant for raising issues that will be foundational

⁴ Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicennism and Exegetical Practice in the Early Commentaries on the *Ishārāt*," *Oriens* 41 (2013), 349–78 and id., "Towards a Genealogy of Avicennism," *Oriens* 42 (2014), 323–63. In both articles Wisnovsky tells us that Rāzī is to Avicenna what Avicenna was to Aristotle, namely a loose interpreter or appropriator, whereas Ṭūsī is to Avicenna what Averroes was to Aristotle, namely a strict interpreter or defender ("Avicennism", 373 and "Towards a Genealogy" 326).

for Islamic philosophy over the following centuries and remain of interest among contemporary philosophers of religion. Rāzī questions the coherence of Avicenna’s identification of God’s essence and existence, arguing that this position either requires that ‘existence’ be predicated equivocally of all existents, or if it has a univocal predication, then God’s existence would be identical to all existents. Ṭūsī replies to Rāzī with the theory of the ambiguous predication (*tashkīk*) of ‘existence’, arguing that ‘existence’ has a single meaning but can have different applications to God and to creatures. Moreover, continues Ṭūsī, Avicenna’s identification of God’s essence with existence is with God’s individual existence, not the common sense of existence that is predicated ambiguously.

Rāzī and Ṭūsī’s commentaries on *Pointers*, 4, 17 are not only significant for their metaphysical positions, but also for the philosophy of language and the theory of ambiguous predication in particular. Until Ṭūsī, the theory of ambiguous predication, itself a development of Aristotle’s *pros hen* homonymy, was primarily a theory used to discuss transcategorial predication. How do we predicate ‘being’ of the things-that-are?⁵ It is Ṭūsī, however, who systematically uses the ambiguous predication of ‘existence’ across the transcendental divide in

⁵ In many Arabic philosophical texts of the Peripatetic tradition *mawjūd* and *wujūd* are more accurately translated as ‘what is’ and ‘being’ respectively (following the Greek *to on* and *to einai*). We have chosen ‘existent’ and ‘existence’ because Rāzī argues for a very firm distinction between essence and existence, so it makes sense to specify the meaning of *mawjūd* and *wujūd* as ‘existent’ and ‘existence’.

order to investigate the question of divine predication.⁶ Ṭūsī appears to be the first to say that even when an ambiguously predicated term has a common meaning, the different subjects of the ambiguous predication may entail different requirements. This difference is not simply a question of intensity, gradation or modulation. An ambiguous term can have a common meaning when predicated of God and creatures, such that when we predicate the term of God, there is an intelligibility that allows us to understand something about God. Still, the implications, or requirements, when predicated of God and the world do not have to be identical. Hence, ‘existence’ can have a common meaning when predicated of the world and of God, but also can be predicated accidentally of the world but not of God. Ṭūsī’s development of ambiguous predication to investigate divine predication thus seeks not only to preserve intelligibility when we speak about God, but also to allow for ontological difference.

Translations

⁶ Ṭūsī discusses this point in a number of texts beyond the commentary on *Pointers*, *namaṭ* 4, 17. These include his correspondence with Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *al-Murāsālāt bayna Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī wa-Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī*, ed. G. Schubert (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1995), 97–99; 2); *Muṣāri‘ al-Muṣāri‘*, ed. W. Madelung (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Mu’assasa-yi Muṭāla‘āt-i Islāmī Dāneshgāh-i Tehrān, 1969), 55–62; *Tajrīd al-i ‘tiqād*, ed. ‘A. M. H. Sulaymān (al-Azārīṭah [Egypt]: Dār al-Ma‘rifah al-Jāmi‘īyah, 1996), 65; and *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā’, n.d.), 93–94, 98.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, namaṭ 4, 17⁷

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“It is sometimes permissible that something’s quiddity be a reason for one of its attributes and that one of its attributes be a reason for another attribute, as for instance, the differentia for the proprium. It is impermissible, however, that the attribute that is something’s existence, be either by reason of its quiddity, which is not existing, or by reason of some other attribute. [That is] because the reason is prior in existence, and there is nothing prior in existence before existence.”

(R1) *Commentary*: This is the second needed premise in order to confirm the demonstration that he mentioned concerning divine unity (*tawḥīd*). It is that the quiddity of something may be a reason for one of its attributes, and likewise an attribute of a quiddity may be a reason for another attribute; however, neither the quiddity nor one of its attributes may be a reason for its very own existence, since the cause is prior in existence to the effect. Thus, if the quiddity were a cause for its very own existence, then it would be prior in its existence to its very own existence <356>. In that case, it follows that either something is prior to itself or the thing would be an existent at two times, which is absurd, namely, since at that time we shift the

⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, ed. ‘A. Najafzāda. 2 vols. (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āsār va Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 2005).

discussion to the first existence, and the discussion about it is just like the discussion about the former, and so the regress follows.⁸ This is the gist of what is in this chapter.

(R2) Know that the discussion concerning this question is for the sake of theological inquiry, and intellects and understandings have been muddled about it. I will indicate the considerations that strike a chord with it and assign the detailed investigation to the rest of my written works. I say, there is no doubt nor uncertainty that God (may He be exalted) is an existent. Thus, saying, ‘existent’ of him and of contingent existents is [said] either [1] equivocally (*bi-l-ishtirāk al-lafẓī*) or [2] univocally (*bi-l-ishtirāk al-ma‘nawī*).

(R3) The first, [1], is to say that applying the term ‘existent’ to the Necessary and the contingent is like applying ‘spring’ [*al-‘ayn*]⁹ to its [distinct] referents [e.g., a source of water, a

⁸ The argument takes the form of a dilemma: The quiddity would be the cause of its own existence, if either (1) the existence of the quiddity is simultaneously its own cause and effect in all respect or (2) the existence of the quiddity at some moment t_1 is the cause of the existence of the quiddity at some subsequent moment, t_2 . In case (1), since causes are *prior* to their effects, and effects are posterior (and so *not prior*) to their causes, the quiddity would exist simultaneously prior and not prior to itself, which is a contradiction. In case (2), the contradiction is avoided since the quiddity, as cause, is prior at t_1 but not prior at t_2 when it is the effect; however, now we simply ask about the existence of the quiddity at t_1 , “Is the quiddity-at- t_1 the cause of its own existence?” If so, it is either simultaneously cause and effect of its own existence or it is an existent at two different moments, and we are off on an infinite regress.

⁹ The Arabic term *al-‘ayn* is reported to have at least forty-seven meanings (others say even a hundred!) and used seventeen different ways in the Quran alone; vide s.v. Lane. Since not all of

coil, a season, a pounce and even a rope for hauling a ship into position] or ‘out’ to visible and invisible [e.g., the stars are out and the lights are out].¹⁰ The well-regarded philosophers, however, agreed on the falsity of this option, even if one sect of well-versed theologians held to it. The philosophers argued for the falsity of this claim via multiple concerns [like the following].¹¹

(R4) First, we know necessarily that the opposite of denial is affirmation. Thus, if the affirmation were not to have some single understood thing that obtains, then the denial would not

these meanings are captured by the English ‘spring’ we sometimes take liberties with the translation to convey the sense of the text, but provide the literal translation in a footnote.

¹⁰ Literally *al-jawn ‘alā l-sawād wa-l-bayād* ([applying the Arabic color term] ‘jawn’ to black and white). Unfortunately, we are unaware of any English color term that means both itself and its contrary.

¹¹ It is not exactly clear whom al-Rāzī intends by “the philosophers”. Avicenna, in his *Metaphysics*, ed. & trans. M. E. Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 1.2, deals with the issue of the proper subject matter of metaphysics as a science, which he identifies with the existent inasmuch as it is an existent (*al-mawjūd bimā huwa mawjūd*). His discussion at least suggested to Duns Scotus (1266–1308) the thesis of the univocity of existence; however, it is not clear whether Avicenna held to such a thesis. Certainly, none of the argument’s that al-Rāzī presents for that thesis in the present text are found in *Metaphysics* 1.2. Still, we have noted a few places in Avicenna that seem structural similar to al-Rāzī’s arguments; however, the contexts of Avicenna’s arguments never concern the univocity of existence. It is of course also possible that al-Rāzī is drawing upon philosophers other than Avicenna.

have an opposite as a single thing but multiple things. That, however, would violate the necessary knowledge that for us to say something either is or is not is exhaustive.¹²

(R5) The second is that we can divide the existent into the necessary and the contingent. The source of the division is inevitably that there is something common (*mushtarikan*) between the divisions, for it is invalid to say the spring is either a pounce or a rope for hauling a ship into position¹³ or at best the intended referent for the term ‘spring’ is this or this. In this case, the division stands up, and the source is something with a common meaning (*amran ma ‘nawīyan*

¹² The argument seems to be that the Law of Excluded Middle requires that *something either is or it is not*, where *is* seems to require a single sense for the universal validity of LEM. That *something either is or it is not* is equivalent to *something either is an existent or it is not an existent*. Thus, if ‘existent’ were an equivocal term then the universal validity of LEM would be jeopardized.

Cf. Avicenna, *Categories* 2.1, 60, 10–12, “Were this not so [namely that existence has a common sense], it would not turn out that something does not exceed the two extremes of the contradiction, for each one of the two extremes of the contradiction would be multiple things and in fact there would not be a single extreme. Instead, existence in all of them is a single account with respect to what is understood.” It should be noted, however, that Avicenna’s general intention in this chapter is to show that existence is neither a purely equivocal or univocal term.

¹³ Literally, ‘*al-‘ayn* is either a knee or spy.’

mushtarikan) because the thing's being named by such and such a term is an intelligible, relative circumstance and is common between the two things.¹⁴

(R6) The third is that when we bring up the proof that the world is inevitably from some existent efficacious cause (*mu'aththir mawjūd*) we decisively know the existence <357> of the efficacious cause. Were we thereupon to become uncertain about whether that existent is something necessary or contingent or a substance or an accident, our becoming uncertain would not call into question that each one of the divisions in our decisive knowledge is an existent. If we were to believe that it is necessary, and thereafter became uncertain that it is something contingent, then in that case [when we become uncertain] the belief of its being necessary would not remain. Thus, were it not the case that being an existent is something common among all of these divisions, the decisive knowledge that it is an existent would otherwise not remain when

¹⁴ The argument seems to be that one can divide something into two classes only when there is something common between the two divided classes beyond just the name. Thus, for example, the class animal can validly be divided into male and female, but it cannot be validly divided into the members of the kingdom Animalia and brutish cads, that is, two equivocal uses of 'animal'.

Al-Rāzī may have in mind Avicenna, *Categories* 4.5, 157, 19–158, 1, “Since the people of note differentiate the state of that which is not impossible, they found part of it is necessary and part of it is not necessary of existence, both of which are common (*yashtarikāni*) in that they are possible in this sense, that is, in the sense of not impossible.” While Avicenna does say that possible existent and necessary existents share something in common, that commonality in the present context is not *existence* but being *not impossible*. For the more general claim that existence is divided into contingent and necessary, see Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 1.6 [1–2].

there is uncertainty concerning these divisions just as the decisive knowledge of its being necessary would not remain when there is uncertainty concerning its being contingent.¹⁵

(R7) The fourth is that whoever claims that existence is not something common [that is, one who claims ‘existence’ is said equivocally] has claimed it to be something common without being aware of it. [That is] because, since the existence in any thing is different from another’s existence, there will not be one and the same thing about which it is judged that it is not something common. Instead, there will be infinitely many things understood and in order to recognize whether [existence] is something common or not it will be necessary that one consider each one of them. Since, however, there is no need for that, and yet the judgment about existence’s not being something common is [supposedly] uniform across all existents, we know that existence *is* something common.¹⁶

¹⁵ The argument seems to be that while there is certainty that the agent who brought about the universe is an existent, there is uncertainty about whether it is a necessary existent, contingent existent, etc., but in that case being an existent must be something common/univocal among all candidates for agent of the universe.

¹⁶ This argument seems directed against a thesis that assumes that *existent* is predicated equivocally not only of classes of thing, like necessary existent and contingent existent, but also of every particular instant of an existent, like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In that case, if someone, S, holds the claim that ‘existent’ is predicated equivocally, such a claim would require that S surveys an infinite number of instances, but it is not the case that S surveys an infinite number of instances. Therefore, S does not hold the claim that ‘existent’ is predicated

(R8) The fifth is that just as we intellectually grasp (*na'qil*) in instances of black that they are equal in blackness (and say the same for all of the specific natures) so likewise we intellectually grasp in existents that they are equal in what is abstracted of existence. Thus, were it permissible to deny this latter proposition, then it would also be permissible to deny those former propositions. That would lead to the result that there simply is no decisive claims of resemblance among anything.¹⁷

equivocally, and so S, without being aware of it, presumably holds that 'existent' is predicated univocally.

¹⁷ The argument assumes some theory of universals, namely that whenever we classify various species of things, whether colors or the like, we can do so precisely because there is some universal that all the instances of that species share in common, like blackness or the like. We classify things as existents and so there must be some universal notion, existence, that they all share in common.

While neither the particular example of instances of black and blackness nor anything like a theory of the univocity of existence appear in Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 5.1, the general argumentative structure of that chapter does mirror al-Rāzī's argument here. In *Metaphysics* 5.1, Avicenna argues that when we consider quiddity in itself, like horseness as such or humanity as such, independent of its existing extra-mentally or mentally, then that quiddity is something common both to its existence in concrete particulars and its existence in the intellect, despite the quiddity's existing as a particular in concrete particulars and as a universal in the intellect. If *Metaphysics* 5.1, is the source for al-Rāzī's argument here, he must think that just as there must be something common between the extra-mental and mental existences of a species, there must

(R9) The sixth is that were a man to remember a poem or rhyme all of whose lines [use] the term ‘existent,’ everyone cannot help but know that the rhyme is repeating [the very same word]. If he were to make a rhyme all of whose lines [use], for instance, the term ‘spring’ such that one of the senses of the term ‘spring’ is suited to each line, it would not be said about [‘spring’] that the rhyme repeats [the very same word]. Were it not that everyone cannot help but know that what is understood by ‘existent’ is one and the same throughout the whole, then they would otherwise not judge that there is repetition here just like <358> they did not judge it in the other form.¹⁸

(R10) This then is a summary of what they mentioned to invalidate the claim of one who says that the term ‘existent’ applies to what is necessary and to what is contingent equivocally

be something common between necessary existence and contingent existence: the quiddity in itself of existence, as it were.

¹⁸ It is not clear how to formalize the argument. An example might be something like this: consider the sentence, “an existent existent makes an existent an existent existent,” which has the sense of “an actual existent makes a potential existent an actual existent.” While “actual existent” and “potential existent” are different, they still share in common, in some sense, existence. Contrast, this sentence with “Buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo,” which has the sense of “a buffalo from Buffalo, NY intimidates another buffalo from Buffalo NY, where ‘buffalo’ has three distinct meanings. Presumably, then the linguistic evidence is that when one hears ‘existent’ used multiple times in a sentence or set of sentences, there is no expectation that a pun or word play is taking place, which gives some credence to the belief that existence is a univocal notion.

(*bi-l-ishtirāk*), and in general, its falseness is like something unanimously agreed upon among the philosophers. Since this option is invalid, we have [this] to say. If it were established that the existence of God (may He be exalted) is equal to the existence of contingent things qua existing, then¹⁹ one of two things must be the case: Either God’s existence (may He be exalted) is joined with some other quiddity or it is not. The first option is the school of thought of many of the speculative theologians (*mutakallimīn*). In this case, they say that the existence of God (may He be exalted) is additional (*zā’id*) to his quiddity and one of the attributes of his true nature (*haqīqa*).²⁰ The second option is the school of thought of the majority of the philosophers. They say that his existence (may He be exalted) is itself his true nature and they express this account by “his haecceity is itself his quiddity” (*innīyatuhu ‘aynu māhīyatihi*) [or “his thatness is itself his whatness”].²¹ The Sheikh [Avicenna] confirmed this account by the [oft] related proof, and there is no reason not to repeat it along with our joining to it an additional confirmation which came before us.

(R11) Thus, we say, if the existence of God (may He be exalted) were something additional to his quiddity (may He be exalted), he would be something contingent. [That is]

¹⁹ Reading *fa hīna’idhin*, for the texts *wa hīna’idhin* (and then).

²⁰ For the view of divine attributes of al-Ash’arī, the founder of the theological school to which Rāzī belongs, see Daniel Gimaret, *La doctrine d’al-Ash’arī* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), part II, chapters 3–6, especially II.3.4; also see al-Ghazālī, *Moderation in Belief*, trans. A. M. Yaqub (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2013), II.2.i–ii and *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed. & trans. M. E. Marmura, 2nd edition, (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2001) disc. 6.

²¹ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 8.4 [3].

because, according to this appraisal, his existence is one of the attributes of his quiddity and the attribute does not become confirmed without the subject of attribution. In that case, his existence (may He be exalted) is in want of his quiddity and whatever is in want of another is something contingent. It is thus established that if his existence were something additional to his quiddity, he would be something contingent. He would also inevitably have some cause, since, you recognize, the contingent thing is in want of a cause, and that cause is either [God's] quiddity or something else. The second [option, namely that it is something other than God's quiddity] does not work because if his existence (may He be exalted) were acquired from something else, then the Creator (*al-Bāri*) would be a contingent²² effect in want of some other efficacious cause (may God be exalted highly above that!). The first also does not work because if his quiddity (may He be exalted) were a cause of his existence, it would be prior in existence to itself, the cause necessarily being prior in existence to the effect, and so the aforementioned absurdity follows. This is the confirmation upon which the Sheikh relied in order to invalidate the account of one who says that [God's] existence (may He be exalted) is something other than his quiddity.

(R12) Know that we have strong, evident proofs [that show]²³ the falsity of the third option. That is the one that the Sheikh chooses, namely that [God's] existence (may He be exalted) is equal <359> to the existence of contingent things in its being existence, and furthermore that that existence is not accidental to some of the quiddities and instead his existence subsists through itself. We will indicate some of [the proofs against this position] here.

²² In some manuscripts *mumkin* (contingent) is absent.

²³ Taking 'alā as part of the syntactical regimen of *adilla quwīya jalīya* on the next page, which has been moved here for clarity.

(R13) The first, then, is that the existence that is common between the necessary and the contingent insofar as it is existence²⁴ either [1] requires that it be accidental to the quiddity or [2] requires that it not be accidental to it or [3] it does not require either one of the two restrictions (*lā yaqtaḍī wa-lā wāḥidan min al-qaydayn*) [i.e., 1 or 2]. If [1] it requires that [existence] be accidental to the quiddity, then in all existence it must be accidental to [the quiddity], because the concomitant of one [and the same] true nature occurs wherever it occurs. In that case, it follows that God’s existence (may He be exalted) is accidental to his quiddity, and that is what is sought. If [2] it requires that it not be accidental to any of the quiddities, then in all existence it must not be accidental to its quiddity. In that case, the existence of contingent things must not be accidental to their quiddities. This is inconsistent with the consensus. Moreover, in that case the contingent things are existents, and when existents are not through an existence accidental to them, they must be through an existence that is itself their quiddities. In that case, then, ‘existent’ is said equivocally of the existents and reverts to the option that we invalidated.²⁵ As for [3]— [namely], if it is said that existence is not required, neither being accidental to a quiddity nor not being accidental to it, then it is not restricted by either one of these two restrictions but by some separate reason—there would be no independent confirmation of the existence itself of the Necessary of Existence insofar as it is, except through some external reason. Thus, the Necessary of Existence would not be not the Necessary of Existence, which is inconsistent.²⁶

²⁴ In some manuscripts *mawjūd*, ‘existent’.

²⁵ See (R3)–(R9) above.

²⁶ The argument is that either (1) existence is accidental to the quiddities of all things or (2) it is not accidental to anything or (3) existence is neutral to being either accidental or not accidental.

(R14) The second is that the philosophers agreed that human intellects do not grasp (*mudrika*) the true reality of God himself (may He be exalted), while <360> they agree that [human intellects] grasp his existence (may He be exalted). How can this be when according to them absolute existence (*muṭlaq al-wujūd*) is what is first conceptualized?²⁷ This requires that his true reality (may He be exalted) be other than his existence (may He be exalted). This is the proof on which they always depend and by which they attack in order [to show] that the existence of contingent things is additional to their quiddities, for they say that we might intellectually grasp (*naʿqil*) the quiddity of the triangle while doubting its existence, and that what is known is other than what is unknown. Likewise, here, since the existence is known,

Option (1) is the Ashʿarite position that Rāzī accepts but the philosophers reject. Option (2) is that existence is not accidental to anything, in which case all things have their existence essentially or necessarily, a position that the philosophers reject, or, alternatively, ‘existence’ is being used equivocally, a position which Rāzī feels that he has already invalidated. If (3) existence is essentially neutral between being accidental and being necessary, then there must be some external reason that explains why one existence is contingent in itself and another necessary in itself. Consequently, there would be some external reason that explain God’s being the Necessary Existent in itself, which would mean he is not the Necessary of Existence in itself.

²⁷ Avicenna discusses this point in Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 1.5 [1] where he says that that the meaning of ‘existent’ is impressed on the soul in a primary way.

while the true nature unknown, the existence must be other than the quiddity. What then is the difference [between the two cases]?²⁸

(R15) The third is that if the true nature of [God] (may He be exalted) were only abstract existence along with the remaining negative restrictions (*al-quyūd al-salbīya*), then those negative restrictions would not be included within the causality of the existence of contingent things. [That is] because privation is not a cause of existence nor a part of it [i.e., of the cause of existence].²⁹ Now when those negative restrictions are excluded from consideration in the causality of contingent things, then his³⁰ causing contingent things would only be owing to that [abstract] existence. Thus, when that existence is equivalent to the existence of the rest of the existents, it follows that the rest of the existents would be equivalent to his existence (may He be exalted) with respect to his causality of contingent things. In that case, it would follow that the existence of everything would be equivalent to God himself (may He be exalted) in his attributes and his actions.³¹

²⁸ The argument relies on the oft repeated (albeit, philosophically dubious) premise that whatever is known is different from what is unknown. God's existence can be known, while his quiddity cannot be known. Therefore, God's existence is different from his quiddity and so cannot be identical with it. See the translation of Ṭūsī's comments on this argument (T12) and the accompanying note for further discussion of the argument.

²⁹ Although not likely, the pronoun *hā* could also be referring to the contingent things.

³⁰ Some manuscripts have the pronoun *hā*, 'their'.

³¹ The argument seems implicitly to assume two premises. One is that efficient causes give to their effects something that they actually or eminently possess, a premise that in some version

(R16) The fourth is that they agreed that what is true of each single instance of the specific nature is true of the rest of its single instances. By this premise they sought to establish the celestial spheres' having matter and to invalidate the school of Democritus concerning the atom, along the lines of which we confirmed these two positions earlier.³² Also, by it they sought to falsify the view of void intervals.³³ Thus, they said [concerning a purported void] since the intervals in some locations would be in want of matter, they must always be in want if it, because that which the occurrent specific nature requires does not vary. When that is established, we say that existence—insofar as it is existence omitting the rests of the accidents from it—is one and the same specific nature, and so what is required of it cannot vary. Given that is the case, <361> existence with regard to us is an accident in want of an essence needing it, then how is one to

the philosophers accept; cf. Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 4.2 [29] & 6.1 [8]. The other is the Avicennan claim that apart from God's being the Necessary Existent through itself, all other divine attributes are negative (or relational); see Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 8.4 [2]. Given that privative and negative restrictions are not included in what it is to be a cause (at least not of an existent effect), the only actual or formal feature that could be included in God's causality is his existence; however, all existents are purportedly equivalent in existence. Therefore, contingent existents are equivalent to God in causality.

³² See Avicenna, *Pointers nimāṭ* 1.7 & 2.17, respectively for Avicenna's use of this principle in his argument for the continuity of matter as opposed to its being atomic and his argument for the nature of the matter of the celestial spheres.

³³ See Avicenna, *Physics*, ed. & trans. J. McGinnis (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2009), 2.8 [9–10].

understand the complete turnabout of something like this existence with regard to God (may He be exalted) as a self-subsistent substance so as to be the most powerful of existents and most intensely self-subsisting of them?³⁴

(R17) As for the argument upon which the Sheikh depends in order to explain that it is not permissible that God's existence (may He be exalted) be something added to his quiddity, all of its premises are conceded except his claim, if the quiddity were a cause of its own existence, then it would be prior (*mutaqaddima*) in existence to itself, for the cause is prior in existence to the effect. We deny this priority, and the explanation of [the denial] is from multiple respects.

(R18) The first is that in *namaṭ* five of this work we will explain³⁵ (if God, may He be exalted, wills) that if by the cause's being prior to the effect *essentially* one means an efficacious cause for it, then this is known and conceded.³⁶ [In that case], however, the gist of the claim of

³⁴ The argument assumes, first, the univocity of existence thesis—which again is that existence inasmuch as it is common to all existents, is something like a specific nature—and second that behavior resulting from one and the same specific nature does not vary. Thus, since God and creatures are both existents and so share a common existence qua existence, whatever that shared existence requires must be the same. Thus, since existence is something additional to our quiddity, it likewise must be something additional to God's quiddity, which just is the Ash'arite position.

³⁵ See Rāzī's discussion of *namaṭ* 5.7.

³⁶ Rāzī appears to be drawing on a sense of essential priority (*taqaddum bi-l-dhāt*) that Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (1086–1153) develops in his *Nihāyat al-Aqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (ed. A. Guillaume, [London: Oxford University Press, 1934], pp. 7–11). There

the one who says the cause is prior to the effect *in existence* just goes back to the cause's not being efficacious with respect to the effect save after its existence, but this just presses into service the initial thing sought. Indeed, we maintain that the efficacious cause with respect to the existence of God (may He be exalted) is only his own quiddity with no consideration of any other preceding existence. Thus, your discussion is a return to the subject of dispute stated differently, and to wit is uninformative about it. If by priority something beyond an efficacious cause is meant, then it is inconceivable let alone credible.

(R19) The second is that we abandon this position and instead ask why did you all say that every cause is prior in existence to the effect?³⁷ Do you not think that the quiddities of contingent things are receptive (*qābila*) of their [individual] instances of existence, and so their quiddities are receptive causes³⁸ of their existence. In this situation, the receptive cause is not [at all] necessarily prior to the effect in existence. If it is such, why might there not be something

Shahraṣṭānī notes that while the philosophers frequently identify essential priority with causal priority, essential priority is more general. Essential priority also includes, for instance, 1's being essentially prior to 2, which is different than merely being prior in order but it also is not a priority by causality, since 1 does not cause 2, even though 2 requires or is conditioned on there being 1.

³⁷ The following argument and responses in the rest of the chapter appear to rely on al-Ghazālī; cf. al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosopher*, disc. 6, [8–12].

³⁸ That is, the quiddity functions like the analogue of a material cause in contingent existents.

like it with respect to the efficient cause? Also, at the beginning of this chapter of this book³⁹ the Sheikh mentioned that something's quiddity might sometimes be a reason for one of its attributes. Thus, we say, when the quiddity is an efficacious cause for one of its own attributes, it is a cause for that attribute. Now it is impermissible that its priority to that attribute be in existence unless the cause be not merely the quiddity itself, but indeed the existing quiddity, but he admitted that the cause is the quiddity itself. Thus, it is established that the priority of the efficacious cause to <362> the effect does not necessitate that it be in existence.⁴⁰

(R20) If it is said, since existence is not considered in the quiddity's being an efficacious cause, and whatever is not an existent is a nonexistent (*ma'dūm*), then in that case it follows that the quiddity, in its state of non-existence, would be efficacious with respect to its own existence, which is absurd. We say, from our claim that the quiddity's causation of its own existence does

³⁹ See Avicenna's base-text above, where he claims, "It is sometimes permissible that something's quiddity be a reason for one of its attributes."

⁴⁰ Here the argument relies on certain Avicennan analogies: Existence is to quiddity, as necessity is to contingency, and necessity is to contingency as actuality is to potentiality, and finally actuality is potentiality as formal cause is to material cause. The material cause as the bearer of potentiality must be prior to whatever is to become actual. Consequently, given the analogies, quiddity as contingent must be prior in existence before being made to exist. It is important to note that the priority is not necessarily temporal priority but perhaps some form of essential priority. Avicenna seems committed to all of these points, and so al-Rāzī says, in whatever way receptive causes and the quiddities of contingent things are causally prior to the actual existence of their instances, so is the divine essence causally prior to its existence.

not depend upon the existence of the quiddity, it does not follow validly that the quiddity, in its state of non-existence, would be efficacious with respect to existence. It is the same as the fact that from our saying that the contingent quiddity's being receptive to existence does not depend upon the existence of that quiddity, it does not follow validly that, in its state of non-existence, [the quiddity] is receptive to existence. Instead, the truth is that the quiddity as such is something different from [both] its existence and its nonexistence. We are only making the efficacious cause with respect to existence just that very quiddity, and that does not preclude its being devoid of existence.⁴¹

(R21) One might say that just as you all allow that before existing its quiddity is efficacious with respect to its own existence, then why not allow that before the existence of that quiddity it is efficacious with respect to the world's existence? In that case it would be impossible to prove the existence of the agent through the existence of the actions. We say [in response], intuition is split between two positions, for we intuitively know that as long as something does not exist it cannot be a reason for the existence of another and we know that it is not unlikely that something exists on account of itself, where what is understood by our saying something exists on account of itself is that it itself requires its own existence [i.e., it is self-necessitating]. Once the intuition of thought cleaves to this split [between the two intuitions], our discussion turns out right.⁴²

⁴¹ The argument seems to be just a nuanced version of that of the previous paragraph.

⁴² The objection seems to be that according to al-Rāzī the divine existence flows from God's quiddity, and since the God's quiddity is eternal so is divine existence. The philosophers, however, had argued for the eternity of the world in just the same way, namely that the world

(R22) This completes the discussion about this issue. Regarding this issue you must know that it is impossible to obtain a claim beyond one of the three claims that we mentioned. One must also take care in distinguishing each one of these claims from the other in order that the discussion concerning this issue quickly become clear and by God's good grace.

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Ḥall mushkilāt Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, namaṭ 4, 17

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“It is sometimes permissible that something's quiddity be a reason for one of its attributes and that one of its attributes be a reason for another attribute, as for instance, the differentia for the proprium. It is impermissible, however, that the attribute that is something's existence be either by reason of its quiddity, which is not existing, or by reason of another attribute. [That is] because the reason is prior in existence, and there is nothing prior in existence before existence.”

(T1) This is another premise for divine unity (*tawḥīd*). An example of something's quiddity being a reason for one of its attributes is [like] twoness' being a reason for two's

emanates from God's quiddity (or perhaps very existence) and since God's quiddity is eternal so is the world. The theologians had countered that God's causal efficacy to bring something into existence is conditioned upon the existence of the divine will. In that case before God's quiddity can be efficacious on the existence of anything, God and the divine will must exist prior to that efficacy. Thus, God's quiddity cannot be what causes the divine existence unless God already exists, the original absurdity. The response seems to be an appeal to competing intuitions.

evenness. An example of some attribute, which is the differentia, being a reason for another attribute, which is the proprium, is rationality's being a reason for the [capacity] for wonder. An example of some attribute, which is the proprium, being a reason for an attribute, which is another proprium, is the [capacity] for wonder's being a reason for risibility. An example of some attribute, which is an accident, being a reason for another attribute like it is the attribution of color to body [and its] being a reason for its visibility.

(T2) The difference between existence and the rest of the attributes here is that the rest of the attributes exist only by reason <571> of the quiddity, whereas the quiddity exists by reason of the existence. Therefore, it is permissible that the rest of the attributes proceed from the quiddity and [that] some of them proceed from others, while it is not permissible that existence proceed from any of them.

(T3) The Eminent Commentator [Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī] was completely muddled about this passage. Because of it, he erroneously believed that the intellects of intellectuals and the understandings of the philosophers were altogether muddled. That is because, by means of many proofs that he acquired from [the intellectuals and philosophers], he inferred that 'existence' does not apply to existents equivocally. He then went on and judged that existence is one and the same thing in everything equally even to the point that he declared that the existence of the Necessary is equal to the existence of contingent things (may He be exalted above that!).

(T4) Next, since he believed that the existence of contingent things is something accidental to their quiddities and he also had judged that the existence of the Necessary is equal to the existence of contingent things, he judged that the existence of the Necessary [i.e., God] is likewise an accident of his quiddity. Thus, his quiddity is other than his existence (may He be greatly exalted above that). He erroneously believed that if he did not make the existence of the

Necessary an accident of his quiddity, it would follow for him either that that existence is equal to the caused instances of existence or that existence is applied equivocally to the existence of the Necessary and the existence of the others. <572>

(T5) The origin of this error is [Rāzī's] ignorance of the sense of ambiguous [*bi-l-tashkīk*] application, for that which applies ambiguously to different things does not apply to them equivocally in the way that 'spring' ('*ayn*)⁴³ applies to the things understood [by] it, but rather only in a single sense to all of them. Still it does not [apply] equally in the way that 'human' applies to individual instances of [humans], but differs either:

- 1) by priority and posteriority (in the way 'continuous' applies to magnitude and to the body that possesses magnitude) or,
- 2) by primary-ness and its privation (in the way that 'one' applies to that which is fundamentally indivisible and to that which is divisible in some other way other than that by which it is one)⁴⁴ or
- 3) by intensity and weakness (in the way that 'white' applies to snow and ivory).⁴⁵

(T6) 'Existence' brings together all of these differences, for it applies to the cause and its effect by priority and posteriority, and to substance and accident by primary-ness and privation,

⁴³ On the many senses of the Arabic *al-ayn* see footnote 9.

⁴⁴ For example, we can speak of one boxcar, which is the basic unit of a train, but we can also speak of one train, which is a collection of boxcars and an engine.

⁴⁵ Cf. Avicenna, *Categories* 1.2, 10.

and to what is fixed and not fixed,⁴⁶ like blackness and motion, by intensity and weakness, and indeed to the necessary and the contingent in [all] three ways.

(T7) The single sense predicated unequally of different things cannot be a quiddity or a part of the quiddity of those things. [That is] because neither the quiddity nor its parts differ; rather [the single sense] is precisely an inseparable or separable accident (*'āriḍan khārijīyan lāziman aw mufāriḡan*), for example, as 'whiteness' is not equally predicated of the whiteness of snow and of the whiteness of ivory. In this case, it is not at all a quiddity or a part of the quiddity of the two [i.e., of the snow and the ivory], but is something externally inseparable from them. That is because between the two contrary limits that apply with respect to colors there is a potentially infinite [number] of species of colors that have no specifically differentiated names, <573> but one name with one sense applies ambiguously to each group of them, like whiteness, redness and blackness. That sense is inseparable [but] non-constitutive for that group.

(T8) In the same way, then, is 'existence' in its application to the existence of the Necessary and to the existence of contingent things differing in ipseities (*hūwīyāt*)⁴⁷ that have no specifically differentiated names. I am not saying ['existence' applies] to the quiddities of

⁴⁶ 'What is fixed and not fixed' are divisions of the continuous quantity. The fixed continuous quantity is what is continuous in existence, such as a line or surface, whereas the non-fixed continuous quantity is what is continuous in time (Avicenna, *Categories* 2.4, 119).

⁴⁷ *Huwīya*, for which *huwīyāt* is the plural, is the translation for *to on* in the only existing Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; however, the accepted Arabic translation of *to on* quickly became *al-mawjūd*. The term can be translated as identity or ipseity, which is done here; see Marmura's note to Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 1.1, fn. 1, p. 383.

contingent things, but to the instances of existences of those quiddities. I mean that it also applies to them as something inseparable, external and non-constitutive.⁴⁸

(T9) When this settles in, the vagaries of this Eminent one entirely melt away. That is because ‘existence’ applies to what is below it in one sense just as the philosophers hold. From that, however, it does not follow that the instances of the inseparable concomitants of [existence] (*malzūmātihi*)—which are the existence of the Necessary and the existences of the contingent things in reality—are equal, since things differing in true nature might share one [and the same] concomitant (*lāzim wāḥid*).⁴⁹ Here I will recount his spurious arguments in detail and indicate the ways they melt away.

⁴⁸ According to Ṭūsī, ‘existence’ is predicated of different existents in the way that ‘whiteness’ or ‘colored’ are predicated of particular instances of white things and colored things. Thus, ‘white’ is said ambiguously of snow and ivory, where one is bright while the other is dark (and of course the infinite varieties of white in between). This use of ‘white’ is unlike the equivocal use of ‘white’ when one speaks of ‘white snow’ and ‘white space’ (that latter of which means unused space regardless of color). Thus, when ‘existence’ is said of the Necessary Existent, that is, God, and of contingent existents, that is, creatures, it is said only ambiguously and so the same sense is applied to God to an infinite degree above that which is applied to creatures.

⁴⁹ In the *Discussions* [= *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Muḥsin Bīdārfar (Qom: Intashārāt Baydar, 1992), 218, §648], Avicenna makes the point that things of which ‘existence’ is predicated ambiguously must differ from each other in essence, but can share a concomitant.

(T10) I say, then, among his spurious arguments by means of which he claimed to have vitiated the philosophers' statement, "that the haecceity (*innīya* "thatness" or "individual existence") of the Necessary is its quiddity"⁵⁰ is his statement:

Since it is established that existence is common, then insofar as it is existence it requires either [1] [existence's] being accidental to the quiddity or [2] not being accidental to it or [3] it does not require either one of the two. The first and second both require the equality of the Necessary and the contingent with respect to being or not being accidental [to the quiddity], while the third requires both of them needing a separate reason, which makes the existence of one of them non-accidental and the existence of the other accidental.⁵¹

<574> The answer is what you learned from what just passed. Consider the light that is common but applies to lights unequally: To be sure sunlight lays claim to the sight of the one with very poor eyesight, unlike the rest of the lights. Likewise, the heat that is common, to be sure some of it lays claim to the disposition for life⁵² or the disposition for the alternation of the species form unlike the rest of the [types of] heat. That is owing to the difference of the instances of the

⁵⁰ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 8.4 [3].

⁵¹ Cf. (R13).

⁵² The reference is to the innate or vital heat of Galenic medicine; for a discussion see Richard J. Durling, "The Innate Heat in Galen," *Medizinhistorisches Journal* Bd. 23, H. 3/4 (1988): 210–212.

inseparable concomitants of light and heat in quiddity (*li-ikhtilāf mulzūmāt al-nūr wa-l-ḥarāra bi-l-māhīya*).⁵³

(T11) Also, if existence were [applied] equally, as he erroneously believed, then the contingent would be what needs a reason, which requires [existence's] being accidental, whereas the Necessary would be what has no need. [That is] because the privation of being accidental does not need the existence of some reason; rather, the privation in it of the reason for being accidental would be sufficient. The truth, however, is what we initially mentioned.⁵⁴

(T12) Also, among [his spurious arguments] is his statement:

The philosophers agreed that the intellects of humans do not grasp the true reality of the deity (may He be exalted) but that they grasp his existence. How could this be when

⁵³ A straight forward reading of the argument is that existence is found in radically different degrees that can have results that are different in kind, which make saying 'existence' of different things an ambiguous predication. It is like 'light', which is said of sunlight and can be seen even by one nearly blind and the light of a flickering candle that might only barely be seen by one with perfect eyesight, or heat, which in some instances, like vital heat, results in life, while in other instances of heat, like fire, life does not result. Additionally, Ṭūsī is responding to why existence can be accidental in creation but not in God, namely, it has different requirements.

⁵⁴ Rāzī's argument assumed that if being accidental (i.e., non-essential) or not is required of one kind of existent, then existence must be required to be accidental or not of all kinds of existents. Ṭūsī's point is that given the ambiguous predication of 'existence,' it is required that 'existence' may be predicated essentially of some existents and non-essentially, i.e., accidentally, of others.

according to them existence is the first [thing] conceptualized. In that case, that requires that there be a difference between his true reality and his existence because their proof upon which they depend and with which they attack is their statement that we intellectually grasp the quiddity of the triangle while doubting its existence.⁵⁵ Now, what is known differs from what is not known. Here, His existence (may He be exalted) is known but his true reality is not known. Thus, his existence differs from his true reality, otherwise what is the distinction?⁵⁶

The answer is that the true reality, which [human] intellects do not grasp, is his proper existence (*wujūduhu al-khāṣṣ*), which is unlike the rest of the instances of existence in Being [or ipseity], which is the first principle of the Universe, whereas the existence [that the human intellects] grasp is <575> the absolute existence that is inseparable from that [proper] existence and the rest of the existences *and* it is [this] that is the first [thing] conceptualized. Now, grasping what is inseparable does not require grasping the instance of the inseparable concomitant in [its] true reality, otherwise from grasping existence one would necessarily grasp all of the proper existences. His true reality's not being grasped (may He be exalted) and the existence's being grasped requires his true reality (may He be exalted) to be something different from absolute existence that is grasped, not from His proper existence.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The reference seems to be to Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 1.5 [9].

⁵⁶ Cf. (R14).

⁵⁷ One way perhaps to understand the argument is this. Consider the apparently incomplete existential quantification, "There exists an x such that x is ..." where the predicate variable is

(T13) Also, among [his spurious arguments] is his statement:

If the true reality of the Necessary were nothing but an abstract existence together with the negative restrictions that do not enter into the causation of the contingent things' existence—for privation is not a cause of existence or a part of [the cause]—then the cause of the contingent things would be existence equal to the contingent things' existence.⁵⁸

purportedly unknown. Rāzī seemingly thinks that when one says, “God exists,” such an existential quantification is in fact complete and the predicate variable is known—“There exists an x such that x is an existent”—whereas the quiddity or true nature is unknown. Thus, the existent and the quiddity are different, since the unknown variable will be something different, or at least more, than merely ‘an existent’. In contrast, Ṭūsī’s position seems to be that while one can have the abstract existential knowledge about God that “There exists an x such that ...” we are not entitled to move from this incomplete knowledge to some complete knowledge where the variable predicate is determinate; we can only say, “There exists an x such that there exists an x ...” The existential quantification remains at the abstract level. For example, from my knowing that there is something in my attic, and yet I do not know what kind of thing it is, I cannot infer that the something-in-my-attic is distinct or different from its being a certain-kind-of-something, albeit a kind that I do not know.

⁵⁸ Cf. (R15).

The answer is that the true reality of the Necessary is not general existence but what is abstracted from his proper existence through which it is unlike the rest of the existences in [that] his subsistence is through himself.⁵⁹

(T14) Also, among [his spurious arguments] is his statement:

They agreed that what is true of each single instance of the specific nature is true of the rest of its single instances, as they mentioned in establishing the matter of the celestial spheres and in invalidating the school of Democritus concerning the indivisible body and the necessity of there being corporeal intervals in some matter. When that is established, the existence is a specific nature of which what is required of it cannot vary. I mean, being accidental and non-accidental to quiddity.⁶⁰ <576>

⁵⁹ This response simply repeats the distinction made in the previous response, namely, there is a distinction between existence considered abstractly, i.e., in abstraction from the proper existence of any particular existent, and that proper existence belonging to particular existents. Thus, for example, while a horse exists and I exist, and so it is proper to predicate ‘existence’ of both of us, the horse has equine-existence while I have human-existence, and these specific ways of existing cannot be predicated of us equally.

⁶⁰ Cf. (R16).

The answer is that existence is not a specific nature, because the specific nature is in the individuals (*ashkhāṣ*) equally and applies to them univocally, whereas existence is not like that.⁶¹

(T15) Next, he objected in this chapter to the Shaykh's claim that if the quiddity were to require its existence, then [the quiddity] would be prior in existence to existence by saying:

There is no sense to the cause's being prior in existence save its producing its effect. In that case, the consequent in the previously mentioned conditional proposition is [just] a restatement of the antecedent by another expression.⁶²

The answer is that we know necessarily that the cause's efficacy is conditioned upon its being prior in existence, and nothing is conditioned through itself [that is, nothing has itself as a condition for itself]. Also, grant that the priority is the efficacy, still it is inconceivable that the quiddity be efficacious, except when it is in the concrete particulars. In that case, its being in the concrete particulars—I mean its existence—is a condition for its existence—I mean its being in the concrete particulars—proceeding from it. This is a contradiction.⁶³

⁶¹ The argument relies on the differences among univocal predication, equivocal predication and ambiguous predication. Existence is unlike, for example, the specific nature, human, for while 'human' is predicated of every individual instance of human univocally, 'existence' is not predicated univocally but only ambiguously of every existent.

⁶² Cf. (R18).

⁶³ Rāzī's claims seemed to be that the conditional, "if x causes y , then x is prior to y " is tautologically true, for x 's priority to y need not be temporal but only causal. Thus, in this case to

(T16) He said next:

Just as the quiddity is receptive to existence although not prior in existence to it, likewise it is an efficient cause of it without being prior in existence.⁶⁴

The answer is that this discussion of his is based upon his conceptualization that the quiddity has a perdurance in the external world without its existence, and thereafter existence inheres in it, which is false, because to be the quiddity is its existence. The quiddity is not abstract-able from existence except in the intellect not in that in the intellect it is severed from existence, for being in the intellect also is an intellectual existence just as being in the external world is an external existence. Instead, the intellect is of the character to take notice of [the quiddity] <577> alone

say x is prior to y is just to say x , insofar as it is a cause, is causally prior to y , which means x causes y . Ṭūsī has two responses. The first seems to be that Avicenna's original conditional should be read like this: "if x exists-as-a-cause of y , then x exists-absolutely (i.e., considered independent of any particular manner of existence) prior to y ". To-exist-as-a-cause and to-exist-absolutely are different ways of speaking of existence, that is, existence is being used in different sense in the antecedent and conditional statements. Consequently, the conditional is not tautologically true. Ṭūsī's second response is much like the first: a quiddity as such is not a cause (since it may either exist or not exist); rather, it is a concretely existing quiddity that is a cause, but there is a concrete existing quiddity only if the quiddity has existence. Thus, having existence is a necessary condition for a quiddity's being a cause, but not identical with being a cause.

⁶⁴ Cf. (R19).

without taking notice of existence.⁶⁵ The absence of considering something is not the consideration of its absence. Consequently, then, attributing existence to the quiddity is something intellectual unlike the attribution of whiteness to the body, for the quiddity does not have a singular existence and an accident called ‘existence’ that has another existence such that they join together as what receives and what is received. Instead, when the quiddity is, [the quiddity’s] being [the quiddity] is its existence. The upshot is that the quiddity is receptive to existence only when it exists in the intellect and it is not possible that it be an efficient cause for an external attribute when it exists only in the intellect.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Cf. Avicenna, *Introduction*, [= *al-Madkhal*, ed. Ibrahim Madkur (Cairo: The General Egyptian Book Organization, 1952)], 1.2, where he introduces the consideration of a quiddity qua quiddity without regard to its mental or external existence.

⁶⁶ Ṭūsī’s summary of Rāzī’s position is that quiddities, as they exist extra-mentally in the world, are such that they are receptive to existence, which is accidental or super-added to them causing them to exist as particulars. (The position that Ṭūsī ascribes to Rāzī seems comparable to certain interpretations, namely Suarez’s interpretation, of Henry of Ghent’s *esse essentiae*.) In this respect, the quiddity is the analogue of the material cause. Rāzī then demanded a principled explanation for why the quiddity can be a material cause before existence is added but an efficient cause cannot be a cause before existence is added. Ṭūsī’s response is to draw upon the Avicennan distinction (see *Introduction* 1.2, p. 15) between the quiddity as it exists in the world (*fī l-a ‘yān*) and the quiddity as it exists in the mind (*fī l-taṣawwur*). The quiddity can be considered the receptive or material cause insofar as that quiddity exists in the mind taken in abstraction from any existence that it might have in reality. In contrast, no quiddity can be

(T17) Next [al-Rāzī] said:

In this chapter the Shaykh mentioned that the quiddity is a cause for its attribute, and that requires its being something efficacious without its being bound together with existence. [That is] because if it were bound together with it, it alone would not be a cause but instead [it would be a cause] only together with existence. From that its being a non-existent does not follow; rather, it is an efficacious cause only insofar as it is what it is not insofar as it is an existent or non-existent.⁶⁷

The answer is that the absence of considering existence with the quiddity together with its requiring an attribute does not require its being severed from existence in the state of requiring [an attribute], for its being severed from existence while it is what it is, is absurd, to say nothing of its being something efficacious. Consequently, then, its being something efficacious with respect to existence from which the state of efficacy is not severed [that is, intellectual existence] is inconceivable.⁶⁸

causally efficacious on extramental things merely insofar as it exists in the mind, but only insofar as it exists in reality or extra-mentally.

⁶⁷ Cf. (R19).

⁶⁸ Rāzī understands the Avicennan text being commented to say that the quiddity taken alone, independent of existence, can be a reason or efficacious cause for one of its attributes, but in that case, there seems no principled reason why the quiddity cannot be a reason or efficacious cause of existence. Ṭūsī's response is much like that given for the previous argument, namely, there is

(T18) This, then, is an explanation of the rotten view that this Eminent one held. These discussions, while they lead to prolixity, are unrelated to the lemma of the text in this place. Since, however, the talk of this man was lengthy on this question, which of the divine questions is the greatest matter of concern in this text and in the rest of his texts, then taking note of the slip of his steps is necessary lest the beliefs of the beginners should be corrupted by following his footsteps.

a principled difference: The notion of quiddity that Rāzī is considering has only mental existence, whereas in order for something to be a reason or efficacious cause of existence in reality, it itself must exist extra-mentally.