Muhammad Legenhausen
(*Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute, Iran*)
IBN SINA'S CONCEPT OF GOD

Introduction

Ibn Sina died in Hamadan in 1037 c. e., when he was just fifty-seven years old, roughly four centuries after the introduction of Islam to Iran. He was a contemporary of the poet Firdawsi, the moral philosopher, Ibn Miskawayhi, the Mu'tazilite theologian, 'Abd al-Jabbãr, the Shi'ite theologians Shaykh Saduq and Shaykh Mufid, and the Sufis Sulami and Qushayri. It was a time of much strife between Buyids, Ghaznavids, Qara-Khanids, Seljuks, and Samanids. As he grew up in Bukhara, Ibn Sina gained notoriety for his intellect. He memorized the Qur'an at age ten, and he excelled in Arabic, about which he wrote a treatise, and jurisprudence. After his father died he was appointed to the court of the Khwarizm shah, Ibn Ma'mun, in Gurganj (like Bukhara, in present day Uzbekistan), where he served alongside the polymath Biruni.

When Mahmud of Ghazna was poised to conquer Gurganj, Ibn Sina fled to Jurjan, on the southeast coast of the Caspian. Mahmud seems to have viewed Ibn Sina as his due after he took over Gurganj, and sent agents to seek him. In Jurjan Ibn Sina began work on the *Qānun* before escaping Mahmud by traveling to Rayy (now in Tehran) with his pupil Juzjani. Before Mahmud captured Rayy, Ibn Sina and Juzjani fled to Hamadan where he completed the *Qānun* (1015—1023). In Hamadan he also began work on the *Shifā'*. During this period, because of the uncertain future of his patron, Ibn Sina entered into correspondence with a rival monarch in Isfahan. The correspondence was discovered and Ibn Sina was imprisoned for four months, during which period he worked on the *Shifā'*, reportedly writing some fifty pages a day! After turmoil and a change of government in Hamadan, Ibn Sina along with Juzjani, two slaves and his brother, disguised themselves as Sufis and escaped to Isfahan. After completing the *Shifā'* there, he started work on the *Najāt*. He also dedicated a Persian work, *Dānesh Nāme-i 'Alā'ī*, to his new patron, 'Alā' al-Dawla. In Isfahan he also wrote the monumental *Kitāb al-Insāf*, which is said to have provided answers to 28,000 questions and would have filled twenty volumes. The manuscript was lost in 1030, when Mahmud attacked Isfahan, and Ibn Sina was forced to flee. Left behind were Ibn Sina's manuscripts for the *Eastern Philosophy* and the *Throne Philosophy* which were lost to us when the library was burned more than a century later by yet another conquering army. Ibn

Sina's patron, 'Alā' al-Dawla recaptured some of the cities he had lost to Mahmud, and Ibn Sina set to work on the *Remarks and Admonitions* in Rayy. He died after unsuccessful attempts to treat himself for intestinal disorders as he accompanied his patron through various maneuvers to escape the attacks of Mahmud and to recover what was lost.

The above biography is a summary taken from the first chapter of Lenn E. Goodman's *Avicenna*[1]. In this insightful and eloquent work, Goodman notes that Ibn Sina memorized the Qur'an at age ten, studied Hanafi jurisprudence, and wrote a book on the Arabic language. Apparently because of his study of Hanafi *fiqh*, and some reported allusions in later life to being Hanafi, Goodman does not think that Ibn Sina ever became Shi'ite, although he admits that he preferred Shi'ite to Sunni patronage[2]. However, little is known about the form of his personal piety—he is said to have used wine medicinally, yet he is also said to have prayed two *rak'a* when he felt stymied in the course of inquiry—his theology and philosophy have left an indelible mark on how Muslims understand God, regardless of whether they support or condemn his views. Both the quality and quantity of Ibn Sina's works is all the more awe inspiring when we consider the tumultuous circumstances in which they were written.

While his life was marked by political tumult and stupendous scholarly productivity, the view of God that Ibn Sina espoused is paradigmatically that of what has come to be called the God of the philosophers. In order to understand his conception of divinity, we should consider the proofs he offered for the existence of God, his discussions of God's attributes, and the place of God in his cosmology, his theories of revelation and the intellect, and his mysticism. However, first and foremost, we must understand how Ibn Sina understood metaphysics and its relationship to theology.

In this regard, one further and often commented upon biographical point should be mentioned. In his autobiography, Ibn Sina says that he read Aristotle's *Metaphysics* until he memorized it but did not understand the point or purposes (*aghrāḍ*) of it until he read Farabi's *On the Purposes of the Metaphysics* (*Maqālah fī aghrāḍ ma ba'da al-ṭabī'ah*). Scholars have advanced various explanations for this remarkable admission of indebtedness to Farabi. As Dimitri Gutas explains, Ibn Sina is not saying that he failed to make sense out of the *Metaphysics*, only that he did not understand its purpose[3].

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[1] *Goodman L. E.* Avicenna. London; New York: Routledge, 1992. P. 1—48.

[2] *Goodman L. E.* Avicenna. P. 24.

[3] *Gutas D.* Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Leiden: Brill, 1988. P. 239. As for the question of how much of the «Metaphysics» was studied by Ibn Sina, Bertolacci writes: «In sum, Avicenna's approach to the "Metaphysics" at the time of his secondary instruction had three main features: (i) it was not an extensive reading of this work in its entirety, but only of the essential parts of it, namely — on the basis of the evidence at our disposal — б, 1—2 and Л, 6—10; (ii) these two loci were read in connection with one another, as elements of the theological part of the "Metaphysics", in disregard of the ontological part of it; (iii) б was read as an introduction

Farabi opens his essay with the comment that many people fail to understand the *Metaphysics* because they assume it is synonymous with *'ilm al-tawhīd*, the science of divine unity, or traditional Islamic theology. He goes on to divide the sciences into the particular and the universal. Physics and the mathematical sciences are particular sciences. Farabi describes metaphysics, including logic and theology, as a universal science, and he explains why logic and theology do not constitute two particular sciences.

Universal science studies what is common to all beings (like existence and oneness), its species and consequent properties, things which are not specific accidents of each individual object studied by the particular sciences (like priority, posteriority, potentiality, actuality, perfection, imperfection, and similar things), and the common first principle of all beings, which [alone] ought to be called by the name of God. There ought to be [only] one universal science, for if there were two, then each one of them would have a subject matter proper to it; but the science which has a subject matter proper to it and which does not include the subject matter of another science is a particular science; therefore both sciences would be particular; but this is contradictory; therefore there is [only] one universal science.

Theology ought to belong to this [universal] science because God is a principle of absolute being, not of one being to the exclusion of another...

The primary object of this science is absolute being and what is equivalent to it in universality (*'umūm*), namely the one.... Then after examination of these subjects, [this science] inquires into matters which are as species to them, like the ten categories of an existent being...[4]

There were two receptions in the Islamic world to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, one represented by Farabi, and the other by Kindi. Kindi sought to legitimize Aristotle's *Metaphysics* by telling the pious that it was really about *kalãm*, theology, and that it discussed the same sorts of problems of God's existence and attributes that were familiar to his readers. Farabi responds that this is misleading. The *Metaphysics* is really about being, and God comes in only because He is the Creator of all beings[5]. This is what enabled Ibn Sina to understand the *Metaphysics*, and it is this insight that allows Ibn Sina to solve the puzzle about the subject of metaphysics in a way that goes far beyond the solution given by Aristotle. If Kindi sought to present metaphysics as theology, and if Farabi sought to correct this and present metaphysics as about being, Ibn Sina elucidates the point already made by Farabi, that theology and logic are to be included in metaphysics, because it should include the cause of all other beings and what is most general, respectively. It is because of

to JI, 6—10, whereas books A, B-K of Aristotle's work were probably neglected». (*Bertolacci A*. The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Shifā': A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought. Leiden: Brill, 2006. P. 58).

    [4] *Gutas D*. Avicenna. P. 240—242.

    [5] This point is argued by Gutas in the reference given above, and is endorsed by Bertolacci (*Bertolacci*. Reception. P. 113).

this connection that in order to understand Ibn Sina's concept of God, we have to consider how he viewed the *Metaphysics*.

Ibn Sina's View of Metaphysics

In his *Shifā'* Ibn Sina divides the sciences into the practical and the theoretical, and the theoretical are, in turn, divided into three areas, the study of nature, mathematics and divinity. Here, he follows Aristotle in setting up a puzzle. Each of the areas of theoretical investigation deals with a type of existent: bodies, quantities, and things that are separate from matter in subsistence and definition, respectively. But at the same time, the divine science is to examine the causes of the subjects of the other two areas. So, on the one hand, divinity, as a science, seems to be another branch of the sciences along with the study of nature and mathematics, while on the other hand, divinity stands above the other two because of its causal priority. The task is to reconcile these two views of the science of divinity. Notice the structure of this problem. Divinity has to play a role in which its subject matter is both considered alongside the subjects of other sciences and yet above them. The reconciliation requires a view that can show how what seems to be just another sort of subject can be viewed as standing altogether above them. Likewise, Ibn Sina's conception of God as the Necessary of Existence (*wãjib al-wujūd*) places God in the realm of existents, but yet the mode of this existence is altogether different from anything else, and has causal priority over them.

Aristotle's solution to the puzzle does not seem to satisfy Ibn Sina. Aristotle sought to solve the puzzle with the claim that the science of being should also consider the principles and causes of things, and since God is the first and most dominant principle, divinity should be studied in metaphysics. Aristotle writes:

Since there is a science of being qua being and capable of existing apart, we must consider whether this is to be regarded as the same as physics or rather as different. Physics deals with the things that have a principle of movement in themselves; mathematics is theoretical, and is a science that deals with things that are at rest, but its subjects cannot exist apart. Therefore about that which can exist apart and is unmovable there is a science different from both of these, if there is a substance of this nature (I mean separable and unmovable), as we shall try to prove there is. And if there is such a kind of thing in the world, here must surely be the divine, and this must be the first and most dominant principle. Evidently, then, there are three kinds of theoretical sciences—physics, mathematics, theology. The class of theoretical sciences is the best, and of these themselves the last named is best; for it deals with the highest of existing things, and each science is called better or worse in virtue of its proper object[6].

God is the first principle of being, according to Aristotle, because being in the primary sense is substance, and the cause or principle of substance cannot be

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[6] Metaphysics, 1064a 29—1064b 6; also see: 1025b 1—1026a 33.

matter, the Platonic forms, or various other candidates, but must be the cause of motion in the universe. Then in Book Λ the prime mover is introduced as the immutable eternal substance responsible for the motion of the universe.

In order to achieve his own solution to the puzzle of the subject matter of metaphysics, Ibn Sina needs to form conceptions of God and metaphysics that differ from those of Aristotle in several key respects, the most fundamental of which are: (1) God is not a substance[7]; and (2) that which *is* in the most basic sense is no longer substance, but the Necessary Existent.

Ibn Sina retains the tripartite division and their names: physics, mathematics, and theology; but, for Aristotle, each of these three sciences studies substances in a different respect. Physics studies material substances with regard to their being in motion or at rest. The subjects of physics are not separable from matter, and are movable. Mathematics studies these same substances with regard to their quantity and measure. It also considers such quantities and measures in abstraction from any material realization. The subjects of mathematics are not separable (from matter, since they are only mentally abstracted from it) and unmovable. Finally, theology considers things with respect to their being, rather than with respect to their motion or measure. Like the subjects of mathematics, theology also deals with what is unmovable, but theology treats of substances that exist apart from matter, according to Aristotle.

For Aristotle, theology and metaphysics are run together because metaphysics deals with being *qua* being, and the prime mover is "the first and dominant principle" for all other substances.

As Ibn Sina poses Aristotle's problem, God cannot be the subject of metaphysics, or first philosophy, because each science investigates the nature of the things whose existence is demonstrated in some higher science. Yet there is no higher science in which to prove the existence of the subject of metaphysics. However, while Ibn Sina reasserts the Aristotelian claim that the subject of metaphysics is being *qua* being, and he agrees that it is proper to investigate the principle or cause of beings in this science, he rejects the Aristotelian idea that this brings us to a consideration of the prime mover as the best candidate for the principle of all existents *qua* existents.

Ibn Sina discovers a contradiction, or at least a tension, in Aristotle's system. Aristotle had distinguished two sorts of questions: questions about whether or not a thing is, existence questions, and questions about what a thing is, whatness or quiddity questions. Yet, when Aristotle turns to being *qua* being, he singles out substances as the primary existents. Being in the primary sense is said to be of substances. So, the science of being *qua* being, metaphysics, becomes the science of substances. However, all of the categories answer question of what a thing is.

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[7] See: *Legenhausen M.* Ibn Sina's Arguments Against God's Being a Substance // Substance and Attribute: Western and Islamic Traditions in Dialogue / Chr. Kanzian, M. Legenhausen (eds.). Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007. P. 117—143.

Insofar as a thing is considered a substance or an accident, it is considered in terms of what it is, not merely that it is. The science of being *qua* being, to the contrary, should concern itself with the existent insofar as it exists, without regard to it being substance or accident or relation or anything else.

Ibn Sina insists that the subject matter of metaphysics cannot be confined to any one category, nor can it be confined to the attributes of anything but the existent insofar as it is existent[8]. Now, the existent, as such, has no quiddity other than its existence, and it is because of this that it does not require a superior science in which its own existence needs to be established. What is needed is only the admission of its "thatness" (*inniyyah*)[9]. A superior science would be needed to establish that a subject exists—so that its whatness or quiddity could be investigated in the inferior science of the immediate rank below—only if the subject were the sort of thing with *both* existence and quiddity, so that one could attempt to prove that a thing with such and such quiddity exists. The existent, however, considered without regard to any question of what it is, *can only be assumed*. The proof of God will then be found by examining the modes of existence, and the argument that contingent existence requires necessary existence.

The assumption of existence is justified because there can be no doubt about it, but the lack of doubt, by itself, does not mean that it is established in the science of metaphysics, or any other science. The existent *qua* existent is not the totality of all that exists, rather it is what cannot be confined to any category of existent, but is common to all of them. Ibn Sina continues:

And moreover, because it is above the need either for its quiddity to be learned or for itself to be established so as to require another science to undertake to clarify [such] as state of affairs therein ([this] because of the impossibility of establishing the subject matter of a science and ascertaining its quiddity in the very science that has that subjecto, [it thus needs] only the admission of its existence and quiddity (*bal taslīm inniyyah wa mãhiyyah faqat*)[10].

The famous proof that Ibn Sina gives for the existence of God, is very different than Aristotle's proof of the prime mover[11]. Aristotle sought to find the principle of the subject matter of metaphysics, being; and since being in the primary sense is substance, the principle of substances could be taken to fulfil this aim.

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[8] *Avicenna*. The Metaphysics of The Healing / Tr. M. E. Marmura. Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005. Bk. 1. Ch. 2. § 11.

[9] See the discussion by Marmura in Avicenna «Metaphysics», p. 383; *Frank R. M.* Origin of the Arabic Philosophical Term '*anniyyah*' // Cahiers de Byrsa, VI (1956). P. 181—201, cited in: *Burrell D.* Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986. P. 118.

[10] *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. Bk. 1. Ch. 2. § 15.

[11] For an examination of Ibn Sina's proof and its further development in Suhravardi and Mulla Sadra, see: *Legenhausen M.* The Proof of the Sincere // Journal of Islamic Philosophy. Issue № 1. Vol. 1. Fall 2004, online at URL=http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/journal/is-01/ Ms-Leg.doc.

After spending most of the *Metaphysics* examining what could best be considered the cause or principle of substances, Aristotle argues for the importance of considering motion and argues that there must be a prime and unmoved mover of all other substances. Ibn Sina, on the other hand, considers being to be beyond substance and attribute as the assumed subject of metaphysics. The existent as such, he argues, can have no cause or principle, for that would only apply to quiddities; but the existent, as such, may be contingent or necessary in its existence. If contingent it will require that which in its existence is necessary, and this is identified with God.

Ibn Sina divides metaphysics into two parts, one of which includes logic and is more general, and the other of which is concerned with the first cause, or theology proper: "It is first philosophy, because it is knowledge of the first thing in existence (namely, the First Cause) and the first thing in generality (namely existence and unity)"[12]. The inclusion of logic and theology in metaphysics explains why the tripartite division of the sciences sometimes is given as physics, mathematics and theology[13] and sometimes as physics, mathematics and logic[14].

Ibn Sina's view of metaphysics, coupled with his recognition of the contingency of the world regardless of its eternity, enables us to appreciate the subtlety of his analysis. The existent—considered absolutely, or without any conditions— is the subject of metaphysics. This has to be able to be assumed without the need for a proof in a prior science, and yet the contingency of the world despite its temporal pre-eternity is needed to avoid the idea that it is the world itself that is the necessary existent. The existent, regardless of quiddity, may be assumed *a priori* (if this is understood to include whatever truths are not scientifically established by experience), not because it is evident to the senses, but because its rejection or establishment would involve an examination of quiddity, and it has none. What may in this sense be considered the *a priori* assumption of an existent, however, does not imply that what is so assumed is necessary, and there is no question begging assumption of the existence of a necessary being[15]. Instead, we are invited to consider an assumed existent, and to consider that regardless of its quiddity, it must be contingent or necessary, and if the former, in need of a causal relation to the latter.

Existence, like necessity and possibility, is not subsumed under anything better known. Since it is not part of a genus, it cannot be defined. As Herbert Davidson

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[12] *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. Bk. 1. Ch. 2. § 18.

[13] *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. Bk. 1. Ch. 1. § 3.

[14] *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. Bk. 1. Ch. 2. § 4.

[15] This is not to suggest, of course, that Ibn Sina's arguments foreshadowed Kripke's for the contingent *a priori*, although further analogies could be drawn. Just as we know that the standard meter bar is one meter long without examining it, because of the rules that govern the practice of standards, likewise we know that there is existence without deriving this from sense impressions of the world, because of the rules that govern the practice of science, as understood in the Peripatetic tradition.

observes, "They [the secondary intelligibles] are rather 'imprinted in the soul in a primary fashion,' and must be grasped immediately"[16]. Davidson holds that Ibn Sina's proof is not entirely conceptual because it relies on the empirical premise that something exists[17]. However, Ibn Sina is considering the existent in abstraction of any empirical data. Existence may be mental or outward, but when considering the existent *qua* existent, such differences are disregarded and it is considered absolutely (*muṭlaq*).

Like Goodman, Davidson engages Ibn Sina as if he were a contemporary, and argues with him. Goodman follows Davidson in classifying Ibn Sina's proof as cosmological, rather than ontological, because of its reliance on the existence of something or other. Goodman observes that Anselm's argument was entirely *a priori*, whereas Ibn Sina's argument depends on the *a posteriori* premise that there is some existent[18]. To the contrary, I would argue that Ibn Sina does not use the existence of some object before us as an *a posteriori* premise, but rather he holds that the existent in itself *qua* existent may be assumed since it cannot be shown *a posteriori* unless with regard to quiddity. How do we know that there is something rather than nothing? The obvious answer would be that we experience it. Ibn Sina's more subtle answer is that this may be legitimately assumed, since a more substantial justification would involve considerations of quiddity, but such considerations cannot establish existence; they can only assume it, and prove the existence of some things on the basis of others. The assumption of existence is woven into our experience, but what is given through sensation is only existents qualified by their quiddities, not the existent *qua* existent.

Aside from the question of whether Ibn Sina's proof is *a posteriori* or not, Davidson argues that Ibn Sina neglects an option that invalidates his proof. The universe may exist by virtue of its components. Instead of viewing existence as needing a foundation in what exists necessarily, Davidson suggests that the parts of the universe might be compared to an arch, in which the position of the arch is caused by the positions of the stones that compose it, and yet the positions of the stones are caused by the position of the arch. Ibn Sina does not allow any sort of circularity in causation, not even partial. Furthermore, Davidson argues, Ibn Sina rules out an infinite regress of causes even before providing any argument against it, while it seems possible that the universe might be caused to exist by its components, and each component by its subcomponents, and so on *ad infinitum*. Davidson takes these objections to be suggested by Ghazali's objection to Ibn Sina's proof, namely that the cause of the totality of existents may be internal to the totality without requiring any external cause. Davidson writes:

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[16] *Davidson H. A*. Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. P. 289.

[17] *Davidson*. Proofs. P. 303.

[18] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 76.

Avicenna seems, in fine, to have made the following misstep: having established, with the aid of a definition, that the possible beings existing at any moment must form a possibly existent totality, he fails to consider that the totality might exist not by reason of a single component but by reason of the components together[19].

Davidson, of course, is correct, that this alternative is not explicitly considered by Ibn Sina. But we should not take this to mean that Ibn Sina's proof should be rejected unless there is no plausible response that Ibn Sina could give on his own behalf. Consider again the arch analogy. If we really wanted to know why an arch has a given position, one could say it has that position because of the position of its component stones, and that the stones are where they are because the arch as a whole is holding them up. But the position of the arch would still need a further explanation, e.g., the builder's design; otherwise we can imagine the impatience of an inquirer who asks why the arch is where it is and is told that it is there because of its components and in response to the next question is told that they are held up by the arch as a totality! Even if it is allowed that two things mutually necessitate each other causally, the dyad itself will be contingent[20]. Likewise, even if it is granted that some material causal dependence may extend downward *ad infinitum* through ever finer components, the question of the efficient cause of the totality with all its components will remain[21]. The contingency of the universe is not merely a definitional trick that forces one to admit an illusory necessity; it stems from the requisites of explanation inherent to the scientific attitude. To reject Ibn Sina's proof, one must step outside the bounds of the scientific enterprise as he understood it and deny any interest in the sort of explanation pressed by Ibn Sina.

As Goodman observes, "the key to Ibn Sina's synthesis of the metaphysics of contingency with the metaphysics of necessity lies in a single phrase: *considered in itself*"[22]. That which is emanated from the necessary is necessitated by the other, but is contingent *considered in itself*. For Aristotle, necessity was to be found in the consideration of quiddities. A thing is necessarily such if it is essentially so, that is, if its being such is determined by its quiddity. For Ibn Sina, the question of necessity and contingency is posed with regard to existence.

The phrase "considered in itself" is also the key to understanding Ibn Sina's view of the subject of metaphysics, and how it is related to theology. The subject of metaphysics is being *qua* being, that is, the existent considered in itself. The various manners in which a thing may be said to be may then be taken up as categorizations of being into necessary and contingent, and the contingent into substance and accident. Being, when considered in itself, however, that is, when considered

[19] *Davidson*. Proofs. P. 306

[20] The argument is essentially that any form of circle of causes will require a further cause outside the circle. See: *Morewedge P.* The Metaphysica of Avicenna. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973. P. 59.

[21] See: *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. Bk. 1. Ch. 6. § 6.

[22] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 66.

apart from any quiddity, turns out to be the Necessary with regard to existence. So, is there not a sense in which God is the subject of metaphysics after all? No. The subject matter of existence is the existent inasmuch as it is existent. The fact that absolute existence, existence without any quiddity except existence, is the ultimate cause of all contingent beings, of everything that has any quiddity other than existence, needs to be proven. The existent, inasmuch as it is considered without any quiddity other than existence, is the *wājib al-wujūd* or God; and this is not the subject of metaphysics. Rather the subject of metaphysics is the existent inasmuch as it is existent. The difference is only in how the absolute existent is considered[23].

Related to the distinction between ways that a thing might be contingent, i.e., contingent in existence, or contingent in the sense of not being necessitated by quiddity, is a frequently encountered confusion about the sense in which Ibn Sina considered existence to be an accident. It was interpreted by Ibn Rushd to mean that Ibn Sina thought that existence is an accident rather than a substance, and he criticized this view. Since then, it has been common to interpret Ibn Sina as holding that existence is an accident that inheres in a substance[24]. However, Ibn Sina considered the entire distinction between substance and accident to pertain only to quiddities, and he held that existence is accidental only in the sense that contingent beings cannot be considered to have existence as part of their quiddity[25].

For Ibn Sina, there are (at least) two sorts of contingency, or being accidental. To understand this, it is useful to begin with Ibn Sina's distinction between primary and secondary intelligibles[26]. The primary intelligibles are the properties that inhere in a substance, whether essentially or accidentally, while the secondary intel-

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[23] See: *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. Bk. 1. Ch. 1. § 17.

[24] See, for example: *Tegtmeier E.* Ibn Sina on Substances and Accidents // Substance and Attribute. P. 229—236; also see the discussion of Burrell (*Burrell*. Knowing. P. 26, 29, 45, 67, 107. It seems that Fazlur Rahman was the first contemporary commentator to have pointed out the error in Ibn Rushd's understanding of Ibn Sina's claim that existence is accidental (in *Rahman F.* Essence and Existence in Avicenna // Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 4 (1958). P. 1—14), although Jannssens points out that "Henry of Ghent, in the late thirteenth century, was aware of the fact that the restricted Aristotelian notion of 'accidentality' was surely not involved here, but a larger one". (*Janssens J.* Ibn Sina and his influence on the Arabic and Latin world. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. i. P. 1—2). For a further defense of Ibn Sina in this regard see: *Pessin S.* Proclean 'Remaining' and Avicenna on Existence as Accident: Neoplatonic Methodology and a Defense of 'Pre-Existing' Essences // Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity / J. Inglis (ed.). London; New York: Routledge and Curzon, 2003. P. 128—142.

[25] This point is further elaborated in: *Pazouki Sh.* From Aristotle's *Ousia* to Ibn Sina's *Jawhar* // *Substance and Attribute*. P. 163—171.

[26] As Marmura observes, although Ibn Sina is usually credited with the distinction, «the distinction between primary and secondary intelligibles occurs in several Arabic logical texts much before Avicenna's time. As many scholars have already pointed out, it occurs in (the Arabic translation) of Porphyry's *Isagoge* as well as in the writings of Fārābo and other Arab thinkers of the tenth and eleventh centuries». The secondary intelligibles depend on the primary ones, and are derived or abstracted from them, so that the primary intelligibles describe the form of a substance, while the secondary intelligibles are the subject matter of logic. See: *Marmura M.* Avicenna:

ligibles are those that are only understood to apply to a thing with the help of abstractions and deductions. The attribution of a multiplicity of primary intelligibles to a subject implies that the subject is compound, while the attribution of a multiplicity of secondary intelligibles to a subject is consistent with the simplicity of the subject[27]. Thus, what the scholastics called the transcendentals are taken to apply to a thing derivatively rather than directly because of the qualities, quantities, and relations that the thing directly exhibits. Existence is to be distinguished from quiddity just as much as unity, goodness, simplicity and their opposites. This distinction leads to two ways in which a property may be accidental: it may be a primary intelligible that inheres in the quiddity of a thing contingently, such as whiteness in Socrates, or it might be a transcendental that contingently may be applied to a subject, as in "Socrates exists". Existence is accidental in the second but not in the first sense.

The distinction is important, not only to avoid the error of thinking that Ibn Sina took existence to be an accident inhering in a pre-existent quiddity, but also to understand why the relation of God to the divine attributes is not one of substance and accidents. We will return to the issue of the divine attributes later.

Goodman and Pazouki observe that the Kantian slogan that existence is not a predicate may be understood as a reflection of Ibn Sina's distinction between existence and quiddity[28]. Likewise, the Kantian rejection of the Cartesian ontological argument may be seen as a reflection of the teaching of Ibn Sina that necessity of existence is not to be derived from quiddity. Just as Kant taught that there was no way to derive actual existence from the contents of a concept, so too, Ibn Sina taught that there was no way to derive existence from quiddity.

As Goodman observes, Ibn Sina created a third major option in metaphysics in contrast to the positions of the *mutakalamīn* and the Aristotelians. According to the theologians, the world is not eternal and is contingent. According to Aristotle, the world is eternal, and the contingent and necessary are determined by the quiddities of the substances in the world. For Ibn Sina, by contrast, the world may be eternal and yet contingent, for its contingency is with regard to existence rather than quiddity.

Goodman explains that Aristotle was criticized by Proclus for limiting God's causal efficacy to motion, rather than giving primacy to existence as Plato had

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Metaphysics // Encyclopedia Iranica. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987. Vol. III. P. 73—79; URL=http: //www.iranica.com/newsite//.

[27] See: *Morewedge*. Metaphysica. P. 57—58.

[28] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 69; *Pazouki*. Ousia. P. 170. While Pazouki and Burrell (*Burrell*. Knowing. P. 35) claim that Ibn Sina's distinction was an elaboration of one earlier stated by Farabi, Goodman points out that this claim (also made by M. Horten, E. Gilson, G. Hourani, and others) is based on an erroneous attribution of one of Ibn Sina's essays to Farabi («Risālat al-Fuṣūṣfo al-Ḥikmah»). Goodman credits Leo Strauss, followed by A.-M. Goichon, P. Krauss, K. Georr, and S. Pines, with showing that the essay was by Ibn Sina and not Farabi (*Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 117—18. № 69).

done. Ammonius, the student of Proclus, identified the demiurge of Plato with the Final Cause of Aristotle. This discussion was studied by Abu Bishr Matta, a Christian commentator and translator, who argued that the cause of the motion of the world must be the cause of its existence. He was also a teacher of a teacher of Farabi[29]. Ibn Sina rejects the entire line of thought that seeks to understand God as the source of motion. If God were understood in this way, and if it were later discovered that the motion of the universe could be adequately explained in terms of its own components and their quiddities, there would be no reason left for there to be a First Cause. Instead of motion, Ibn Sina takes up a Sufi idea: existence itself should bear witness to God[30]. In moving away from physics as a source for a proof of God's existence, we find the same sort of attitude in Ibn Sina as is found in Bonhoeffer's warnings against a theology of a "God of the gaps"[31].

That which goes beyond physics is a metaphysical contingency. So, no matter how the world is to be explained in terms of its relations to its components, big bangs, big crunches, and whatever else may be produced by the speculations of the natural sciences, the contingency of the world goes beyond these matters to reflect a further need for explanation.

What Ibn Sina accomplishes is the wedging apart of what can be safely assumed without need for any proof or evidence, i.e., the existent *qua* existent, from what is necessary, the *wājib al-wujūd*. As Goodman understands it, Ibn Sina succeeds in reinstating "the Platonic recognition that all necessities in nature, in the realm of becoming, are relative, not absolute"[32]. In this manner, Ibn Sina avoids the occassionalism that was common among many of the *mutakalimīn*, and thus is able to conceive of a universe that is subject to scientific investigation. The world moves according to causal laws that cannot be disregarded with the excuse that the whim of the Almighty could make any instance of fire cold rather than hot. In saying this, however, Ibn Sina opens himself to the attack of those who would accuse him of denying miracles. We will consider his response later. For now, we may recall Goodman's comments on this issue: "the secret of destiny is that God governs through nature"[33]. Goodman's overall judgment on Ibn Sina's synthesis is positive:

I believe the synthesis was successful, and that the rival efforts to pull it apart by committed Peripatetics and sophisticated Ash'arites like al-Ghazālī, who had schooled himself in Ibn Sina's writings, were based on the oldest of hermeneutical errors in philosophy — insistence on taking the key terms and divisions of a rival thinker in conventional senses rather than in the sense the philosopher criticized assigned them[34].

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[29] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 74.

[30] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 75.

[31] *Bonhoeffer D*. Letters and Papers from Prison. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. P. 310—312.

[32] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 80.

[33] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 88.

[34] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 92.

Goodman goes on to explain that the success of Ibn Sina's synthesis comes from a recognition that choice, necessity and contingency are *perspectival*. Even if the ultimate physics of the world is causally deterministic in the strictest sense, the contingency of the world will remain. From the perspective of causal antecedents, an event may be necessary, and the entire world may be considered necessary by virtue of the divine creative command; but considered in themselves, without regard to what has caused them, the event and the world must be recognized as contingent and in need of a cause or principle[35]. Goodman continues:

> Ibn Sina's synthesis preserved and salvaged what was most right-headed in the two rival views: the world is contingent, dependent on God. Yet the facts of nature are not arbitrary and haphazard. They express the forms of things, which derive ultimately from God's wisdom[36].

Goodman subjects Ibn Sina to criticism as well as praise. He takes issue with Ibn Sina's views on emanation, human and divine freedom, miracles, and the Aristotelian notion that whatever is possible will at some time be actual, but he concludes:

> the conception of being itself as both contingent and necessary, contingent intrinsically but necessary with reference to its causes, was a breakthrough for philosophy, built on and fruitfully employed by latercomers, but in its own simple terms not to be surpassed[37].

Goodman is so generous with his evaluation of Ibn Sina's philosophy, that it seems over-defensive to dispute any of his criticisms. However, there is an important point that warrants further discussion. Goodman offers a resuscitation of Ibn Rushd's objection to Ibn Sina's proof: "it is not analytic to say that what is contingent in the sense that its non-existence involves no contradiction is also contingent in the sense of requiring a cause"[38]. I think Goodman's point is well-taken, but that Ibn Sina could get around it. What seems right about Goodman's point is that the need for a cause is not generated by mere logical contingency, regardless of one's philosophy of logic. There may be contingent truths that describe details of the physical structure of the universe that even an ideal physical theory will take as given or primitive. Such ultimately unexplained contingencies cannot be ruled out *a priori* and it would be a theological error, falling back into the "God of the gaps" view, to try to explain all such contingencies by appeal to the will of God. The contingency of the world, like the contingency of the existent *qua* existent, however, calls for an explanation, needs a cause, not merely because it is a logical contin-

[35] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 94.

[36] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 95.

[37] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 96.

[38] *Goodman*. Avicenna. P. 85.

gency, but because of the metaphysical principle that existence (unless necessary) needs a cause. To understand why existence needs a cause, however, would take us beyond Ibn Sina's philosophy, and I think would be most fruitfully explored in a discussion of the nature of explanation, its relation to metaphysical theories and world-views[39].

Emanation

The type of causation through which the First Cause is related to its effects is emanation, which may be considered a kind of efficient causation; not, however, of the sort that imparts motion, but of a sort through which existence spills over from the necessary to the contingent: "[This science] will [also] investigate the First Cause, from which emanates every caused existent inasmuch as it is a caused existent, not only inasmuch as it is an existent in motion or [only inasmuch as it is] quantified"[40].

Islamic philosophy particularly draws on the Neo-Platonic tradition by taking up the theory of emanation. This theory also found its way into Christian theology through the Church fathers, although Muslims and Christians applied it differently. Origen uses emanation theory to explain the Trinity: the Son has a community of substance with the Father because an emanation must be *homoousios* with its source. Arius was condemned as a heretic for holding that Son was subordinate to the Father because the emanation is subordinate to its source. At any rate, emanation theory was common among the Christian theologians of antiquity, whether confirmed as orthodoxy or rejected as heresy. The emanation of the persons of the Trinity, however, was taken to precede creation. The Father emanates the Logos, but He does not create the Logos. In Islamic theology, on the other hand, emanation is used as a theory of creation. The first creature is the counterpart of the Logos, the First Intellect; and just as Christianity identifies the Logos with Christ, Islamic theology takes the First Intellect to be the Muhammadan Light[41].

Like Farabi, Ibn Sina sees the creation of the world in terms of the problem of how to derive many from one, and both of them continue the Neo-Platonic tradition in this regard. This tradition, which continued through Spinoza to Hegel, has been frequently criticized for its determinism. This debate also finds

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[39] The sort of discussion I have in mind is sketched in: *W. Luffler*. Einfьhrung in die Religionsphiosophie. Darmstadt: WBG, 2006. P. 151—176.

[40] *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. Bk. 1. Ch. 2. § 16.

[41] See: *Stead Chr*. Philosophy in Christian Antiquity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. P. 167—172. For the Muhammadan light, interpreted as the first intellect, and as the first thing created by God in Shi'ite narrations, see: *Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi*. The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994. P. 7f., 29—59. Amir-Moezzi cites Ignaz Goldziher, «Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Hadit» // Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorasiatische Archäologie (1908). P. 317f., for a discussion of Sunni hadiths according to which the intellect is the first of God's creations.

expression in David Burrell's book of comparative philosophy, *Knowing the Unknowable God*[42].

According to Burrell, we may compare two models of God's relation to the world: emanationist and creationist. The emanationist model is governed by the axiom that from the pure One, there can only come one; while the creationist allows that the intentional act of creation can produce many things. Clearly, however, Ibn Sina's great synthesis was intended to merge the emanationist and creationist views. On the one hand, Ibn Sina holds that God is distinct from all other things in being necessary and in being without any quiddity other than existence itself. On the other hand, the entire universe is the effusion or emanation of pure being. Thus, we find both elements of transcendence and immanence.

The emanationist scheme is described by Seyyed Hossein Nasr as being consistent with Islamic scriptural teaching.

It is neither in his unified vision of the cosmos nor in the doctrine of Divine intellection that Ibn Sinā differs from the Islamic perspective. It is more in limiting the power of God to a predetermined logical structure and in diminishing the sense of awe of the finite before the Infinite that he came to be criticized by certain authorities of the Islamic Tradition[43].

The position of Nasr, that Ibn Sina more or less successfully gives philosophical expression to the theological idea of creation, is subject to criticism by Parviz Morewedge:

> Let us criticize Nasr's position briefly in our attempt to clarify the meaning of emanation and creation. The key word in Nasr's description of God's creation of the world is 'production'. In disagreement with Nasr, we wish to point out that there is a difference between 'producing something out of nothing' and 'producing something by emanation from one's thought'. In the latter case, there is a resemblance between the agent and the product; this resemblance is not to be found in the first case. Whereas the Islamic God produces the world *ex nihilo*, in Ibn Sina's philosophy we find the explicit assertion that the Necessary Existent does not produce the world in such a manner, but that the first intelligence emanates from it (*padīd miyāyad*). Consequently, the view that Ibn Sinā upholds the creation theory is open to serious objection[44].

Burrell, Morewedge, and Netton agree that creation and emanation are to be seen as rival explanations for the existence of the universe. To the contrary, Ibn Sina views his theory of emanation as a philosophical interpretation of creation. In

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[42] *Burrell*. Knowing. P. 14—18, 25, 29, 33—34.

[43] *Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines. Boulder: Shambhala, 1978. P. 214.

[44] *Morewedge*. Metaphysica. P. 272. Morewedge's criticism of Nasr is endorsed as «definitive» by Netton (in *Netton I. R*. Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology. London: Routledge, 1989. P. 166).

order to refute a philosophical interpretation of a religious doctrine, it does not suffice to point out differences between the literal interpretation of the doctrine and the philosophical interpretation, for the philosophical interpretation of religion is essentially a kind of esotericism. But let's consider Morewedge's objections in more detail. He argues that there is a difference between producing something out of nothing and producing something out of one's own thought. This makes it sound as though thought is the material out of which emanations are produced. However, thinking is only a metaphor for emanation; and no matter how noble the history of the metaphor, it is only meant to indicate the complete dependence of the product on the producer. Just as thoughts are caused by a thinker and have no existence independent of the existence of the thinker, what is emanated is likewise dependent on its source.

A similar charge to that Morewedge makes against the emanationist view could also be leveled against the scriptural literalist. In *Genesis*, the acts of the six days of creation are performed through God's words. According to the Qur'an: "Our only speech to a thing, when We will it, is that We say to it, 'Be!' and it is". (16: 40). Among the *mutakalimīn*, the early theologians of Islam, this led to speculations about how God creates the word, "Be (*kun*)", and whether this requires another "Be!", leading to an infinite regress. 'Abd al-Jabbar gives an extensive commentary on the debate, and against overly literalistic interpretations of the Qur'an, argues that the divine command is not an instrument through which God effects creation[45]. The debate is one with which Ibn Sina would have been well acquainted. The outcome of the debate, regardless of whether one agrees with the conclusions of 'Abd al-Jabbar, would have supported the view that emanation theory is at least as viable a candidate for explaining creation as the other theological positions that had been taken on the issue for the previous hundred fifty years. Even if emanation is explained by analogy to thinking, this no more implies that thought is the material or instrument through which God creates than the text of scripture implies that divine words are such material or instruments. If the difference between emanation and creation is to rest on whether the act of creation is performed as the emanation of divine thought or as the utterance of a divine command, the unity of thought and word that is presumed in the scriptures of the world will undermine the distinction. Indeed, as Cassirer comments:

> In the creation accounts of almost all great cultural religions, the Word appears in league with the highest Lord of creation; either as the tool which he employs or actually as the primary source from which he, like all other Being, and order of Being, is derived. Thought and its verbal utterance are usually taken directly as one; for the mind that thinks and the tongue that speaks belong essentially together[46].

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[45] See: *Peters J. R. T. M.* God's Created Speech. Leiden: Brill, 1976. P. 377—382.
[46] *Cassirer E.* Language and Myth. New York: Dover, 1953. P. 45—46.

However, Morewedge takes the main difference between creation and emanation to lie in the absence or presence of resemblance between agent and product: in creation there is no resemblance, while in emanation there is. Such a claim has a number of difficulties. For one, resemblance is a matter of degree. Whether or not one accepts an emanationist or creationist account of the origin of the world, there will be both similarities and differences between God and the world. There is no good reason to think that the differences are necessarily any less on an emanationist account than they are on an account based more literally on scripture. Differences and similarities of various sorts would have to be weighed in order to support any argument that the resemblance found in emanation theory is too great to be acceptable. Second, the anthropomorphism of scripture would seem to provide grounds for holding that, if anything, the similarity between Creator and creation is greater on the literal reading than on the emanationist account. Third, according to the emanationist theory of Ibn Sina, God alone is necessary in His existence, while the world and everything else in it are contingent. Furthermore, Ibn Sina argues that God is not even a substance, because unlike substances, God has no quiddity. Certainly these features by which Ibn Sina characterizes God are sufficient to support the idea that his concept is of a transcendent God. Transcendence may be given a very precise meaning according to Ibn Sina's account: the transcendent is that which is not limited by any quiddity.

Furthermore, if creation is interpreted in such a way as to offer a version of the transcendence for God that is incompatible with emanation theory, it will fall into the danger of a denial of divine immanence. Creation may be contrasted with emanation as a rival to it only when creation and emanation are taken to be inconsistent, and the possibility that they might be the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of the relationship between God and the world are ignored.

The question is not emanationism or creationism, but compatibalism or incompatibilism. Although these terms are usually employed to describe positions in the debate on free will and determinism, here the issue is whether emanation and creation are compatible or not. The two debates are not unrelated, however, since many of the critics who hold that emanation fails to recognize the freedom of God's creative act also hold that the scheme of emanation results in a deterministic universe that is incompatible with human freedom[47].

The debate about emanation or creation is often marred by a failure to appreciate the implications of the idea that emanation is not temporal. It is held that since God emanates everything that comes into existence, and since His emanation is necessary, what is emanated is necessarily determined, and God has no choice in the matter. Here we need to be careful about the attribution of choice to God. We say that a human being's freedom is curtailed or limited when a person chooses to do something but is prevented from doing what was chosen. We can also deny freedom with respect to what a person does without choice. One does not choose

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[47] *Burrell*. Knowing. P. 29.

one's involuntary movements, and there is a sense in which one does not choose when one acts under coercion (although this was an issue that was debated among the *mutakalimīn*). Emanation is held to be incompatible with divine freedom when it is considered on the model of involuntary movements. The comparison is inadequate because it is based on a paradigm of temporal human agency in which action follows intention in time. While an intention that is temporally prior to an act may by typical of voluntary human actions, the absence of this priority of intention to act does not mean that God's action is involuntary.

A more serious objection to emanation is reported by Burrell to have been issued by Maimonides. Maimonides claims that if the world is a necessary result of God's existence, like the relation between efficient cause and effect, then God's act of creation cannot be a free act of the divine will, and furthermore, the distinction between God and world will be obscured, since the necessary result of a necessary cause will be as necessary as the cause. However this sort of objection fails to take full account of the radical difference between the causal role of emanation and of the efficient causes among substances. The necessity by which God emanates the first intellect is not one that forces the divine hand, as it were, but is the result of God's own perfection. To put the matter in theological terms, God's power is sufficient for all things. Had he not willed to create, there would have been no creation. The necessity by which the first intellect emanates is only the necessity that stems from divine perfection, and in this regard Ibn Sina emphasizes knowledge and wisdom. We say that the virtuous person who acts in accordance with virtue acts freely, even if there is a sense in which the virtue necessitates the act, because the virtuous person has the power to do otherwise, and is not compelled by any outside force to act virtuously. Likewise, God's act of creation will be free because He has sufficient power to do otherwise, and His action is not constrained by any outside factor. Maimonides felt that there was a contradiction, or something close to a contradiction, between the idea of an act performed out of necessity and one performed in time through purpose and will. As Ibn Sina sees it, however, the scriptural literalism of creation as a single temporally located act is incompatible with the unlimited perfection of God. On the philosophical interpretation of creation, there is still purpose and will, according to their own philosophical interpretations, but God is not a fellow traveller in the stream of time who acts in response to events that are independent of Him. God is the efficient cause of the universe only in the sense that the courage of the courageous person is the efficient cause of the act of courage. The universe is a necessary result of God's existence only given God's perfection.

The suggestion that emanation is inconsistent with the religious outlook because it denies the intentionality of the creative act fails to appreciate the fact that the emanationist framework contains its own interpretation of intentionality. To insist on the inconsistency between intentionality and emanation is to fall back on an anthropomorphic view of intentionality that does not square with the divine atemporality.

The problems for emanation theory about the necessity of the effect of a necessary cause are not solved by switching to a creationist view, for the creationists have also held, like Ghazali and Leibniz, that this is the best of all possible worlds, and that given God's power, wisdom and goodness, He could not have chosen to create anything else.

Where Ibn Sina's emanation theory runs into real problems, however, is in its link with physics. Each of the first ten created intellects was associated with a celestial sphere in a Ptolemaic system in which the planets all revolve about the earth. This, however, is not a necessary feature of the emanationist picture of the world anymore than it is a necessary feature of more literalistic interpretations of creation.

What is essential to the emanationist scheme is the view that the creation of the physical world is mediated by immaterial creatures. The view is eloquently summarized by William Chittick.

The basic understanding is that the cosmos is coherent, ordered, layered, and directional. There are degrees of reality, some closer to Real Being and some further away. Closeness to the Real is judged in terms of the degree of participation in its attributes, that is, by the intensity of a level's unity, life, consciousness, power, will, compassion, wisdom, love, and so on. Distance from the Real is judged by the weakness of these same attributes. Ultimately, the traces of Being—Consciousness—Bliss become so attenuated that the process can go no further, so it turns back upon itself.

Muslim cosmologists see the universe as bi-directional, eternally coming forth from the Real and eternally receding back into the Real. It is at once centrifugal and centripetal. The Real is Absolute, Infinite, and Unchanging, and everything else is moving, altering, and transmuting. All movement is either toward the Real or away from it. The direction of movement is judged in terms of the increasing or decreasing intensity of the signs and traces of the Real that appear in things[48].

Although Nasr and Chittick have a tendency to condemn modern science for its departures from the traditional world view as represented in the present discussion by Ibn Sina, the real villain in the story seems to be scientism rather than modern science *per se*. Even though Greek philosophy was steeped in polytheism, the Muslim philosophers were able to harmonize it with a worldview based on *tawḥīd*. Surely, modern science should prove no more recalcitrant than Greek natural philosophy, and if Muslims were able to oppose the opposition between Athens and Jerusalem, they should also be able to synthesize the findings of modern sciences within a worldview that carries on the tradition of philosophical reflection to which so prominently belongs the *Shaykh al-Ra'īs*.

In Western civilization, a sharp distinction has commonly been drawn between reason and revelation, or Athens and Jerusalem. In order to understand the role that the intellectual sciences have played in the Islamic tradition, we need to un-

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[48] *Chittick W. C.* Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World. Oxford: Oneworld, 2007. P. 140—141.

derstand that the predominant Islamic perspective has seen reason and revelation as harmonious and complementary, not antagonistic[49].

Traditionalists might argue that reason as understood by the Greeks was in fact harmonious and complementary to revelation, while modernity and the quantitatively dominated rationality it spawned are the devil's work. However, modernity's rationality is more complex and multifaceted than its despisers admit. If a Muslim youth stops praying when he learns that water is H_2O, it is not because of the inherent incompatibility between the spirit of modern science and the spirit of religion, but because of the lack of receptivity he finds toward science among those whom he considers religious or because of the lack of religion in those who have taught him science, or both. The problem of the conflict between modern and traditional worldviews is one whose roots must be sought in cultural and social factors, not in compatibility or incompatibility with the quantitative methods employed in the modern sciences.

In conclusion, opposition to emanation theory stems from a view that sees the philosophical enterprise as an incompatible rival to religion, rather than as a way to the intellectual understanding of truths that are expressed in another manner in theological sources. To present emanation and creation as rival explanations for the origin of the world is to beg the question against the proponents of emanation, for it is precisely this rivalry that they sought to undermine by considering emanation as an esoteric model for creation.

Likewise, although the appearance of plants and animals is given different explanations by evolutionary theory and by religious teachings about creation, there is no need to take such teachings to be incompatible, for they may be describing reality at different levels. The difference between the compatibalism that some Christian philosophers[50] have advocated with regard to evolution and the Bible and the compatibalism that Ibn Sina sees between creation and emanation is that Christian evolutionists would not argue that the theory of evolution provides a deeper or esoteric meaning for what is stated in the Bible, whereas Ibn Sina, like Hegel, thinks of his philosophical theory as providing the key to the esoteric exegesis of religious teaching for those who are capable of understanding it.

In order for young Muslims to keep on saying their prayers, it is pointless to try to return to an understanding of water that denies it the status of H^2O. It is also counterproductive to attempt an exegesis of religious texts that sees them as containing all sorts of hidden references to modern science, as have become all too popular among Muslims eager to find endorsements for their religious views by way of modern science. What is needed is for at least some Muslims to en-

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[49] *Chittick*. Science. P. 110.

[50] For a survey and articles from various viewpoints, including those of several Christian evolutionists, see: *Dembski W. A.*, *Ruse M*. Debating Design: From Darwin to DNA. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

gage in the kind of intellectual endeavor (*taḥqīq*) exemplified by Ibn Sina and to which Chittick invites his readers, one that finds a way to lead us from the outward aspects of religion and nature to intellectual understanding that has divinity as its goal. This, however, requires a worldview in which philosophical principles are found to integrate religion along with modern science. Ibn Sina applied his emanation theory in order to achieve this in the context of the science of his own day, and hence the association of the ten intellects with the celestial spheres of the Ptolemaic system. To follow Ibn Sina's example with intellectual wisdom we should not imagine replacing the planets in his system by some other heavenly bodies, say, galaxies or nebulae; but we might take up the suggestions offered by Alvin Plantinga for a religious outlook on science.

Clearly much of contemporary science, in particular contemporary human science such as psychology, economics, and sociology, is deeply inimical to Christian theism. Christian scholars must recognize these things; we should try to see exactly how this antagonism goes, what its limits are, where the antagonism is sharpest, where it is most subtle and dangerous, and so on; and the resulting insight must be made available to the Christian community. And suppose there are serious shortcomings, from a Christian perspective, in the way in which one or another discipline (or parts of one or another discipline) is currently practiced and pursued: then Christians should try to do it better[51].

The Divine Attributes

Ibn Sina continues to develop his theology on the metaphysical basis he has set up in which God is the Necessary in Existence. God can have no internal multiplicity, because in that case He would depend upon His parts or components. There can not be more than one necessary existent, because there could be nothing to distinguish them. God cannot change, because this would imply difference in His accidents at different times, which would require quiddity other than existence. Since God does not change, and nothing could possibly generate God, God is eternal.

All of the traditional attributes of God that are asserted by the theologians are confirmed by Ibn Sina, but with an interpretation that coheres with the basic vision of God as the *wājib al-wujūd*, that has no quiddity but existence, and

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[51] *Plantinga A.* On Rejecting The Theory of Common Ancestry: A Reply to Hasker // Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith 44 (December, 1992). P. 263. For more on Plantinga's views on evolution, see: *Pennock R. T.* Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001 (which includes p. 113—145) the reprint of A. Plantinga «When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible» (first printed in: Christian Scholar's Review. Vol. 21. № 1. P. 8—32; URL = http://www. asa3.org/asa/dialogues/Faith-reason/CRS9-91/Plantinga1.html — an article that began a protracted debate on the issue of the compatibility of evolutionary theory and Christian faith). For Plantinga's more recent reflections on religion and science, see: *Plantinga A.* Religion and Science // The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edit.) / *Zalta E. N.* (ed.). URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/religion-science/.

is purely immaterial. The most fundamental feature of divinity, from which everything else in his interpretation of the divine attributes follows, is the fact that God is the existent without any quiddity. Divine unity and necessity follow from this. There can be no division or multiplicity of any sort in God, because this would require God to have qualitative features to distinguish the parts. God must be necessary because if contingent then that whose quiddity is nothing other than existence would be dependent on something else for its existence, while that which is essentially existence cannot depend for its existence on anything outside itself[52].

In order to understand Ibn Sina's view of the divine attributes, it is of paramount importance to keep in mind that the relationship between God and His attributes is not one of substance and accident. God does not have accidents, not even necessary accidents, for He is devoid of all quiddity and primary intelligibles do not apply to Him. It is because of this that a multiplicity of divine attributes will not introduce multiplicity in God[53]. This is why the section of the *Dānesh Nāmeh* on the lack of multiplicity in God follows immediately after the section in which it is demonstrated that God is not a substance.

All of the characteristics of God are either relational (Ibn Sina calls it 'union', as the fact that Creator and creatures are joined in the sense that they coexist) or negative, and in no way do they involve any form imposed on God. Neither relational nor negative properties imply any form in God. This provides a key for giving an interpretation of some of the standard attributes in such a manner that they may be said to characterize existence without quiddity. Pre-eternity, for example, is interpreted negatively as having no beginning in time. God knows Himself because there is no barrier or separation between Him and Himself. God does not know Himself in the sense of having anything even remotely analogous to a mental image.

A particularly difficult issue for Ibn Sina was how God could have knowledge of what changes. The problem is merely how there could be knowledge of what changes in God, and the solution that Ibn Sina offers in the *Shifā'* is, in effect, that God knows the temporal and changing in a universal and unchanging manner by knowing the principles and causes of all changes. God timelessly knows that a given eclipse occurs on a certain date, but it would be impossible to know that this eclipse is not happening now, taking "now" to be a primitive indexical, because God is atemporal so that there is no moment that is not present to him in a universal or abstract way[54].

A number of commentators have taken issue with Ibn Sina's account of divine knowledge, first and foremost Ghazali. More recently, some have observed that the example of the eclipse that Ibn Sina uses is disingenuous, because it is a repeat-

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[52] *Morewedge*. Metaphysica. P. 55—56.
[53] *Morewedge*. Metaphysica. P. 58.
[54] *Avicenna*. Metaphysics. P. 289—290.

able celestial event due to well known causal principles. Knowledge of the particular still eludes Ibn Sina's God[55].

Even if we allow that for Ibn Sina only the universal can be known by God, there is no need to limit his knowledge to knowledge of things like eclipses. Both Leaman and Netton recognize this. Leaman explicitly argues that Ibn Sina could have argued for God's knowledge of particulars as sole instances of general principles that would allow infinitely detailed knowledge. Netton thinks that he did not take this route in order that God's knowledge not appear to be too similar to human knowledge. However, Ibn Sina could preserve the distinction on the basis of the fact that human knowledge is discursive and structured by representation, while divine knowledge is not representational, but direct and inclusive.

Divine power is also explained in a manner that requires no positing of mental states in God. He is powerful because it is not the case that He wills but fails to act or that He acts but fails to bring about what He intended. Nothing constrains God. Here we find a standard move that compatibilists have applied to divine instead of human freedom.

Mysticism

One of the chief objections that is made against the "God of the philosophers" is that it leaves the believer cold, and that it allows for only an impersonal intellectual relation with God, rather than a relationship of devotion. This myth will be dispelled by the slightest familiarity with Ibn Sina's mysticism.

Ibn Sina presents his mystical vision of God both in the form of allegory and symbol, as well as in more prosaic works, such as the fourth part of the *Remarks and Admonitions*[56].

Ibn Sina's mysticism is an intellectual mysticism. Like other forms of Islamic mysticism, it describes a path toward union with the Beloved. In the discussion of the divine attributes, it is shown that the Necessary of Existence is perfect, without any flaw, and thus, is Pure Good. Love is the innate attraction that all souls feel for perfection and what is good[57]. So, since the *wājib al-wujūd* is perfectly good, it is fitting to call Him the beloved. God loves Himself, and the emanated intellects are also His lovers. As Netton points out:

> In one sense, emanation (*fayḍ* [grace]) and love (*'ishq*) may be viewed as two sides of the same channel of cosmic movement: all things come from God by a process of necessary emanation and all things desire to return to God by a process of innate or necessary love[58].

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[55] See: *Leaman O.* Medieval Islamic Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. P. 115; *Netton*. Allah Transcendent. P. 162.

[56] *Inati Sh.* Ibn Sina and Mysticism. London: Kegan Paul International, 1996.

[57] *Inati*. Ibn Sina. P. 79—80.

[58] *Netton*. Allah Transcendent. P. 176.

Ibn Sina claims that his mysticism is superior to that of the Sufis who rely on a *shaykh* for the sake of the purification of the heart, because the union achieved by the Sufi is through the imagination, while the union he seeks is through the intellect, and the imagination is perishable, while the intellect is eternal. The purpose of purification and gaining mastery over one's desires is for the sake of protecting the intellect from distractions. Both the Sufi and the philosophical mystic seek union with the Beloved. The difference is that the latter does so through intellectual reflection.

Although Ibn Sina may be described as a mystic on the basis of his writing about the philosophical path of mysticism, unlike Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi and others, he does not describe having any mystical experiences. Shams Inati speculates about why Ibn Sina did not describe his mystical experiences. Perhaps it was because of fear of persecution, or, she suggests, more likely it was fear of being misunderstood[59].

To these suggestions, a third might be added. Intellectual mysticism does not aim at mystical experiences at all, for such experiences are the products of the imagination. Instead, the union sought by the intellectual mystic is a state at which one arrives through philosophical reflection. The ecstasies of which Ibn Sina speaks are not the goal, but are byproducts of illumination. As such, it would not be appropriate for the philosopher to devote attention on the byproducts of his quest instead of on the goal of the Truth itself. Ibn Sina writes: "Rejoicing in the ornament of pleasure, inasmuch as it is pleasure—even if it is in the Truth—is perplexity. And advancing in totality toward the Truth is salvation"[60].

Ibn Sina begins the eighth *namaṭ* of part four of his *Remarks and Admonitions* with a discussion of the types of pleasure and pain. In the ninth *namaṭ*, however, Ibn Sina informs his readers that in the quest for the Truth, the knower (*'ārif*) puts aside his own desires and fears:

> The knower seeks the First Truth, not anything other than Him, and does not prefer [knowledge of] anything to knowledge of Him. And his worship is for Him only. That is because worship is fitting for Him and because worship is a noble relation to Him, not because of desire or fear. If it were because of desire or fear, the motive in him would be the desired or the feared. This would be what is sought. Then the Truth would not be the end but a means to something other than Him that would be the end, and that would be sought instead of Him[61].

The ultimate aim of the *'ārif* is not a mystical experience, or even knowledge itself. Mystical experience and knowledge are means to reach the Truth. The ultimate aim is nothing less than the Truth. Since the ultimate Truth, the perfect Beloved, the pure Good, is that which is pure existence without any quiddity, it

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[59] *Inati*. Ibn Sina. P. 64.

[60] *Inati*. Ibn Sina. P. 88.

[61] My translation from Ibn Sina «Al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt». Vol. 4. Beirūt: Mu'assassah Nu'mān, 1994. P. 68—74. Cf.: *Inati*. Ibn Sina. P. 83—84.

cannot be described by what is like it, by a contrary, by genus or differentia, and can only be indicated by express intellectual knowing (*bi ṣarīh al-'irfān al-'aqlī*). This is entirely in keeping with the discussion of the divine attributes in terms of relation and privation. It is because God has no quiddity that He must be described by relation and privation, and it is for the same reason that He can only be indicated by *al-'irfān al-'aqlī* [62].

Ibn Sina's mysticism is intellectual and pertains to illumination found through theoretical reason. However, just as this illumination has byproducts in the form of feelings of ecstasy, and other effects on the imagination, it also has effects on the practical character of the philosopher. Hence, the knower is described by Ibn Sina as attaining moral virtues. "The knower is bright-faced, friendly, and smiling. Due to his modesty, he honors the young as he honors the old"[63]. The knower is magnanimous, filled with mercy, courageous, generous, and forgiving.

Just as God is both the purely Good and the *wājib al-wujūd*, because that which lacks any quiddity to limit it has no flaw or imperfection, likewise existence and value are woven together in the path of the wayfarer. The same negative characterization that shows God's goodness through the absence of flaws is reflected in the manner in which the mystic approaches God by stripping himself of distractions, desires and fancies until his soul reflects pure existence, the Truth. Here Ibn Sina uses the famous analogy of the Sufis of the soul being like a polished mirror that reflects the divine light of pure being. The soul, motivated by love, moves upward toward God as it disregards all imperfection and limitation. So, the intellectual movement toward God is also a practical one in which virtue is acquired.

Conclusion

Ibn Sina's concept of God is essentially a metaphysical concept, in a very precise sense, for the subject of metaphysics is being *qua* being, and God is that whose being is not limited by any quiddity. God is therefore unitary, necessary, simple and perfect. Because all beings essentially love what is perfect, God loves Himself. God creates the world through a process of emanation or grace that is unconstrained by anything outside of the divine essence. Since God is essentially wise and good and powerful, His creation is an act of mercy, munificence and generosity. His actions are free in that they are not constrained or forced by anything other than Him; but they are not arbitrary, because they are in accordance with His perfections. The divine attributes as well as the path of the mystic toward God are all to be understood in terms of the fundamental understanding that Ibn Sina has of God as the Existent in itself without any limitation of quiddity. Ibn Sina offers a vision of God that is at one and the same time philosophical, esoteric, intellectual

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[62] For a different view of the matter, see: *Morewedge*. Metaphysica. P. 233—234, mentioned in: *Netton*. Allah Transcendent. P. 177—178.

[63] *Inati*. Ibn Sina. P. 89.

and mystical. Ibn Sina's concept of God is that of a Being Who is highly abstract and from Whom all anthropomorphism is removed, and yet Who is purely Good, loving and merciful. The way toward God described by Ibn Sina is likewise an intellectual path, but it is also a path motivated by the love of the wayfarer for God, and it is one in which advancement on the path toward Him is marked by the acquisition of moral virtue.

What we find in Ibn Sina's concept of God is that God is understood as transcendent, for He is beyond all categories, and beyond space and time. He is immanent, for He knows all things (even if only in their immaterial and universal respects) and all things depend upon Him. The understanding of God, according to Ibn Sina, has an outward and an inward aspect. Outwardly, God is to be understood through the texts of the Qur'an and narrations as the Creator. Inwardly, He is to be understood by an elite through philosophical intellection as the *wājib al-wujūd* by whose grace the hierarchy of all beings is emanated. The way toward God also has outward and inward aspects. The outward way is to uphold the law and be righteous. The inward way is through a mystical path of intellection. Ibn Sina describes God in a way that is completely consistent with Islamic orthodoxy, yet points beyond the letter of creedal statements to a deeper philosophical understanding. The standard divine attributes of the monotheistic religions are affirmed. God is perfectly good, loving and merciful. For the purpose of establishing a just society governed by law, He has sent prophets who show people the way toward Him, the most excellent and last of whom is the Apostle Muhammad, may Allah grant peace and benedictions to him and to his folk[64].

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[64] *Inati*. Ibn Sina. P. 82—83.

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