

<355>

“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.”

(1) *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 exists twice, which is absurd. Since we then switch the discussion over to the first existence, and the discussion about it is just like the discussion about the first, the regress follows. This is the gist of what is in this chapter.

(2) 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 possible existents is either [1] equivocally (*bi-l-ishtirāk al-lafẓī*) or [2] univocally (*bi-l-ishtirāk al-ma‘nawī*).

(3) The first, [1], is to say that applying the term ‘existent’ to the Necessary and the possible is like applying ‘spring’ [*al-‘ayn*]¹ to its [distinct] referents [e.g., a source of water, a 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].² 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 through multiple concerns.

(4) 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 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.³

¹ The Arabic term *al-‘ayn* is reported to have at least forty-seven meaning (others say even a hundred!) and used seventeen different ways in the Quran; vide s.v. Lane. Since not all of these meanings are captured by the English ‘spring’ I sometimes take liberties with the translation to convey the sense of the text, but provide the literal translation in a footnote.

² Literally *al-jawn ‘alā l-sawād wa-l-bayāḍ* ([applying the Arabic color term] ‘jawn’ to black and white). Unfortunately, I am unaware of any English color term that mean both itself and its contrary.

³ NOTE TO SELF: the argument seems to be that the Law of Excluded Middle requires that *something either is or it is not*, where *to be* seems to require a single sense for the universal validity of LEM. That *something either*

(5) The second is that we can divide the existent into the necessary and the possible. The source of the division is inevitably that there is something common (*mushtarikan*) between the divisions, for it is invalid say the spring is either a pounce or a rope for hauling a ship into position⁴ 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'nawīan 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.⁵

(6) The third is that when we bring up the proof that the world is inevitably from some existing 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 possible 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 some existent. If we were to believe that it is necessary, and thereafter became uncertain that it is something possible, 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 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 possible.⁶

(7) 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.⁷

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.

⁴ Literally, *al-'ayn* is either a knee or spy.

⁵ NOTE TO SELF: 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.

⁶ NOTE TO SELF: the argument seems to rely on the premise that when there is certainty that there is some *x*, but uncertainty about whether *F_x* or *G_x* or *H_x*, then *x* must be something common to *F*, *G* and *H*. Assuming this premise the argument is: 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, possible existent, etc., but in that case being an existent must be something common/univocal among all candidates for agent of the universe.

⁷ NOTE TO SELF: This argument seems directed against a thesis that assumes that existent is predicated equivocally not only of classes of thing, like necessary existent and possible 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 equivocally, and so *S*, without being aware of it, presumably holds that existent is predicated univocally.

(8) The fifth is that just as we intellectually grasp (*naʿqilu*) 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.⁸

(9) 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.⁹

(10) 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 possible equivocally (*bi-l-ishṭirāk*), 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 possible things qua existing, then¹⁰ 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 (*zāʿid*) to his quiddity and one of the attributes of his true nature (*haqīqa*).¹¹ 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” (*innīyahu ʿaynu māhīyahī*) [or “his thatness is itself his whatness”].¹² The Sheikh [Ibn Sīnā] 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.

⁸ NOTE TO SELF: 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, existence, that they all share in common.

⁹ NOT TO SELF: It is not clear to me 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, the difference seems to be in degrees, i.e., an actual existent has a more robust existence than a potential existent, in which case, they still share existence in common. Contrast, this sentence with “Buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo,” which has the sense of “buffalo from Buffalo, NY intimidate other 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.

¹⁰ Reading *fa hīnaʿidhin*, for the texts *wa hīnaʿidhin* (and then).

¹¹ Provide al-Ashʿarī and al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād* references and perhaps Gimaret.

¹² I See Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 8.4 [3]; perhaps add Heidrun and Sasha’s articles.

(11) 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 possible. [That is] 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 possible. It is thus established that if his existence were something additional to his quiddity, he would be something possible. He would also inevitably have some cause, since, you recognize, the possible 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 possible¹³ 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.

(12) Know that we have strong, evident proofs [that show]¹⁴ 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 possible 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.

(13) The first, then, is that the existence that is common between the necessary and the possible insofar as it is existence¹⁵ 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 yaqtadī wa lā wāḥidan min al-qaydayni*) [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 any¹⁶ of the quiddities, then in all existence it must not be accidental to its quiddity. In that case, the existence of possible things must not be accidental to their quiddities. This is inconsistent with the consensus. Moreover, in that case the possible 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.¹⁷ 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

¹³ In some manuscripts *mumkin* is absent.

¹⁴ Taking *alā* as part of the syntactical regimen of *adalla quwīya jaliya* on the next page, which has been moved here for clarity.

¹⁵ In some manuscripts *mawjūd*, 'existent'.

¹⁶ The Arabic is *shay' min ...*, which more naturally is rendered "some of ...," but which in the present case would seem to render the argument invalid, for it is illicit to move from *some x* to *all x*.

¹⁷ See (3)–(9) above.

restrictions but on 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.¹⁸

(14) 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?¹⁹ 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 possible things is additional to their quiddities, for they say that we might intellectually grasp (*naʿqilu*) 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, while the true nature unknown, the existence must be other than the quiddity. What then is the difference [between the two cases]?²⁰

(15) 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-salbiya*), then those negative restrictions would not be included within the causality of the existence of possible things. [That is] because privation is not a cause of existence nor a part of it [i.e., of the cause of existence].²¹ Now when those negative restrictions are excluded from consideration in the causality of possible things, then his²² causing possible 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 possible 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.²³

(16) 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

¹⁸ NOTE TO SELF: The argument seems to be that existence is either required, and so necessary of God—options (1) and (2)—or not required, and so not necessary of God—option (3). If (1) is true and so existence is necessarily accidental to all existents, then it is accidental to God, which is false, where if (2) is true and so existence is necessarily non-accidental, i.e., it is essential, to all existents, then existence is essential to creatures, which again is false. If (3) existence is not required of God and so not necessary for God, then God, who just is the Necessary of Existence, would not be necessary of existence, which is absurd.

¹⁹ FIND REFERENCES TO THE PRIMARY CONCEPTS IN AVICENNA.

²⁰ NOTE TO SELF: The argument relies on the oft repeated (and 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.

²¹ Although not likely, the pronoun *hā* could also be referring to the possible things.

²² Some manuscripts have the pronoun *hā*, 'their'.

²³ NOTE TO SELF: The argument seems implicitly to assume two premises. One is that causes give to their effects something that they actually or formally possess, a premise that in some version the philosophers probably accept [**find references**]. 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 privation and negative restriction are not included in what it is to be a cause, 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, possible existents are equivalent to God in causality.

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.²⁴ Also, by it they sought to falsify the view of void intervals.²⁵ Thus, they said 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 case²⁶, existence with regard to us is an accident in want of an essence needing it, then how is one to 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.²⁶

(17) 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

(18) The first is that in *namaṭ* five of this work we will explain (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. [In that case], however, the gist of the claim of 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 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 antecedent 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.

(19) 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?²⁷ Do you not think that the quiddities of possible things are receptive (*qābila*) of their [individual] instances of existence, and so their quiddities are receptive causes²⁸ 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 like it with respect to the efficient cause? Also, at the beginning of this chapter of this book²⁹ the Sheikh mentioned that something's quiddity might sometimes be

²⁴ **References:** celestial sphere's having matter: probably somewhere in *namaṭ* 2.14–17; atomism probably somewhere in *namaṭ* 1.1–4.

²⁵ See Avicenna, *Physics* 2.8 [9–10].

²⁶ NOTE TO SELF: 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, the behavior resulting from our shared existence should be the same. It is not: our existent needs a quiddity, while God's does not and rather is self-subsistent.

²⁷ 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].

²⁸ That is, the quiddity functions like the analogue of a material cause in possible existents.

²⁹ See first sentence of the commented-text above.

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 admitted³⁰ 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.³¹

(20) 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 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 possible 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.³²

(21) 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.³³

³⁰ See Avicenna's text being commented, where he claims, "It is sometimes permissible that something's quiddity be a reason for one of its attributes."

³¹ NOTE TO SELF: Here the argument relies on certain Avicennan analogies: existence is to quiddity, as necessity is to possibility, and necessity is to possibility 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 possibility 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 possible things are causally prior to the actual existence of their instances, so is the divine essence causally prior to its existence.

³² NOTE TO SELF: The argument seems to be just a nuanced version of that of the previous paragraph.

³³ NOTE TO SELF: 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 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.

(22) 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.