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Damien Janos

AVICENNA ON THE ONTOLOGY OF PURE QUIDDITY

SCIENTIA GRAECO-ARABICA

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Scientia Graeco-Arabica



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Στον ήλιο μου, στην σελήνη μου, στην Ιθάκη μου.

There cannot be beauty or splendor surpassing the quiddity's being purely intelligible [*an takūna l-māhiyyah 'aqliyyah maḥḍah*], pure goodness, free from any deficiency, and one in all respects.

(Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7,
translation by Marmura, revised)

The essences of Avicenna are so many ghosts of Plato's Ideas.

(Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 76)

This theory obviously implies that all the flora and fauna are regularly destroyed, and then come to be again. Avicenna posited that this regeneration of the species is brought about by natural necessities, including the assistance of the agent intellect.

(Gad Freudenthal, *The Medieval Hebrew Reception*, 272)

Acknowledgements

This book was a long time in the making. Its various parts were composed at different periods, in different places, and in different states of mind. My access to the primary sources required for such a large research project has been irregular, and I could not always get my hands on what I needed at a particular moment, or consult the best or most recent editions of certain texts. All of these variables are reflected in the book. In spite of its shortcomings, I hope that this study will stimulate further research on Avicenna and challenge some deeply entrenched assumptions concerning his philosophy. Even if scholars disagree with the solutions I proffer, I hope that the cluster of questions I raise will prove valuable and thought-provoking. *In nuce*, I try to show that Avicenna's interpretation of the ontology of pure quiddity is complex and unique, and also forms the matrix of innumerable threads that unfold in the medieval and early modern periods and radically changed the philosophical landscape after him. Avicenna himself is just as remarkable for the *longue durée* philosophical problems he bequeathed to posterity as for the intricate interpretations he formulated in his works. Among other things, this study wishes to persuade the (still unconvinced) reader that Avicenna's thought represents a crucial and unique 'moment' in the history of philosophy and, more precisely, in the development of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic metaphysics and epistemology.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the following people: Frank Griffel, who conveyed innumerable comments and sound advice, which greatly improved the draft; Olga Lizzini, with whom I had several stimulating conversations; Jules Janssens for his valuable feedback; David Twetten, for a protracted and very constructive discussion; Amos Bertolacci for his help with the manuscript evidence on Avicenna; and Robert Wisnovsky for his unfaltering support and his readiness to share his expertise in Islamic intellectual history. I am also grateful to Rosabel Pauline Ansari, Pauline Froissart, Mateus Domingues da Silva, Salimeh Maghsoudlou, and Naser Dumairieh for sharing some results of their ongoing research and for their valuable suggestions, as well as Florian Ruppenstein at De Gruyter for his outstanding editing. Fariduddin Attar's feedback and incisive comments also greatly improved the draft. Finally, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Marwan Rashed. Not only did he accept to publish this study in his erudite series; his work on Avicenna and Yaḥyā b. 'Adī was a key source of inspiration for my analysis. Particularly in this case, I wish to acknowledge the precious help and contribution of these scholars and stress that any errors or misinterpretations of the evidence are entirely my own.

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Introduction

As the volume of research on Avicenna's philosophy and its impact on subsequent intellectual history keeps growing, so does scholars' appreciation of this thinker's contribution to the fields of logic, physics, psychology, and metaphysics. Although Avicenna, or Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037 CE) in Arabic, has always been considered a towering figure in Islamic philosophy, modern scholars are increasingly keen to describe his life and works as a landmark in the intellectual history of the Islamic world, and, more broadly, in the history of Western and medieval philosophy.¹ So much so, that it has now become commonplace to speak of the 'pre-Avicennian' and 'post-Avicennian' periods in Islamic intellectual history, or of 'Avicenna's philosophy' as opposed to 'Avicennism' or the 'Avicennizing' philosophical tradition that flourished after the death of the 'leading master' (*al-shaykh al-ra'īs*), as he came to be known.² Even the now conventional division between the 'classical' and 'postclassical' periods of Islamic intellectual history implicitly presupposes a distinction between Avicenna's career and that of his predecessors and close disciples, on the one hand, and a new era marked by the creation of large philosophical and theological syntheses, many of which were inspired by this Avicennian heritage, on the other.³ If anything, the study of these intellectual developments has confirmed the hypothesis that Arabic philosophy did not die with Averroes in 1198 CE as a result of Ghazālī's (d. 1111 CE) earlier onslaught in his *Refutation of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifah*).

As it turns out, complex philosophical systems were still being elaborated long after the end of the classical period, and Avicenna's ideas contributed to this phenomenon in a decisive manner. Later Muslim scholars borrowed, criticized, and elaborated upon many of the theories that the master had articulated. With hindsight, it

1 I use the term 'medieval' here mainly in reference to the European Christian and Jewish traditions and as a broad chronological marker, bearing in mind that it is inadequate to describe the Islamic world, which never experienced, technically speaking, a 'Middle Age' between antiquity and modernity. As for connecting Islamic philosophy with the 'Western' tradition, it is justifiable on several counts: the common Greek sources it shares with Latin and Jewish philosophy; its roots in the Abrahamic tradition; and its numerous formal parallels with Latin scholasticism. In that sense, it can be contrasted to the 'Eastern' traditions, such as Buddhist and Hindu philosophy. Even then, all of these notions are obviously problematic and open to discussion and qualification.

2 See Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Islamic Reception*; idem, *Towards a Genealogy*; idem, *Essence and Existence*.

3 The cutoff for the end of the classical period and the beginning of the postclassical period in Islam is alternately given as 1130, 1200, or even 1256 CE, the last date corresponding to the Mongol invasions of the Middle East. Griffel, *The Formation* (forthcoming) makes a convincing case to the effect that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE) should be regarded as the first major 'postclassical' thinker in Islam. In terms of philosophical history specifically, however, the main distinction in my eyes is between the 'pre-Avicennian' and 'post-Avicennian' periods, given the depth and scope of Avicenna's influence on subsequent Islamic thought.

becomes easier to see that Avicenna's philosophy is not just the end of the formative era of Islamic thought and the apogee of the 'classical' period; it also marks the beginning of a new, highly diversified, and sophisticated philosophical culture in Islam, which lasted up to the present day in some parts of the world. During this time, philosophical ideas were expressed frequently in commentaries written on works of the *shaykh al-ra'īs*, as well as in independent treatises and in large philosophical-theological summae. These works spanned the genres and disciplines of theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*ḥikmah*).⁴ In modern parlance, they often displayed a combination of theological and philosophical concepts and theories. Yet, most of these works were marked in some way or other by Avicenna's terminology, theories, and outlook.

One salient example of Avicenna's influence on this later tradition, which happens also to coincide with his most famous contribution to philosophy in general, is his theory of the distinction between essence and existence. Avicenna argues that essence or quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and existence (*wujūd*) are two distinct and irreducible notions in the mind and that one can think of the former without invoking the latter. That is to say, one can conceive of essence or quiddity solely 'in itself' and in complete abstraction from any consideration of existence. Nevertheless, all caused and contingent beings—whether concepts in the mind or concrete entities in the world—have an essence and an existence which can be apprehended together. The various implications of these claims for the fields of epistemology, ontology, and theology were endlessly discussed and debated in the post-Avicennian tradition, both in commentaries on Avicenna and in independent works of *ḥikmah* and *kalām*. What is more, the Avicennian terminological and conceptual framework that underpins this distinction was borrowed and refined by later authors to further their philosophical and theological projects. The unfolding of these complex processes of transformation and naturalization of Avicenna's philosophy in the various fields that make up the intellectual landscape of postclassical Islam is fascinating, and it has deservedly received increased scholarly attention. But these developments are not by any means limited to Muslim authors. As is well known, many of the Christian philosophers of medieval Europe responded enthusiastically to Avicenna's philosophical ideas, which contributed to shaping the scholastic discussions of essence and existence, causality, and the universals, to name only a few key topics. And there is growing evidence that Avicenna's views had a profound impact on medieval Jewish thinkers as well.⁵

In addition to its reception in postclassical Islam and in the medieval Jewish and Latin philosophical traditions, the Avicennian problem of the relation between essence and existence has also informed much of the modern historiography on this

⁴ For the development and characteristics of these two genres in the postclassical tradition, see Grifel, *The Formation* (forthcoming). I am deeply indebted to him for sharing an early version of his book.

⁵ See, among other works, Hasse and Bertolacci (eds.), *The Arabic*.

thinker. Although some scholarship on Avicenna was already being produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth century by European orientalists, it was Amélie-Marie Goichon's monograph entitled *La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sīnā*, published in 1937, which first oriented the attention of modern readers to the philosophical depth and significance of Avicenna's doctrine of essence and existence.⁶ Goichon's work, in spite of some inevitable shortcomings—some of them imposed by the limited number of texts and editions available at the time, others stemming from the overly scholastic outlook through which Goichon read Avicenna—is still regarded as a masterful philological and analytical study, written at a time when many of Avicenna's works could be consulted only in manuscript form. Subsequent to Goichon's monograph, studies on Avicenna's theory of essence and existence continued to flourish. More than any other aspect of his thought, it is this question that has lain at the forefront of the modern discussions and debates in Avicennian studies. The modern literature on this topic is rich and intricate, and it is marked by certain watershed moments. Dimitri Gutas's *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, published in 1988, provided, for the first time, an adequate chronological and methodological framework to study the Avicennian corpus.⁷ Although it does not focus on the essence/existence problem in any depth, this work offered a decisive methodological reorientation by promoting a new kind of contextual, philological, and developmentalist analysis of Avicenna's thought. This approach is exemplified in a monograph by Amos Bertolacci.⁸ Robert Wisnovsky's *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, published in 2003, is another prime example of this new wave of studies on Avicenna. Building on the insight of an article by Jean Jolivet, it discusses some of the key notions underlying Avicenna's metaphysics and provides a detailed contextual analysis that pays heed not only to the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, but also to classical Islamic theology and especially to early Ash'arite *kalām*. In addition to providing new insight into the Avicennian modalities of 'the possible' and 'the necessary' and their application to ontology and theology, Wisnovsky's study also acutely problematized the notion of essence in a manner that made it virtually impossible for later scholars to ignore the gravity of this question in the master's philosophy; all the more so, since Avicenna himself appears to say contradictory things about essence in his various works. More recently, a series of monographs by Tiana Koutzarova, Olga Lizzini, Alexander Kalbarczyk, and Fedor Benevich on Avicenna's logic and metaphysics have yielded valuable insight into this

6 This work in effect firmly established the relationship between essence and existence as the central problem in the modern historiography on the *shaykh al-ra'īs*.

7 A re-edited and expanded version of this seminal study was published in 2014.

8 Bertolacci's monograph, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, furthered our appreciation of Avicenna's understanding of metaphysics as an Aristotelian science and shed valuable light on the manuscript transmission and textual aspects of *Metaphysics of The Cure*.

philosopher's theories of essence and existence.⁹ The last two studies in particular deal extensively with the logical dimension of Avicenna's theory of essence and also explore some of its ontological implications. Quite some time before, Alain de Libera had addressed this topic from the perspective of the *Avicenna latinus* in two hefty books devoted to the history of the universals in medieval philosophy.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that, although written from outside the field of Arabic philosophy, de Libera's studies constitute the most sustained and detailed analysis of Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity. To these monographs, one should add a dizzying number of articles dealing with various aspects of Avicenna's metaphysics, which testify to the fact that, since Goichon's landmark publication, the number of studies on this thinker have increased steadily over time.

In spite of this plethora of works, some thorny questions and nagging uncertainties pertaining to Avicenna's theory of essence have endured. Does Avicenna intend the distinction between essence and existence solely at the conceptual level, as a purely intramental one, or is it grounded also in the real world, so that it may be called a 'real' distinction as well? What exactly is the ontological status of essence, of 'pure quiddity' or 'quiddity in itself,' both in the mind and in concrete beings? And in what ways do logic and ontology interrelate and interface in Avicenna's descriptions of essence? Finally, in what manner is Avicenna's doctrine of essence connected with his theological views and with his theory of God's intellection and knowledge? In other words, does God know the essences of each thing in addition to His own essence? The academic rigor of the above-mentioned monographs notwithstanding, none of them addresses Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity expressly and exhaustively. With the notable exception of de Libera's studies, they say little on the specific issue of the ontological status of essence and how it fits in the *shaykh's* general ontology. More to the point in this regard is a set of articles published by different authors over the course of several decades, which, when taken as a whole, cast valuable light on the topic. Accordingly, they form the basis of my approach and analysis in the present book.¹¹ By building on these contributions, I aim to explore the prototypically Avicennian notion of pure essence and to tackle head-on the issue of its ontological status. To that effect, I provide a sustained textual analysis of the evidence related to pure quiddity and try also to cast new light on a cluster

⁹ Koutzarova, *Das Transzendente*; Lizzini, *Fluxus*; Kalbarczyk, *Predication*; and Benevich, *Essentialität*. Benevich's interesting study became available to me only after the completion of my draft and at around the same time that the latter was accepted for publication by De Gruyter. Although I could not do justice to Benevich's various results, I tried as much as possible to integrate the main lines of his conclusions into my analysis. The same holds for his and other articles published in 2018.

¹⁰ De Libera, *La querelle*; idem, *L'art*. Only specific sections of these two books deal directly with Avicenna. I describe de Libera's contribution to the topic in some detail in chapter I.

¹¹ Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*; idem, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*; Rashed, *Ibn 'Adi; Porro, Universaux*; and Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*. The results of these studies are discussed in detail in chapters I and II.

of vexed issues pertaining to the master's philosophy. Indeed, clarifying Avicenna's notion of pure quiddity can, in turn, help to solve many of the enduring tensions in his epistemology, theology, and metaphysics that have puzzled modern scholars, such as the issues of the various types of universals, of psychological abstraction, and of God's knowledge of particulars. This study argues that pure quiddity lies at the heart of Avicenna's entire philosophical system and that the latter is comprehensively and cogently interpretable only in light of this crucial notion. It is the cement that connects virtually all aspects of his philosophy together.

In this book I try to show that Avicenna's metaphysics is profoundly indebted to the late-antique debates about the universals and common things as well as to the Mu'tazilite—and more specifically, Bahshamite—theory of the Attribute of the Essence. These textual and doctrinal precedents enabled Avicenna to develop a distinct and original theory of pure quiddity (*al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya*). Although he approached the debate about the universals and common things chiefly through the framework bequeathed by the Neoplatonists, and especially within the perspective of Porphyry's (d. c. 305 CE) *Eisagoge*, he made a crucial contribution by shifting the emphasis of the debate from the universals (*al-kulliyāt*) and common things (*al-umūr al-āmmah*) to his theory of pure quiddity. This distinction is significant, because for Avicenna 'genusness' and 'speciesness,' like universality itself, are mental attributes that are superadded to pure quiddity, and which therefore do not preclude a discussion of the logical and ontological status of essence itself in the intellect. So the key questions for him become not so much whether 'universal species' and 'universal genus' exist as such in the world, and, if so, how they exist, as Porphyry had initially formulated them, but rather whether pure quiddities exist as such, and how the external concomitants and attributes, such as genusness, speciesness, universality, and oneness, relate to them in the concrete world and in the mind. This drastic reframing of the discussion of universals had many implications, one of which was to increase and refine the theoretical framework used to study these notions and to articulate—arguably for the first time—a theory of transcendental objects of thought that are conceptually removed from all relations or things external to them.

In addition, the present book proposes a novel approach to the question of essence and existence in Avicenna that relies on a detailed terminological and doctrinal analysis of the evidence drawn from his entire corpus. This approach also involves a drastic revision of the conceptual framework used to study essence and existence that has hitherto prevailed in Avicennian studies. One core feature of my analysis implies renegotiating the boundary between essence and existence by means of the notion of *tashkīk* or modulation. Modulation is a crucial, yet understudied, notion that Avicenna applies to many key concepts of his philosophy, be it universality, oneness, form, matter, necessity, priority, and, of course, existence. The upshot is that these notions are neither strictly equivocal nor univocal, but can be adapted to different philosophical contexts and their meanings modulated in a variety of ways. When it comes to existence specifically, Avicenna appears to have devised his theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) mostly on the basis

of his interpretation of Aristotle's focal homonymy, but he implements it in a way that departs sharply from the Greek sources.

Building on a study by Alexander Treiger,¹² I try to show that Avicenna has a relatively systematic understanding of ontological modulation or *tashkik al-wujūd* and that this theory is constituted of a set of well-defined aspects or modes. This theory enables Avicenna to reconfigure his ontology and allows for a remarkable degree of flexibility in the way in which existence is predicated of things. By reconstructing this modulationist theory of existence, one is able to proffer a reinterpretation of how the master may have envisaged a full-blown ontology of essence. The connection I propose between these two theories—pure quiddity and ontological modulation—emerged on my view from the problem Avicenna faced of having to account for the ontological status of this pure object that is quiddity in itself. Like the ontological status of God, that of pure quiddity is somewhat of an oddity or exception in the Avicennian system, since it differs from the ontological status of all caused and contingent beings. As a result, these two case studies can only be conducted through the lens of *tashkik*, which allows for a fragmentation and modulation of the notion of existence. In this connection, the issue of whether ontological modulation is restricted to the categorical or predicamental level, or whether it can be extended also to the divine being, is one that has recently received keen attention in the scholarship.¹³ Following Treiger, I argue that *tashkik al-wujūd* should be extended to the transcendental level, a move which enables me to tackle in earnest the question of how *tashkik* relates to essential being—first and foremost, God's essential being. For Avicenna's new theory, I contend, justifies including the notion of essential being in a general ontology that otherwise, and as a general rule, regards existence as an external concomitant or attribute of essence. On my interpretation, not only does Avicenna extend this modulationist approach to God, but he also articulates it in a manner that recognizes the fundamental distinction between essential existence vs. external or concomitant existence, thereby anticipating some of the later developments that appeared in the postclassical period in Islam and in Latin scholasticism. Another related and thought-provoking query investigated in the book pertains to the connection between ontological modulation and the various 'senses' (*ma'ānī*) of existence Avicenna outlines in *Metaphysics* I.5, an issue that has not received sufficient attention in the modern literature. Ultimately, my amplified interpretation of *tashkik* in general, and of *tashkik al-wujūd* in particular, allows me to proffer a comprehensive account of the place, function, and ontological status of pure quiddity in Avicenna philosophical system.

I propose to explore these issues in the various 'contexts' of existence Avicenna broaches in his works: human intellectual existence, concrete extramental existence,

¹² Treiger, Avicenna's Notion.

¹³ In addition to Treiger, see Mayer, Fahr ad-Din; Griffel, Ismā'īlite Critique; and Wisnovsky, On the Emergence.

and ‘divine existence,’ i.e., the separate intellects and especially God’s intellect. In addition, I devote special attention to mental existence and the notion of intelligible being, attempting to clarify this ontological mode in Avicenna’s philosophy, especially in connection with the conception of pure essence in the mind. While not all of my conclusions taken individually are in themselves novel, in the sense that some of them may best be qualified as rehabilitations or revisions of older scholarly views held about the master’s system, I believe that the overarching and integrated account of Avicenna’s theory of essence I provide constitutes a new way of reading his metaphysical thought. This approach also challenges existing interpretive paradigms regarding his theory of essence and existence, which have in general pitted these two notions one against the other in an overly schematic way. This kind of narrative excessively prioritizes either essence or existence in Avicennian ontology. From an interpretive viewpoint, one may say that it crystallized in the cleavage between ‘the foundationality of essence’ (*aṣālat al-māhiyyah*) and ‘the foundationality of existence’ (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) in the later Islamic tradition. In contrast, the main thesis of this book is that Avicenna elaborated a full-blown and sophisticated ontology and epistemology of quiddity and, more precisely, of ‘pure quiddity’ or ‘quiddity in itself’ (*al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya*). The subtlety and complexity of this doctrine—one might even say its ambiguity—are factors that later contributed to the development of the two diametrically opposed intellectual strands mentioned above; their very existence testifies to the fact that they were seen as valid interpretations of Avicenna’s works, like two streams flowing from a common source.

The analysis aims to show that Avicenna’s ontology of quiddity is multifaceted and complex. Fundamentally, this doctrine relies on a mereological interpretation of how pure quiddity can be said to exist in universals in the mind and in concrete individuals, as well as on a theory of the intelligible reality, irreducibility, and distinct existence of pure quiddity in the human and divine intellects. What made this doctrine possible was what scholars have increasingly come to recognize as Avicenna’s ‘ontologization of logic’; in this case, the ontologization of a matrix of logical distinctions used to express the various relations between the different elements or aspects of essence: those between quiddity and its internal constituents (*muqawwimāt*) and those between quiddity and its external, non-constitutive concomitants (*lawāzim ḡayr muqawwimah*). I argue that the basic distinction between pure quiddity and its external concomitants—which I call the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model—lies at the very core of Avicenna’s epistemology and ontology and represents the main framework through which his philosophy should be interpreted. The *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model is applied not only to a logical context, whence it first originated, but also, remarkably, to the ontological and theological contexts, where it is used to differentiate between various senses and modes of existence, to explain causality, and to solve conundrums focusing on God’s relation to the world. The process of ontologizing these various logical distinctions and relationships goes hand in hand with a re-configuration of the notion of existence (*wujūd*), which, for Avicenna, is modulated in nature (*tashkīk*), and which therefore applies differently to quiddity taken in itself

and to the realization of its concomitants. In that sense, the study intends to bring together Avicenna's logic and ontology in a manner that exposes their foundational interrelationship in his system.

Another factor that enabled Avicenna to articulate an original theory of the ontology of essence was his uncompromising and adamant recognition of mental existence as a valid and self-contained ontological realm. His position on this issue implies that intelligible objects in the human and divine intellects exist in a robust sense and possess a truer and prior mode of existence. Coupled with his earnest engagement with late-antique Greek philosophical sources as well as Islamic theological texts, especially those emanating from the Bahshamite tradition,¹⁴ this interest led Avicenna to advance the discussion of intelligible being as a foundational principle of reality. On my view, Avicenna's ontology of quiddity and his theory of its intelligible and irreducible existence should be regarded as a turning point in the history of philosophy in the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions, since it drastically re-oriented and profoundly shaped subsequent discussions of essence and its relation to existence. What is more, it decisively validated a full-blown theory not only of mental existence generally speaking, but more specifically of the intelligible existence of pure mental objects, whose repercussions can be intuited in the works of many later scholars, such as Duns Scotus (d. 1308 CE), Gabriel Vasquez (d. 1604 CE), and Francisco Suárez (d. 1617 CE). Avicenna's daring theories opened a new horizon for a purely abstract and theoretical mode of reflection of mental objects that had not been previously envisaged in Islamic intellectual history.

My intention in writing this book is to provide a synthesis of much of the recent scholarship on the topic that can be easily consulted by students and experts alike as well as an analytical and source critical study on a crucial concept of Avicenna's philosophy. My approach is therefore twofold: synthetic and synoptic, on the one hand, and critical and analytical, on the other. The overarching aim is to provide a comprehensive and fresh interpretation of the role of pure quiddity in Avicenna's metaphysics and epistemology by approaching the Avicennian corpus as a whole and by providing a detailed examination of the key concepts and technical terms at play. In order to reach this objective, I collate key passages bearing on the issue of quiddity gleaned from the entire Avicennian corpus, translate them into English, and examine them in a comparative manner, thereby providing readers with an opportunity to reflect critically on these excerpts within the confines of a single study. My aim is to be as inclusive as possible, both in terms of the relevant texts brought within the fold of the discussion and of the scope of the analysis. There are two factors motivating this approach. First, Avicenna discourses on quiddity in itself in an array of texts pertaining to the disciplines of logic, psychology, and metaphysics. In general, he does not treat this issue in a systematic and sustained fashion in any one of these works, and

¹⁴ By the Bahshamite or Bahshamiyyah tradition, I mean the theological current that based itself on the works and doctrines of the Mu'tazilite thinker Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 933 CE).

his comments on quiddity are typically integrated in a broader philosophical discussion having to do chiefly with existence, logic, noetics, the universals, or some other pointed topic. One exception is *Metaphysics* V.1, where Avicenna provides what is perhaps his most focused and cogent account of the epistemological and ontological dimensions of pure quiddity. But even then, V.1 is primarily a discussion of the universal concepts (*al-kulliyāt*), or rather, as its title purports, of ‘common things’ (*al-umūr al-‘āmmah*), and the mental concomitants that are attached to them. In view of this, juxtaposing the key passages that bear on the issue in a systematic manner with the aim of studying Avicenna’s terminology and intent seems a desideratum, as only a comparative and synthetic approach to the evidence might result in substantial headway. What is more, the issue of quiddity bridges the fields of logic, psychology, metaphysics, and theology in a way that makes it impossible to explore its implications without a thorough consideration of the interplay between these various disciplines. Accordingly, a reconstruction of the master’s doctrine that relies on his entire corpus and these various disciplines presents itself as the most auspicious path to tread. The following analysis will pay particular attention to Avicenna’s logical treatises—notably *Introduction*, *Categories*, and *Demonstration of The Cure*, as well as the logical section of *Pointers*—on key metaphysical works by the master—notably from *The Cure*, *Salvation*, and *Pointers*—as well as on psychological works and the little studied *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*. In addition I rely quite heavily on the later works *Notes* and *Discussions*, which provide fascinating insight into the master’s philosophy, and whose relevance for the study of Avicenna’s thought has not been fully exploited.

The second reason for adopting a wide scope of analysis has to do with the state of the secondary literature. Although many insightful studies have been published on the topic of essence in Avicenna’s philosophy, when it comes to pure quiddity specifically and the various epistemological and ontological issues associated with it, scholars have typically focused on specific facets of the problem, with the result that the contemporary reader is faced with a dishearteningly disparate and fragmentary literature, in different languages to boot. The absence of a handy survey or recapitulatory article on the topic only compounds this problem.¹⁵ These studies typically zoom in on one aspect of the problem and usually omit to relate it to the greater picture in Avicenna’s philosophy.¹⁶ One argument I make in this book is

15 The best starting point to obtain a general understanding of the problem remains Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, but the ontological and epistemological issues related to pure quiddity are not explored in any depth in this book. Benevich, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz,’* provides a brief summary of some aspects of the problem.

16 Adopting a comprehensive approach is particularly important, because there has been a tendency in the past scholarship to compartmentalize issues that prove to be, upon closer examination, inter-related and whose study must be undertaken collectively for a general picture of Avicenna’s views to emerge. Scholars have in general dealt with the logical and epistemological aspects of quiddity in itself in isolation of its theological and metaphysical aspects. They have prioritized either the ‘divine’

that Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity is a cornerstone of his entire philosophical system and ties together his epistemology, noetics, ontology, and theology. In view of this, the results reached by previous studies need to be compared and their interrelationship and compatibility examined in detail. Building on these studies, I engage in a project of terminological and conceptual disambiguation of the notions of quiddity and existence in Avicenna, as well as of a set of other related notions that pertain to quiddity, such as oneness, priority, and universality. This implies, to begin with, an analysis of the various terms Avicenna uses to refer to quiddity in itself, quiddity in the mind, and quiddity in the concrete world. This task is not only crucial to reach a proper understanding of Avicenna's doctrine of pure quiddity; it is also a requisite step in the long-term project of reconstructing the history of the reception of Avicenna's ideas in the postclassical period, where the nature of quiddity and its relation to mental existence served as one of the dividing lines between schools and thinkers. In most cases, these debates were propped on intricate terminological distinctions derived directly from Avicenna's works. As will be stressed on repeated occasions, Avicenna's choice of terms when describing quiddity is thoughtful and deliberate and represents a decisive element of the problem. Yet, the rich and multifaceted technical vocabulary he taps into in order to describe pure quiddity has been conveyed in English by means of a limited and often misleading set of terms, which have furthermore not been subjected to analytical scrutiny. Modern translators and interpreters have often relied on the expression 'quiddity in itself' in their works, without however fully clarifying its meaning and using it to gloss over a number of Arabic terms and locutions. As a result, Avicenna's philosophical language and doctrines have sometimes been unintentionally distorted through oversimplification. To this focus on terminology, I add an emphasis on philology. As I try to show, deter-

context of the pure quiddities or the human epistemological context, with the result that these two perspectives have often been divorced from one another. A few examples will suffice to show this: Marmura's remarkable and groundbreaking studies (Quiddity and Universality; Avicenna's Chapter on Universals) focus mostly, if not exclusively, on quiddity and universality in the mind and, hence, on the mental concepts. Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, 107–125, for his part focuses mostly on quiddity in the concrete world and how it relates to the mind. In contrast, Goichon, *La distinction*, and Rashed, Ibn 'Adī, are more interested in the divine and theological implications of this issue. As for Benevise, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*, he distances himself from these theological considerations and limits his discussion to the mereological existence of quiddity in the mind and the concrete world. Hence, the issues of (a) the status of quiddity in itself in the human mind and its connection to human cognition and epistemology, (b) its existence in the concrete world, (c) whether and how it exists in the divine mind, and (d) its relation to divine causation and creation, have in general been treated separately in the past, even though they are intertwined and must be tackled alongside one another if one is to make serious headway on this matter. With that being said, it should be stressed that the overwhelming majority of Avicenna's comments pertaining to quiddity in itself define it as a notion in the human mind, not in the divine mind, so that it is primarily from this angle that the inquiry should be pursued, at least initially. Only after its status in the human mind has been clarified can the corollary question of how it relates to God and the separate intellects be tackled. These points account for the structure of the present book.

mining the correct Arabic syntax and grammar of a passage can impact on its overall meaning and interpretation, sometimes in drastic ways. A telling example related to essence is a famous passage of *Metaphysics* V.I, which, on my view, has been misinterpreted largely on philological grounds and, it would appear also, to further a particular interpretation of Avicenna that complies with the status quo of the nonexistence of pure essence (see section II.2.4).

In parallel to this exercise in terminological disambiguation, I articulate a contextualist approach and attempt to connect Avicenna's views with regard to several major philosophical traditions.¹⁷ This—I believe—is a necessary step to generate adequate philosophical framing for his ideas. The first is the Greco-Arabic philosophical context, which is of course the main tradition within which Avicenna is operating and from which he is drawing. This tradition spans from Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) to the master himself and includes many Peripatetic and Neoplatonic works, some of which were translated and adapted from Greek and Syriac to Arabic, others of which were composed in Arabic by some of Avicenna's predecessors. One central claim of this book is that Avicenna's ontology of essence arose from the convergence of two problematics¹⁸ he inherited from this Greek background: first, Aristotle's discussion of being in *Metaphysics* and especially his theory of 'core-related' or 'focal homonymy'; and second, the late-antique discussions on the universals and common things. Avicenna not only elaborated considerably on Aristotle's ontology and theory of focal meaning, but also—as hinted at by the very title of *Metaphysics* V.I, "On General Things and the Manner [or Mode] of their Existence" (*Fī l-umūr al-‘āmmah wa-kayfiyyat wujūdihā*)—proceeded to examine how existence relates to the various aspects of the universals and common things. In this regard, I pay particular attention to the late-antique philosophical background, which subjected Aristotle's ideas to a process of sustained transformation and elaboration, and also engendered many innovative theories that themselves in turn contributed to shaping Arabic philosophy. Illustrative of the significance of this late-antique legacy is Avicenna's own commentary

17 In embracing this contextualist approach, I take inspiration from Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*, which masterfully combines an analysis of *kalām* with Greek and Arabic philosophical sources. Other examples embodying this type of approach are de Libera, *La querelle*, and idem, *L'art*, which merge the voices of ancient Greek, Arabic, and Latin thinkers. Given the present state of our knowledge, it seems no longer possible to approach Avicenna's works and thought by looking only at the Greek philosophical heritage in Islam. Avicenna was also heavily indebted to, and engaged in a direct dialogue with, various groups of theologians, especially Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite theologians. In addition, I believe that the Latin Scholastics were careful readers of Avicenna and have valuable things to say—and this, in spite of the language divide and chronological gap that separates them from the master. Likewise, modern studies written on the *Avicenna latinus*, such as those by Pini and Porro, can be fruitfully consulted and integrated into the analysis.

18 I am aware that this term is rarely used in English in a non-technical, non-philosophical context. However, it adequately points to the cluster of philosophical issues that are articulated in, and characterize, the Avicennian corpus and that were bequeathed to the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic intellectual traditions, where they enjoyed rich and complex intellectual developments.

on Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, which contains *in nuce* some of the main philosophical issues relating to quiddity that Avicenna amplifies in his other writings. But the master's reliance on this tradition extends beyond this single commentary and pertains to the general legacy of the discussion of the universals (sing., τὸ καθόλου) and common things (sing., τὸ κοινόν) that had unfolded in the Greek Neoplatonic and Peripatetic circles. Avicenna's own doctrines on quiddity and universality should be seen not only as echoing and perpetuating, but also frequently as building on and re-orienting, the debate about the common things that one finds in the works of prominent Greek thinkers. The importance of the late-antique discussion about the universals and common things has been consistently underestimated when approaching Avicenna's theory of quiddity.¹⁹ Yet, it represents a crucial piece of the puzzle and one that calls for scrutiny. Thus, I offer a detailed exposition of how Avicenna reacted to specific issues his predecessors put forth, as well as how he largely embraced the conceptual framework he inherited from this late-antique tradition and implemented it in his analysis of quiddity. Building on a crucial study by Marwan Rashed, I also consider in detail how Avicenna's views on essence and the universals relate to those of his Christian predecessor Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 974 CE), who was himself an heir to and interpreter of late-antique philosophy.²⁰ I contend that Yaḥyā's theory of essential being (*al-wujūd al-dhātī*) had a profound impact on Avicenna.

But there are other major intellectual currents that informed Avicenna's thought, one of which is the early Arabic theological tradition. Recent studies have shown the extent of his debt to the early *kalām* debates, especially regarding the relation between 'the thing' (*al-shay'*) and 'the existent' (*al-mawjūd*).²¹ In this connection, another important claim made in the present book is that Avicenna's theory of quiddity in itself is heavily indebted in its ontological and epistemological dimensions to the doctrines of the *mutakallimūn*, and especially the Baṣrian Mu'tazilite School that coalesced around the figure of Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 933 CE). The latter's ontology and theology, as well as those of his main followers, such as 'Abd al-Jabbār, Abū Rashīd al-Nīshāpūrī, Ibn Mattawayh, and Mānkdim Shashdīw, can illuminate some important features of Avicenna's doctrine and represent some of the key sources underlying the master's metaphysics. The relation between Avicenna and the Bahshamite theological school, however, is nuanced and complicated: it is informed by processes of adaption and transformation, as well as by an attitude of opposition to certain of their ontological and theological doctrines. Building on recent studies, I delve into the issue of how Avicenna's ontology relates to the Bahshamite theory of the states or modes (*aḥwāl*), which was a crucial aspect of the metaphysical discussions and

19 One notable exception is de Libera, *La querelle*, and idem, *L'art*, 499–607, who lucidly contextualizes Avicenna's theory of quiddity vis-à-vis the ancient philosophical discourse on the universals.

20 Rashed, Ibn 'Adī.

21 See notably Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, which builds on the insight provided in Jolivet, *Aux origines*.

debates going on at the time.²² My analysis highlights the debt that Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity owes to the discussion about essence (*dhāt*), attributes (*ṣifāt*), and states (*aḥwāl*) emanating from these Mu'tazilite circles, and in particular to the Bahshamite theory of the 'Attribute of the Essence' (*ṣifat al-dhāt*).²³

The overarching aim of my approach is to situate Avicenna's theory of quiddity in itself at the confluence of the Greek and Arabic traditions and, more precisely, at the junction of these two broad intellectual debates, i.e., the ancient philosophical debate about the universals and the *kalām* debate about the ontological status of 'the thing' (*shay*) and 'the state' (*ḥāl*). These trends, I argue, deeply informed Avicenna's doctrine of essence, although the master also steered the discussion in new directions and tackled issues that had previously been ignored or left unexplored. One major contribution Avicenna adds to the Greek and Arabic legacy he embraced is a vivid and remarkable interest in the nature, conditions, and implications of mental or intellectual existence, of what it means to exist in the mind or intellect (both human and divine). The implementation of Avicenna's method and philosophical priorities on this inherited doctrinal substrate, combined with his inquisitive and dynamic style of philosophizing, led him to drastically reshape the material he received from the Greek philosophers and the Muslim theologians. This process ultimately culminated in the elaboration of an idiosyncratic philosophical system, of which pure quiddity represents one of its most seminal and outstanding features.

The third and fourth traditions postdate the master and consist of the post-Avicennian Arabic tradition and the Latin scholastic tradition respectively.²⁴ What, it may be asked, can be gained from a retrospective reading of Avicenna's works through the eyes of later authors? Invoking these multifaceted and highly transformative intellectual traditions in my analysis alongside the late-antique background and early Arabic theology is admittedly ambitious and also risky from a methodological perspective. In spite of this, it can also be seen as a highly desirable and analytically productive venture. Gaining insight into what some of the most brilliant philo-

22 See especially Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*; some insight is to be gained also in Alami, *L'ontologie modale*; and Benevich, *The Classical*.

23 Building on the insight provided in Dhanani, *Rocks*, I will attempt to expose Avicenna's familiarity with Mu'tazilite sources. Dhanani argues that Avicenna consulted some of 'Abd al-Jabbār's physical works and that he was cognizant of the intra-Mu'tazilite debates on atomism. In addition to this doctrinal aspect, there are some hints that the master interacted directly with Mu'tazilite theologians. One hint is Avicenna's possible exposure to Mu'tazilite *kalām* during his formative years as a student of *fiqh* with Ismā'il al-Zāhid in Bukhara. The latter was a specialist of Ḥanafī *fiqh*, and according to Dhanani and Bulliet, most of the Ḥanafī scholars in this region and during this time adhered to Mu'tazilite theological views; see Dhanani, *Rocks*, 129, and note 7; Gutas, *Avicenna*, 13, and note 11. Another element of some significance is Avicenna's potential encounter with 'Abd al-Jabbār during his stay in Rayy between 1013 and 1015; see Dhanani, *Rocks*; and Gutas, *Avicenna*, 296.

24 Recent studies have shown that Avicenna exercised some influence on the Jewish tradition as well, but I refrain here, mostly for reasons of space, from investigating this issue and leave it to others to examine how the Avicennian theory of essence was received by later Jewish philosophers.

ophers in the centuries after Avicenna had to say about his doctrine of quiddity can only enrich and benefit an assessment of the subject. For one thing, these Arabic and Latin commentators give their own versions and interpretations of Avicenna's theories, thereby opening alternate interpretive perspectives. In this respect, it is remarkable—cultural contexts notwithstanding—to what degree the Latin and Arabic philosophical interpretations sometimes concur and overlap, even when these thinkers were oblivious to each other's existence. One salient example concerns the status of quiddity in concrete beings and the realist metaphysical interpretation of Avicenna's doctrine that appears to have been articulated in postclassical Islam and in the medieval Latin West. This in itself might tell us something important about Avicenna's theories that goes beyond the mere history of their reception. If something of a consensus can be reconstructed from these later sources on specific points of doctrine (if not on major philosophical themes), it would carry some interpretive weight or in any case would deserve our careful consideration. But quite apart from this tantalizing possibility, these later Latin and Arabic philosophers and interpreters of Avicenna raise fascinating questions and issues pertaining to quiddity and the universals and develop conceptual distinctions whose analysis can enrich our understanding of the Avicennian texts. While the Latin reception of Avicenna's metaphysics (including his views on quiddity and common nature) is well known and has been acknowledged and studied for a long time, the impact of Avicenna's doctrine of essence on the postclassical Arabic philosophical tradition from the twelfth century onward represents a massive field of study that still awaits detailed research.²⁵

The present study can be regarded as an experiment in contextual analysis, in that it attempts to bring together these various philosophical contexts and intellectual traditions, which are crucial to the interpretation of Avicenna, but which have often been dissociated from one another in scholarly works. The main incentive for this multi-contextual approach has its roots in the unique historical position that Avicenna himself occupies at the crossroads of the Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Persian, and Arabic philosophical traditions. Like so many other aspects of his thought, Avicenna's contribution to the philosophical problems of quiddity and the universals marks a turning point for later discussions of these subjects. Whether through direct influence or by way of reacting to his doctrines, the master influenced in one way or other most metaphysical accounts of the relation of essence and existence formulated during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries (and beyond), and this not only in the Islamic world, but in medieval Europe as well. In the Islamic world, the framework he elaborated regarding the various distinctions of quiddity and his emphasis on its intellectual abstractness proved particularly momentous and transformative. Whether one reads Maimonides (d. 1204 CE), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210

²⁵ In fact, when it comes to quiddity in particular, and with the exception of a cluster of studies by Toshihiko Izutsu (mentioned in the bibliography), there is a paucity of literature on the topic.

CE), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274 CE), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 CE), Henry of Ghent (d. 1293 CE), or Duns Scotus, Avicenna's views regarding the epistemological and ontological ramifications of quiddity are foundational for these thinkers' conceptualization of this philosophical problem, and the technical terms and concepts the master deployed reappear in one form or other in their works. What is more, his works were the funnel through which much of the late-antique discussion about the universals was transmitted to the postclassical Islamic tradition, albeit in a thoroughly revised and 'Avicennized' form. This justifies taking these various contexts into account, be it only to highlight parallels and commonalities in the reception of Avicennian philosophy and to identify some of the conceptual turning points in the later debates about quiddity. In one sense, these later discourses on essence can be regarded as variations on a common theme that finds its blueprint and main source of inspiration—if not its very philosophical origin—in the Avicennian works.

The present book consists of five main chapters. The first provides a survey of the literature, raises the main conceptual issues to be discussed, and proposes some new methodological ideas. The last four each cover a 'context of existence' in Avicenna's philosophy. Chapter II focuses on the domain of human mental or intellectual existence; chapter III on quiddity in the concrete world; and chapters IV and V on the divine context, which includes God and the separate intellects. This tripartition reflects the Neoplatonic scheme 'before,' 'in,' and 'after multiplicity,' to which Avicenna himself refers at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12. However, I have reversed this order, beginning with quiddity in the human mind and ending with a discussion of the pure quiddities in God. The justification for this inversion is rooted in Avicenna's own works. Most of the information Avicenna provides regarding quiddity in itself is found in an epistemological, psychological, and logical context. In these cases, the emphasis is on the mental or intellectual dimension of quiddity and of how it can be conceived by the human mind. What is more, the master often begins his metaphysical inquiry, as in *Metaphysics* I.5, with an analysis of what is better known to us, which consists of the primary notions, among which is 'the thing' (*al-shay'*), which is closely related to and a shorthand for quiddity, even though it may not correspond to it exactly. It makes sense, then, that the inquiry into the ontological status of quiddity should begin with its status in the human mind.

Chapter I provides what I consider to be a necessary survey of the existing state of the literature regarding Avicenna's theory of essence and existence and especially regarding the pointed issue of the ontological status of pure quiddity. Given the interconnectedness of the various issues at stake, as well as the intricate nature of the interpretations that have been proposed regarding pure quiddity, it is a requisite to synthesize this vast pool of information in order to reach a clearer understanding of the accomplishments that have been made thus far, as well as the various desiderata, challenges, and pitfalls that still lie ahead. Two general points emerge from this review: first, scholars have sometimes proposed enticing interpretations of discrete aspects of the problem, while failing to connect them to the larger picture,

thereby amputating Avicenna's theory of essence. Second, the survey suggests that, in many cases, the existing conceptual and theoretical framework to study essence and existence is inadequate, because it does not allow for interpretive nuances and rather crudely opposes two notions whose interface and 'relationship' is highly intricate and nuanced. Hence, in addition to reviewing much of the scholarship on the issue, I propose some novel conceptual and theoretical distinctions that can aid in the present quest to bring clarity and precision to the problem.

In chapter II, which is devoted exclusively to the relation between quiddity and mental existence, I argue that Avicenna defends the view that quiddity in itself is conceivable and amounts to a distinct intellectual consideration, form, and meaning in the human mind. Pure quiddity exists in the mind in abstraction from its mental concomitants and accidents and as a pure intelligible object. This means that quiddity in itself possesses its own ontological status in the human intellect, which is distinct from that of the complex or synthetic universal concept, which it nevertheless underlies and forms a part of. This thesis goes against the standard view in Avicennian studies that intellectual existents are exclusively limited to a single kind of object, namely, the universal concepts that are potentially or actually predicated of exterior beings. Furthermore, the analysis underlines the need to differentiate between 'quidditative distinctness' and 'quidditative irreducibility': pure quiddity exists intelligibly, both on its own in a distinct manner and as an irreducible part of the complex universal concept.

The purpose of chapter III is to show that Avicenna upholds a moderate kind of ontological realism relying on a mereological interpretation of quiddity, according to which it can be said to exist as an irreducible part of the concrete individual. This section underscores the close interconnections between Avicenna's mereological, hylomorphic, and logical distinctions. It also contends that Avicenna adopted, but considerably modified, the threefold Neoplatonic scheme of the universals, which includes the universals 'in matter' or 'in multiplicity,' and which he combined with Alexander of Aphrodisias's (fl. ca. 200 CE) theory of nature to elaborate a doctrine of immanent formalism. These late-antique ideas were nevertheless adapted in light of Avicenna's view that pure quiddity is something (strictly speaking) distinct from the mental universal, as well as of a redefinition of the various senses of universality, one of which can be applied (in a qualified sense) to quiddity in the concrete world. Although he rejects the strong realism associated with the Platonic forms, Avicenna articulates a theory of the irreducible existence of quiddity as a principle within concrete beings, which is intended to mirror its existence in the mind. In addition, I argue, following Jon McGinnis, that pure quiddity lies at the root of Avicenna's theory of abstraction and establishes a necessary correspondence between the ontological and epistemic planes. Consequently, pure quiddity assumes the role of an ontological and epistemological constant in Avicenna's philosophy. This not only helps to explain his theories of the distinction between essence and existence and of causal complexity as these apply to the extramental world. It also

opens a fresh perspective regarding the vexed problem of abstraction and emanation in Avicenna's works.

Chapter IV analyzes Avicenna's theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) and seeks to show that some of the modes and senses of existence relate directly to quiddity. It argues that pure quiddity possesses its own special mode of existence, which is constant, irreducible, simple, prior, and, for these reasons, also 'divine.' Essence possesses only a single mode of intelligible existence, and this regardless of its 'ontological contexts,' that is, regardless of whether it is a part of a complex being (a material and concrete individual, a universal in the mind), or whether it exists distinctly as a concept in the human mind. This implies a sharp distinction between three different modes of existence in Avicenna: the realized existence associated with the concomitants and accidents of complex contingent beings; the special mode of existence of quiddity; and God's special mode of existence. The last two are presented as ontological 'exceptions' in Avicenna's philosophy, inasmuch as they differ from the mode of existence of all other entities, which is complex, caused, and contingent.

Finally, in chapter V, I argue that the pure quiddities exist in all the divine intellects, starting with God and ending with the Agent Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*). The mode of existence of pure quiddity is fully identical with God's essence, but becomes differentiated on purely noetical grounds in the other divine intellects. In this connection, Avicenna's reliance and elaboration on Neoplatonic theories are highlighted. Locating the pure quiddities—as opposed to the complex mental universals that are the objects of human intellection—in God and identifying them with His objects of thought helps to solve many seemingly intractable problems in Avicenna's theology, such as his claims concerning God's knowledge of universals and particulars, as well as the issue of how God can know a plurality of objects without an ontological plurality actually existing in the divine essence. The claim that the pure quiddities exist identically with the divine essence is coherent, because they are in this state devoid of all concomitants (*lawāzim*) and attributes (including possibility, numerical oneness, and plurality), which are the hallmark of intelligible multiplicity. This makes them the only valid candidates for this kind of divine knowledge and existence.

By building on the cumulative insights of classical and postclassical Islamic, medieval Latin, and modern interpretations of Avicenna, I argue that pure quiddity possesses a unique and special mode of existence, which manifests itself differently depending on the ontological contexts at hand: it exists (a) irreducibly in concrete beings and in universal concepts in the human mind together with external concomitants and accidents; (b) in the human mind in a mode distinct from the complex universal; (c) in the separate intellects, including the Agent Intellect; and (d) in a divine mode that is fully identical with God's essence. I aim in this manner to formulate an alternative solution to the essence/existence conundrum: the distinction is conceptual and real, albeit in different ways, and both the scholastic theory of essential being sometimes attributed to Avicenna and the theory of the co-extensionality of

essence and existence are correct and also compatible in ways that had not hitherto been envisaged. Finally, I show that Avicenna is in many ways a Neoplatonist when it comes to his doctrine of the universals and God's knowledge, in a manner that has not been fully appreciated, although he also innovated considerably on the ancient models and eventually fashioned an innovative and daring system out of this philosophical legacy. What emerges from the study is that Avicenna's theory of the ontology of quiddity represents a special 'moment' with regard to the slow maturation of his philosophical system and, more generally, of the history of philosophy. It is a special moment, because, for reasons I expound in the book, it is a doctrine that, in its details and very sophistication, is idiosyncratic to Avicenna and in particular to the works of his middle period, especially *The Cure*. Yet, at the same time, it is also a 'moment' in the sense of a turning point, because the main features of his theory exerted a profound influence on later treatments of essence and outlined some of the main problematics and issues that were later discussed in the Arabic, Persian, and Latin commentaries on the master's works. Indeed, Avicenna's doctrines influenced entire generations of postclassical Muslim and medieval Christian scholars, who conceived of quiddity, existence, and the universals partly through the lens of his philosophical legacy.

Chapter I:

Pure Quiddity in Context

1 Introducing the problem

Quiddity or essence, for Avicenna, designates the ‘whatness’ or ‘what-it-isness’ of a thing, its essential structure and principle, as well as its meaning and intelligibility to the mind. As such, it is what makes conception or conceptualization (*taṣawwur*) possible. Quiddity is what is referred to by the definition (*ḥadd*), according to which a thing is what it is and not something else, regardless of the mode in which it exists. In other words, the definition informs us about its thingness (*shay’iyyah*) in abstraction from that thing’s existence, that is, whether it exists and how or in what mode it exists.¹ Quiddity as such is apprehended as a unitary

¹ This is the general definition of quiddity embraced by virtually all Arabic philosophers and by many theologians as well. Avicenna provides definitions of *māhiyyah* in various places, especially in the sections dealing with logic (see, for example, *Salvation*, 12–13; *Pointers*, vol. 1, 219–232; *Logic of the Easterners*, 15–17). There he explains that the reply to the question ‘What is it?’ (*mā huwa*)—the Arabic term *māhiyyah* is derived from this expression—needs to include the various essential (*dhātiyyah*) or constitutive (*muqawwimah*) elements of the definition for it to be complete and accurate. Additionally, there are various ways of framing the answer to this question, the most common or direct of which is the definition through genus and differentia. In this manner, one refers to the species through its constitutive features, such as when one answers ‘rational animal’ in reply to the question of what a human being is, where ‘animal’ indicates the genus and ‘rational’ the differentia. The species (*naw’*), for Avicenna, is what corresponds most directly and fully to the actual existent and the primary substance and is therefore the recommended way of elucidating the quiddity of a thing. For it includes, in the case of human, “substantiality, corporeity, faculties of nourishment, growth and reproduction, of sense, movement, speech and others” (Avicenna, *Salvation*, 13.3–5; translation by Ahmed in Avicenna’s *Deliverance*, 9). In other words, it contains all the differentiae that distinguish human beings from other species of animals. Alternatively, one can explain the quiddity of a thing through reference to genus alone, such as when one says of a human being that it is an animal, or of a human being and a horse that they are both ‘animal’; yet, this approach is more general and less precise, since it does not include all the essential features and differentiae that characterize humanness or horseness as a species. It is important to note that the same thing can be both genus and species depending on the question asked and on the kind of quiddity that is defined. Thus, ‘animal’ is a genus in the definition of ‘human being,’ but it is itself a species when included in the definition of ‘body,’ since it qualifies or specifies generic body into animal body, which in turn is a genus for the various animal species (see *Salvation*, 15–16). One important Avicennian specificity is added to this relatively standard logical account: the master distinguishes *sensu stricto* between quiddity in itself and ‘being a species’ or ‘being a genus,’ that is to say, between the pure nature (e. g., humanness or animalness) and universal genusness and universal speciesness. For genusness (*jinsiyyah*) and speciesness (*naw’iyyah*) are added as exterior intentions or meanings (*ma’āni*) to pure quiddity in the mind. In itself, horseness is neither universal nor genus. I shall discuss these important points later on in detail. Much later in time, the lexicologist al-Tahānawī (fl. 1740s), *Dictionary*, 1423–4, distinguishes between the views of the logicians (*al-mantiqiyyin*), according to whom quiddity is the answer to the question “What is it?” (*bi-mā huwa*), and those of

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idea and meaning (*ma'nā*) in the mind. It is what represents a thing's essential or foundational nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and true reality (*ḥaqīqah*).² This is because quiddity contains, and is constituted by, a set of internal and essential components that determine its very nature and, thus, the nature of an existent thing as well. These are what Avicenna calls the constitutive elements or constituents (*muqawwimāt*) of quiddity, which are its inner, essential, and formal constituents. These are sharply distinguished from (a) the external concomitants (*lawāzim*), which, in contrast, are non-constitutive (*ghayr muqawwimah*) and hence do not enter into the quidditative core, although they necessarily accompany quiddity when a thing actually exists; and (b) the accidents proper (*a'rād*), which are also external to quiddity, but do not necessarily attach to quiddity in existence and always remain separate from it.³

Thus, whereas the *muqawwimāt* are internal (sing., *dākhil*) to thingness, the *lawāzim* and *a'rād* are external (sing., *khārij*). These external attributes essentially follow the constituents and can always be conceptually dissociated from them. In Avicenna's epistemology, these external intentions in the mind include concomitants and accidents as diverse as universality and particularity, oneness and multiplicity, genusness and speciesness, actuality and potentiality, etc. Anything that does not enter into the constitutive core of quiddity will be external to it, either as a necessary concomitant, i.e., something that necessarily attaches to quiddity when a thing exists either in the mind or in concrete reality (e.g., oneness) or as an accident proper, i.e., something that may or may not attach to the essence, but which in any case remains essentially separable from quiddity even when a thing exists (e.g., musical in Socrates). By way of example, whereas shapeness (*shakl*, *shakliyyah*) is always constitutive of triangle, and thus one of its *muqawwimāt*, being 'one' triangle, existing concretely as an individual wooden triangle or in the mind as a universal triangle, or even having three angles equal to two right angles are all things that are external

the theologians and philosophers (*al-mutakallimīn wa-l-ḥukamā'*), according to whom it answers the question "What makes the thing what it is?" (*mā bi-hi l-shay' huwa*). This nuance is interesting inasmuch as it underlines the logical and ontological/causal implications of quiddity, both of which find important roots in the Arabic intellectual tradition in the works of Avicenna.

2 As I will show on various occasions throughout this study, the terms *māhiyyah*, *ṭabī'ah*, and *ḥaqīqah* are interrelated and often used interchangeably by Avicenna to designate essence, even though they may convey different nuances depending on the context.

3 For informative discussions of the term and notion of *lāzim*, see Goichon, *Lexique*, 364–369; Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 615–616; Lizzini, *Fluxus*, especially 557–561; Kalbarczyk, *Predication*; and Benevich, *Essentialität*. The last two authors focus mostly on the logical context. Although some scholars differentiate between the meanings of the terms *lāzim* and *lāḥiq*, it seems to me that Avicenna uses them quite loosely and interchangeably, so I treat them as broadly synonymous in this study. What is important for my purposes is that they express a state of externality or extrinsicity vis-à-vis pure quiddity; both the *lawāzim* and *lawāḥiq* are external to (*khārij*), non-constitutive of (*ghayr muqawwimah*), and follow and are entailed by (*lazima*, *laḥiqa*) essence. It should be noted that the term *lāzim/lawāzim* also appears frequently in the context of Avicenna's discussions of God, for which see De Smet and Sebtī, Avicenna's Philosophical Approach. I discuss this issue in detail in chapter V.

and concomitant to the pure quiddity ‘triangleness.’⁴ In brief, pure quiddity refers strictly to the internal constituents of essence, as well as to the unitary concept that emerges in the mind as a result of their essential and intrinsic relation. When used in this technical sense as meaning essence or quiddity, the Arabic term *māhiyyah* is the direct counterpart of a set of Greek expressions that Aristotle used in his metaphysics, and which are usually translated into English as ‘essence’: *τό τί ἐστι* (as in *Posterior Analytics* 89a32) and *τό τί ἦν εἶναι* (*Topics* 132a4 and *Metaphysics* 993a18 and 988a10). Although Avicenna inherited this concept from Greek philosophy thanks to the translation movements from Greek and Syriac to Arabic, he developed it considerably in his own philosophical reflection and teaching, thereby making a valuable contribution to metaphysics, and one which was to profoundly influence subsequent intellectual history in Islam and the Latin West. In his system, the concept of quiddity becomes a foundational concept, a metaphysical cornerstone, surpassed perhaps only (and arguably) by the concept of existence (*wujūd*).⁵

One of Avicenna’s major contributions to the philosophical discussion about quiddity he inherited from antiquity was his insistence on the fact that quiddity can be conceptually distinguished from any other consideration—even from the consideration of existence—and apprehended strictly in itself. This claim, or rather, the implications Avicenna teased out of it, proved to be epistemologically and metaphysically momentous, but they remain somewhat obscure and tantalizing, even though they have been the object of a considerable amount of scholarship. One important upshot of Avicenna’s view is that existence is not constitutive of quiddity and of the ‘whatness’ or essential core of a thing. We can reflect on the quiddity or thingness of a thing without broaching the question of whether that thing exists in actuality and in what mode (concrete or intellectual) it exists. To know the quiddity of horseness, horseness ‘in itself,’ is clearly a different kind of knowledge from knowing whether a particular horse exists in the concrete world. It is also distinct from the apprehension of the universal concept ‘horse’ in the mind, which is a single universal form that can be predicated of many (*maqūl ‘alā kathīrīn*). This distinction between the knowledge of essence and the knowledge of existence reflects two other sets of distinctions frequently encountered in Avicenna’s works: that between conception (*taṣawwur*) and assent or conviction (*taṣdīq*); and that between the ascertainment of quiddity (*taḥaqquq al-māhiyyah*) and the ascertainment of existence (*taḥaqquq al-wujūd*). According to Avicenna, then, there is a knowledge of quiddity that is ‘in

4 The triangle is one of Avicenna’s favorite examples to illustrate the relation between the constitutive elements and the external concomitants of essence, as well as the distinction between essence and existence; see *Introduction*, I.6, 34.10–15; *Categories*, II.1, 61–62; *Metaphysics* I.5, 31.5–9; *Pointers*, vol. 1, 182, 199; vols. 3–4, 441–442. The example of the triangle to discuss essence was used by Aristotle at *Posterior Analytics*, II.792b.14ff.

5 For the various Greek terms and expressions that lie behind the Arabic word *māhiyyah*, as well as for the relevant texts that informed this notion, see Afnan, *Philosophical Terminology*, 12–13, 274–276, and especially Endress, *Proclus arabus*, 79ff.

itself' or about quiddity 'and nothing else.' The object of this rarefied and fully abstract conception Avicenna calls 'pure quiddity' or 'quiddity in itself.' Everything that is not internal to it or constitutive of it, such as universality, oneness and multiplicity, actuality and potentiality, etc., and even existence (*wujūd*) itself, can be described as external intentions and concomitants that do not participate in its definition. This kind of abstract thinking is possible, because according to Avicenna the rational soul has the ability to analyze and synthesize concepts at will. Thanks to these mental operations, our mind can distinguish quiddity from other concepts and intentions and apprehend its pure meaning (*ma'nā*).

Avicenna's epistemological claims on behalf of quiddity have received considerable attention in the modern scholarship, where they have been discussed in connection with other important notions the master deploys in his works, especially universality and intentionality.⁶ If one peruses the modern historiography, one notices that the lion's share of the scholarly attention has fallen on the relationship between quiddity and existence, an issue that has ramifications not only with regard to human thought and mental existence, but also with regard to the concrete existence of extramental beings. According to Avicennian doctrine, existence is one of the non-constitutive concomitants that are entailed by quiddity and apply to it from the outside; hence, it does not enter into the definition of the 'whatness' of a thing, nor is it included in the very conception (*taṣawwur*) of quiddity. As an external concomitant (*lāzim*), attribute (*ṣifah*), and intention or meaning (*ma'nā*), however, it bears an ambiguous relationship with quiddity. In the modern historiography on Avicenna, this relationship has been described variably as an 'accident' or 'accidental,' as one of 'necessary concomitance,' 'co-relatedness,' and 'co-implicativeness,' or simply as a 'relationship.' These are notions that have most often been construed as indicating a purely 'conceptual' or 'logical' connection established by the mind. Whatever the case may be, these two concepts—quiddity and existence—make a distinct and irreducible intensional claim: they can be jointly apprehended and conceptually connected in the mind without ever fusing or losing their semantic and conceptual distinctiveness.⁷

The questions of how these notions relate to one another as metaphysical principles and what their status in concrete reality amounts to have been discussed from

⁶ See notably Izutsu, *Basic Problems*; Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*; idem, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*; Pini, *Absoluta*; Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*; and Tahiri, *Mathematics*, especially section 4.1. The most comprehensive treatment of essence in Avicenna conducted from an epistemological and logical perspective is now Benevich, *Essentialität*.

⁷ The only exception to this rule in Avicenna's philosophy is God or the First Cause, in whom quiddity and existence cannot be meaningfully separated, even at the purely conceptual level or as a mere consideration (*bi-l-i'tibār*). Accordingly, scholars have interpreted Avicenna as saying either that God has no quiddity or that His quiddity is identical with His existence, two formulations that are supported by the textual evidence from Avicenna's corpus. Either way, the key idea is that quiddity and existence do not amount to a duality in God, neither in reality, nor in the thinking mind.

the early reception of Avicenna's works in the Arabic and Latin traditions up to the modern scholarship on this thinker. Yet, in spite of remarkable contributions, the problem of the relationship between essence and existence continues to be among the most abstruse and difficult in Avicennian studies. It is also one that has for years divided—and continues to divide—scholarly opinion in a way that few other topics in the field of Arabic philosophy have.⁸ From a historical perspective, the seeds of this disagreement lie in the postclassical Islamic period and in the Latin Middle Ages, which were heirs to Avicenna's metaphysical doctrine. Starting shortly after Avicenna's death, disciples and detractors alike felt compelled to address his doctrine of essence and its relation to existence. Scholars stemming from the Arabic, Persian, Latin (and to a lesser extent, Hebrew) traditions formulated various answers to the problem in commentaries on the master's works as well as in independent treatises. In the process of commenting on the master, they often made the Avicennian essence/existence distinction—or rather their interpretation of it—the cornerstone of their own metaphysical system.

In this regard, the medieval and modern discussions revolving around the relationship of quiddity and existence are by no means based on a monolithic or homogeneous problematic. Rather, they consist of a set of distinct, albeit related, issues, all of which present their own character and difficulty. Three points in particular have proven profoundly fertile. The first is the issue of the intensionality of essence and existence, of their philosophical meaning and structural and semantic relationships. The second is the issue of their extensionality, the spectrum of entities or things these notions cover and whether these spectrums partly overlap, are identical, or differ altogether. Finally, there is the more specifically Avicennian problem of the epistemological and ontological status of quiddity in itself, a topic to which Avicenna alludes on various occasions in his works, but which he never analyzes in a systematic way.⁹ These three issues are all interrelated. The second issue of extensionality obviously hinges on the meaning of 'quiddity' and 'existence,' whereas problem three is directly dependent on the other two, especially on the second one: if quiddity is said to be extensionally broader than existence, or if not all quiddities are actual existents, then what is its ontological status? In other words, what is the ontological status of those instances of quiddity that cannot be directly correlated with an actual

8 This is true not only of modern scholars, but also of some of the postclassical followers and critics of Avicenna in Islam, who devoted much attention to the master's doctrine of essence and existence. For an overview of some of these developments in the post-Avicennian tradition with a particular focus on essence, see Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*; and idem, *Towards a Genealogy*. Other major doctrinal points of contention in the modern literature on Avicenna focus on the place and nature of intuition and abstraction in his epistemology, on his views on divine knowledge, and on the place of mysticism in his works.

9 For the distinction between the extensionality and intensionality of essence and existence, and for an insightful analysis of these notions, see the groundbreaking study by Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*.

existent? While there is a certain scholarly consensus concerning the first point (intensionality), there is only partial agreement concerning the second (extensionality), and major disagreements concerning the third (the epistemic and ontological status of pure quiddity). It is accordingly with the last two problems, and especially with the third problem, that this study will deal. In the meantime, additional comments regarding these three core issues of Avicennian metaphysics are in order.

The intensional or semantic distinction between quiddity and existence is recognized by virtually all medieval and modern interpreters as constituting one of the foundational tenets of Avicenna's philosophy. As scholars have shown, this question, as it is framed in the Avicennian works, was informed by two distinct traditions. On the one hand, there is the Aristotelian contribution, as encapsulated especially in *Metaphysics* and the appendant commentaries on this work. These texts, with which Avicenna was thoroughly acquainted, are always in the background of his own philosophical analysis. Even though Aristotle does not press the distinction between quiddity and existence in the way Avicenna does, some passages of the Aristotelian corpus, such as *Posterior Analytics* II.7, are certainly at the origin of Avicenna's reflection on the subject. In addition, scholars have suggested that some late-antique Peripatetic and Neoplatonic texts could have influenced Avicenna's approach to this question: these include, among others, Alexander's *Quaestio* 1.3 and 1.11 and passages from *Theology of Aristotle*. Thus, many of the Greek texts that were rendered in Arabic and consulted in classical philosophical circles in Islam informed the discussion concerning essence and existence.¹⁰

At any rate, Avicenna's novelty in this regard was not merely to distinguish between the 'whatness' and 'thatness' of an existing thing, that is to say, between *what* a thing is (i. e., its essence) and *that* a thing is (i. e., its actual existence). Rather, it lies in the claim that we can conceive of quiddity in complete abstraction from existence, that is, by omitting to consider whether a thing exists or not in actuality. Knowing what horseness is and the definition of horseness does not in any way require the awareness that this individual horse exists in the extramental world. This realization encouraged Avicenna to enshrine mental existence as a particular ontological category that stands side by side to concrete existence. This in turn had the effect of shifting the focus of the analysis of quiddity away from extramental ontology to mental ontology. By the same token, however, this approach posed the acute question of how quiddity relates not to existence *simpliciter*, or to concrete, extramental existence, but specifically to mental existence. Avicenna—and virtually every thinker

10 The literature on essence and existence in Avicenna and on the relation of his theories to the Greek philosophical tradition is immense and cannot be cited in full. Here I mention only some representative studies in order to orient the reader: Goichon, *La distinction*; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*; Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*; idem, *The Distinction*; Belo, *Essence*; Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*; Lizzini, *Ibn Sīnā's Metaphysics*; eadem, *Wuğūd-Mawğūd*. This study will focus on the much more narrow issue of pure quiddity in Avicenna, and especially on its ontological status. Relevant studies pertaining to this topic will be cited in the course of the analysis.

who flourished in his stead—struggled to clarify exactly what this view entailed in terms of how quiddity relates to mental existence and whether it can be said to possess some kind of intellectual entitativity.

While the late-antique Greek background was decisive for Avicenna's preoccupation with essence and existence, his approach was also informed by the early Arabic theological tradition (*kalām*), which discussed at length the relation between 'the existent' (*al-mawjūd*), 'the nonexistent' (*al-ma'dūm*), and 'the thing' (*al-shay'*), key terms that appear prominently in Avicenna's own metaphysical discussions.¹¹ The Arabic theologians had from an early stage onward initiated a discussion as to what constitutes the basic or primary entities and notions of reality. The *kalām* tradition was particularly influential in orienting Avicenna's approach to the issue of the extensionality of quiddity and existence, for a similar debate had flourished in Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite circles regarding whether 'the thing' encompassed both 'the existent' and 'the nonexistent' or only the former. While some, namely, the Ash'arites, claimed that 'the thing' and 'the existent' are identical and constitute primary conceptual notions as well as the actual building blocks of reality (i.e., all atoms or substances are 'things' and 'existents'), others, namely the Mu'tazilites, claimed that 'the thing' is extensionally greater than 'the existent' and inclusive of both it and 'the nonexistent.' This implies that 'things' can be divided into 'existent things' and 'nonexistent things,' a view that led to ontological conundrums regarding the status of 'the nonexistent thing.' As Wisnovsky and other scholars have shown, this specific *kalām* debate had an impact on Avicenna's terminology, on the way he frames the problem of essence, and even on the answers he formulated to the philosophical questions he found in the Greek and Arabic sources.¹²

Avicenna addresses the issues of intensionality and extensionality in earnest in what is probably his most famous work to date, *Metaphysics of The Cure*. Having clarified some key terms used in his general metaphysics (such as *shay'*, *mawjūd*, *wujūd ithbātī*, and *wujūd khāṣṣ*) in section I.5, Avicenna goes on to argue for the apparent co-extensionality, co-implication, and reciprocity of 'thing' (*shay'*) and 'existent' (*mawjūd*).¹³ Avicenna's comments on the relationship of these two notions are

11 The main study is Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, particularly chapters II.7, 8, and 13; see also Wisnovsky, *One Aspect*; idem, *Notes*; idem, *Avicenna*; Jolivet, *Aux origines*; Belo, *Essence*; and Benevise, *The Classical*. In general, it is Avicenna's relation to Ash'arite *kalām* that has been the main focus of attention, although Jolivet, Belo, and Wisnovsky (in *Avicenna*, 105–110) have pointed to the importance of Mu'tazilite theology to understand his metaphysics.

12 Wisnovsky, *Notes*; idem, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*; idem, *Avicenna*.

13 An important clarification here concerns the distinction between the terms 'thing' (*shay'*) and 'quiddity' (*māhiyyah*). Following some recent contributions, such as Bertolacci, *The Distinction*, and De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*, I will in what follows distinguish between *shay'* and *māhiyyah*. More precisely, I will distinguish between *shay'*, on the one hand, and the terms nature (*tabī'ah*), reality (*ḥaqīqah*), quiddity (*māhiyyah*), thingness (*shay'iyah*), and special existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), on the other. This cluster of terms refers to *what* a thing is, to the essence and quidditative reality of a thing taken in an abstract way, whereas *shay'* refers to an actual existent and

well known and have been extensively examined by modern scholars, starting with Goichon's classic monograph on Avicenna's metaphysics.¹⁴ Avicenna's principal aim throughout this section of *Metaphysics* appears to be to emphasize the close relationship and mutual dependence of 'the thing' and 'the existent,' of essence and existence. Moreover, Avicenna is keen in this passage to maintain a dual division of existents into mental and extramental and to correlate this division with two aspects of quiddity or essence: quiddity connected with concrete individuals, and quiddity connected with mental objects. Understandably, some scholars have taken *Metaphysics* I.5 as reflecting Avicenna's definitive stance on the issue and emphasized the thesis of the co-extensionality and co-implicativeness of essence and existence. This is the case, for example, of Bertolacci, who, on the basis of this text, has suggested that it would be more appropriate to speak of an essence/existence *relationship*, rather than an essence/existence *distinction*, given that these two notions are always co-implicated and pertain to every existent, whether concrete or mental.¹⁵

merely *suggests* quiddity in that existent. Although 'the thing' has sometimes been construed as a synonym of quiddity or essence, and although Avicenna himself sometimes uses this term loosely to that effect, there is an important conceptual difference between these two notions. The term *shay'* really means, for Avicenna, *an existing* essence or thing. It refers to an entity that possesses *both* existence and essence and, hence, to something that can be pointed to (*al-mushār ilayhi*), and which is also, by the same token, an entity that is caused and complex or composite. As such, 'the thing' is always interrelated or correlated with 'the existent' and fully co-extensional with it. It is on these grounds that the formula *māhiyyāt al-ashyā'* can in most cases be replaced with the equivalent expression *māhiyyāt al-mawjūdāt*. The terms *māhiyyah* and *shay'iyah*, in contrast, express quiddity in a more abstract and theoretical way and often designate 'pure quiddity' or 'quiddity in itself' specifically. According to Avicenna, it is this abstract notion that can be conceptually distinguished in the mind and separated from existence, as in the case of the consideration of the pure quiddity 'horseness' or 'humanness,' which, in itself, does not include any consideration of existence. In these cases, 'a quiddity' can only awkwardly be called 'a thing' (except, perhaps, in a non-technical sense), although the idiosyncratic but cognate term 'thingness' or *shay'iyah* can be used more appropriately to refer to the same fundamental meaning. Hence, the distinction between *shay'* and *māhiyyah* is not merely a formal difference, but rather reflects a profound philosophical shift in perspective from studying the ontology and epistemology of quiddity as it is instantiated in composite or complex existent things (*shay'*, or quiddity *in the thing*) and as it is conceived of in itself and in an abstract mode (*māhiyyah*, *shay'iyah*). In spite of this, there has been a general tendency in the Western interpretations of Avicenna to conflate these two notions, starting perhaps with Thomas Aquinas, who identifies 'being' and 'essence' (*esse* and *essentia*)—and not 'the thing' (*shay'*, *res*)—as the primary notions discussed by Avicenna in *Metaphysics* I.5 (see Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 1). Given that the term *shay'* does not illuminate in any useful way the issue of the ontological status of pure quiddity and is systematically contrasted with a cluster of terms designating pure quiddity in Avicennian technical parlance, the present study will focus primarily on the terms *māhiyyah* and *shay'iyah*.

14 Goichon, *La distinction*. As I will point out in due course, some of my conclusions overlap with those of Goichon.

15 Bertolacci (The Distinction, 287) proposes to use the term 'relationship' instead of the term 'distinction' favored by Goichon and many others after her to describe essence and existence. The point, I presume, is that the latter stresses not only the difference, but also the separateness of essence and

However, it is with regard to the second problem of extensionality that scholars' opinions begin to diverge in significant ways. One group, representing by far the majority of scholars, has argued for a perfect and strict co-extensionality of quiddity and existence, maintaining that all essences are actual existents and that all actual existents must necessarily have an essence that makes them what they are. On their view, whatever is an existent (*mawjūd*) is also a thing (*shay'*) endowed with a quiddity (*māhiyyah*) or possessing thingness (*shay'iyyah*), and vice versa, so that all quiddities must exist in actuality, either in the concrete, extramental world or, at the very least, in the human mind thinking them. This approach in effect reduces the relation of essence and existence to that between 'the thing' and 'the existent.' As Bäck noticed, it also implies a "weak principle of plenitude" concerning the existence of mental quiddities: in order to 'exist,' all quiddities must have at least mental existence, and some of them may in addition become realized in concrete existence.¹⁶ Since Avicenna posits only two kinds or modes of existence in his works—concrete extramental existence, and intellectual universal existence—these scholars reason that all quiddities must be subsumed under one or both of these categories. Accordingly, some quiddities can be said to exist in the physical, extramental world (e.g., this particular horse) *and* in the human mind apprehending it (the universal, intelligible form 'horse'), while others (e.g., the universal form of the phoenix or an artificial form like a heptagonal house) will presumably exist only in the mind.

As a consequence, it would seem that quiddity is never found in a state that is fully free from existence (*wujūd*). Although these scholars are aware that Avicenna

existence, and also suggests strongly a mental or conceptualist context, inasmuch as a distinction is performed by the mind, and so it seems from the outset to create a certain bias in our thinking about these notions. The term 'relationship' in contrast seems more neutral and puts the emphasis on the complicated interface between these two notions as they interact in the mind and in the concrete world, which is the crux of the problem facing modern scholars. However, as Olga Lizzini pointed out to me, a relationship necessarily presupposes a distinction of some kind, so these notions appear ultimately to be roughly interchangeable, and it remains unclear what benefit there is to talk of a relationship rather than a distinction. This point notwithstanding, given what was said above concerning the distinction between *shay'* and *māhiyyah*, it is important to adduce an additional qualification: the terms *al-shay'* and *al-mawjūd* pertain primarily to actual existents, whether to things that can be pointed to in concrete reality, or to distinct objects in the mind. In view of this, it is normal that whenever Avicenna is talking about these entities, he would stress the co-extensionality of quiddity and existence, since these notions are always found together in contingent beings; in other words, a thing *both* exists *and* has a quiddity. In this connection, it is also important to stress that 'the thing' is always, at least conceptually, complex, and, as a result, also caused and contingent (accordingly, God, for Avicenna, is not a *shay'*). As can be seen, this metaphysical template does not provide an ideal—and arguably even an adequate—framework to examine the ontological status of quiddity in itself. The reason for this is that, as can be inferred from its very appellation (quiddity *in itself*), pure quiddity is taken in abstraction from existence, and so there is no direct link between it and the mode of existence that applies to *the things*, i.e., to the actual, caused, composite or complex existents.

¹⁶ Bäck, *Avicenna's Conception*, 233, 236.

also mentions a third consideration of quiddity in some of his works, namely, that of quiddity in itself (*al-māhiyyah bi-mā hiya tilka l-māhiyyah*), which is described as being independent of both mental and extramental existence, they argue (or assume) that this aspect of quiddity cannot possess any kind of autonomous existence and, hence, corresponds to a purely conceptual or epistemological aspect of quiddity that excludes existence altogether. In that way, the Avicennian proposition that we can consider quiddity in itself does not, on their view, conflict in any way with the thesis of the perfect overlap and co-extensionality between essence and existence. From a textual perspective, this position relies heavily on *Metaphysics* I.5 of *The Cure*, which argues most explicitly for the co-implication and co-extensionality of quiddity and existence, or rather of *shay'* and *mawjūd*, a chapter which these scholars regard as the *locus classicus* of the Avicennian theory of essence. Indeed, in this section of his work, Avicenna's main thesis throughout seems to be that thing (*shay'*), and, hence, also quiddity (*māhiyyah*), are co-extensional with, and co-implicative of, the existent (*mawjūd*), and, hence, that every 'thing' or 'essence' is also an 'existent' and has existence (and vice versa), although the meanings and intensionality these terms carry differ. This view seems to be substantiated by other passages in the Avicennian corpus, such as when Avicenna explains in *Salvation* that "the thing is either a concrete existent or a form that exists in the estimation or in the intellect."¹⁷ This reading of the evidence may be called the default or 'standard' position in Avicennian studies and is the one most frequently encountered in modern accounts of this thinker's metaphysics.¹⁸

Other scholars, however, have rightly brought attention to the fact that Avicenna sometimes intimates that quiddity is extensionally broader than existence (in its concrete and mental modes). In other words, there are reasons to think that quiddity can exist in a mode of being that is separate from its instantiations in mental and extramental objects. In claiming that essence or quiddity may be conceived of in itself and in abstraction from particular concrete existents and universal mental existents, Avicenna appears to posit an aspect of quiddity that does not immediately fall under, nor even connect with, existence as such. Since the *three aspects of quiddity* that Avicenna outlines in *Introduction* I.2 (in extramental particulars, in universals in the mind, and in itself) do not square perfectly with the *two aspects of existence* he rec-

¹⁷ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 179: *al-shay' immā 'ayn mawjūdah wa-immā šūrah mawjūdah fī l-wahm aw al-'aql*.

¹⁸ Rahman, *Essence and Existence in Ibn Sinā*; idem, *Essence and Existence in Avicenna*, was one of the first modern exponents of the essence/existence co-extensionality thesis and of the view that pure quiddity does not exist as such in any special way. He was also a staunch advocate of the view that the essence/existence distinction in Avicenna is purely conceptual. His general interpretation of Avicenna's metaphysics has been followed and expanded by many other scholars up to the present day. Rahman's approach was defined largely by what he perceived as an erroneous European or western interpretation of Avicenna, which had crystallized in the works of the Latin Scholastics and some modern scholars stemming from this tradition, such as Gilson and Goichon.

ognizes (actual existence in the extramental world and in the mind), the hypothesis is that quiddity could be extensionally broader than existence and would cover a spectrum that only partially overlaps with that of the actually existent things (*maw-jūdāt*). As Wisnovsky observes,

A commentator could fairly infer from Avicenna's assertion that essence is not only logically prior to existence, it is also extensionally broader than existence. After all, Avicenna now holds that there are essences which are neither mental nor concrete existents; therefore every existent will also be an essence, but not every essence will be an existent.¹⁹

Having made this observation, Wisnovsky does not proceed in his book to settle this issue in any detail. Yet, his comments attest to the profound ambiguity of Avicenna's position and to the degree of uncertainty affecting modern interpretations on this topic. Understandably, scholars have spilled much ink trying to elucidate what Avicenna meant in this and other related passages when he describes quiddity in itself as pertaining to neither mode of existence. On a first reading, the aforementioned *Introduction* 1.2 does suggest that quiddity is extensionally broader than existence, that is, broader than the two spheres consisting of mental and extramental existents, since the third class of quiddities mentioned—quiddity 'in itself' or 'insofar as it is quiddity' (*al-māhiyyah bi-mā hiya tilka l-māhiyyah*)—cannot apparently be subsumed under either of these two ontological groups. And indeed, the evidence that can be adduced from the various texts studied by Wisnovsky is problematic: If essence or quiddity is extensionally broader than existence, and if the two concepts are intentionally distinct, then how is one to construe the nature of quiddity in itself in abstraction from concrete and mental existence? What ontological status, if any, can be ascribed to it? More specifically, if it is a consideration or concept in the mind, then how exactly does it relate to mental existence? Put more bluntly, can it be conceived at all without amounting to a certain mental existent?²⁰

These observations lead to the third, and arguably the most intricate, issue, namely, the ontological status of quiddity in itself, which is central to the present study.²¹ Since the two other aspects of quiddity—quiddity in concrete extramental en-

19 Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*, 109–110.

20 In his study on Avicenna's metaphysics, Wisnovsky does not engage directly with these issues and does not proffer a solution regarding the problem of the ontological status of pure quiddity, even though he lays valuable ground for its examination. He adopts what may best be called an agnostic or skeptical position regarding the issue of quiddity. But in his more recent publications, Wisnovsky is more keen to stress the co-extensionality of essence and existence, rather than the greater extensionality of essence, and he states explicitly that there is "no independent existence of essence in Avicenna, only essential priority of essence" (*Essence and Existence*, 28–29). He therefore restricts quiddity to the two classes of mental and extramental existents.

21 As Pini, *Absoluta*, 388, pointedly noted, "Poche dottrine sono tuttavia altrettanto problematiche, se non addirittura misteriose per l'interprete contemporaneo." Here I am using the expression 'ontological status' in a hypothetical manner as part of the objective or *skopos* of this study and do not

tities and quiddity in mental entities—are said to overlap with the two modes of existence (universal mental existence and concrete extramental existence) usually described by Avicenna, it is quiddity in itself (and only this aspect of quiddity) that could potentially constitute an exception to the rule of co-extensionality and justify the greater scope of quiddity over existence. But from the instant that the greater extensionality of quiddity over existence is posited, then it becomes a priority to clarify what ontological status quiddity in itself could be said to possess. Does it have another, distinct, and autonomous mode of existence that differs from the two mentioned previously? Is it a nonexistent thing, which can nonetheless be conceived of in the mind? Or is it to be regarded as a kind of universal mental existent after all, in spite of the provisos Avicenna emits in this regard?

It is in respect to these last points that the greatest disparities in scholarly opinion have become manifest, with a variety of interpretations being formulated, but no consensus emerging from the literature. What is more, it is not only modern scholars who have been puzzled by these questions, but also the postclassical Muslim thinkers involved in the reception, interpretation, and transmission of Avicenna's philosophical system. In this connection, Wisnovsky has drawn a useful list of difficult philosophical issues that later commentators on Avicenna inherited from the master and which they tackled in their own works. Among these issues, Wisnovsky includes the ontological problem of pure quiddity. He writes:

In one famous passage [*Introduction* I.2], Avicenna says that essence (or quiddity, *māhiyya*) has three aspects: one when the essence is considered as a universal, i.e. as a mental existent; another when the essence is considered as a concrete individual, i.e. as an extramental existent; and a third aspect, when the essence is considered in and of itself, i.e. as unrelated to either mental or concrete existence. If it has neither the ontological status of a universal nor the ontological status of a concrete individual, what exactly is the ontological status of essence when it is considered "in and of itself" in this third way?

Immediately afterwards, Wisnovsky adds: "The exposure of these and other apparent inconsistencies and contradictions prompted post-Avicennian thinkers to create a newly systematized version of Avicenna's philosophy."²²

At root, the problem of the ontological status of pure quiddity arises from a paradox embedded in the textual evidence. On the one hand, Avicenna explicitly affirms that quiddity in itself exists *neither* in the concrete world *nor* in the mind, which would suggest that it does not exist at all, since Avicenna only recognizes—on the traditional interpretation—two spheres or modes of existence: particular/concrete and universal/mental. Accordingly, one can have a vague mental awareness or entertain a logical consideration of quiddity in itself, without it amounting to any kind of

want to imply from the outset that quiddity in itself *does* possess existence; rather, as I will show shortly, the 'ontological status' referred to in my introduction can correspond to a 'positive,' 'neutral,' or 'negative' status, depending on one's interpretation of the evidence.

²² Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Islamic Reception*, 202.

distinct and autonomous existent. On the other hand, Avicenna repeatedly refers to the existence (*wujūd*) of quiddity in itself in *Metaphysics* V.1 of *The Cure*, and even at 205.1–2 to its “divine existence” (*wujūd ilāhī*), an expression that has puzzled medieval exegetes and modern researchers alike. If it is quite clear that, according to Avicenna, quiddity in itself does not exist independently in the concrete world along the lines of a Platonic Form, its relation to mental existence is in contrast much more obscure. Avicenna routinely describes it in mental, intellectual, and intentional terms, and he also dispenses some effort to explaining how the mental state of quiddity in itself can be distinguished from that of the universal existent, with the implication that these two objects are located in the human mind. Hence, the possibility that pure quiddity possesses *at the very least* a distinct mental existence has to be seriously taken into consideration. Admittedly, this seems to flatly contradict the previous claim to the effect that pure quiddity does not exist in the mind. What is more, and to compound the problem, Avicenna also asserts that quiddity in itself exists *in* concrete beings. He appears to claim that it exists as a part (*juzʿ*) of concrete entities. At first glance, this seems contradictory, since the expression ‘in itself’ would seem to cancel out that possibility and to allow only (and purely hypothetically) for an immaterial and separate mode of existence of quiddity comparable to that of the Platonic forms. What is more, assuming that this kind of extramental existence were possible, one would then have to explain how quiddity in itself could be located in two very different ontological contexts, the mental and the concrete. How these various claims and features of Avicenna’s doctrine relate to one another and what exactly ‘in itself’ means in these different contexts are questions that remain to be clarified.

Understandably, scholars have been baffled by these paradoxical statements, and the number and variety of answers they have proffered over the years to try to resolve them testifies to the complexity of the issues at stake. Part of the problem has to do with the sheer number of concepts, terms, and issues that need to be tackled for an examination of the topic to claim any degree of comprehensiveness. Avicenna articulates his views on essence in logical, psychological, and metaphysical contexts, and these intersect with many other problematics in his works. As a result, the textual evidence that is relevant to the subject and that needs to be considered is scattered over a large number of works. If used in a haphazard or partial way, it can serve to support any number of interpretations, most of them irreconcilable with one another. This is the case, for instance, of Avicenna’s views on universality and the universals, which are highly complex and nuanced, and whose analysis must rely on additional texts apart from the famous passage in *Metaphysics* V.1. As a preliminary to the task of comprehensively and systematically analyzing this subject, I provide an outline of the main issues to be tackled and the various interpretations forwarded by scholars.

2 The *status quaestionis* on the issue of the ontological status of quiddity in itself

It will seem sensible that the scholars who defend the strict co-extensionality of quiddity and existence, or rather of ‘thing’ and ‘existent,’ regard the issue of the ontological status of quiddity in itself as somewhat moot. Since quiddity and existence are always co-implicated or co-related, there cannot, as a rule, be a quiddity that is devoid of existence. Since Avicenna recognizes only two modes of existence, the mental existence of universals and the concrete existence of particulars—an ontological spectrum covered by the Arabic technical term *al-wujūdāyn*—then quiddity must assume one or both of these ontological modes and exist in one or both of these ontological contexts. No quiddity will lie ‘outside’ of their scope, and there is no third, special ontological mode corresponding to pure quiddity. Another way of substantiating this position is as follows: since Avicenna claims that quiddity in itself is considered in abstraction from existence and does not relate to any of the existents or modes of existence—he says at *Metaphysics* V.1.196.11 that it exists “neither in the mind nor in the concrete world”—quiddity in itself must be regarded as something nonexistent or as lacking the status of an existent proper.

On this view, quiddity in itself will be a mere mental aspect or consideration devoid of any entitative or substantive quality, of any independent and distinct existence. It can be described at most as a logical or epistemic consideration in the mind, without ever assuming the status of an intellectual existent proper. Accordingly, whenever Avicenna discusses quiddity in itself, he does not intend to present it as an autonomous or special case of quidditative existence that would be distinct from particular and universal existence, but as a purely logical, psychological, or epistemic object. Whatever the case may be, quiddity exists only as a universal in the mind or in concrete individuals in the exterior world, and there is no special, third mode of existence attached to pure quiddity.²³ And if ever it is possible to regard this consid-

23 This view may be called ‘standard’ in Avicennian studies. It has been either explicitly defended or implicitly endorsed by many specialists of Avicenna: see, among others, Rahman, *Essence and Existence in Avicenna*, and idem, *Essence and Existence in Ibn Sīnā*; McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 35; idem, *Logic and Science*, especially 168–171; Druart, *Shay’*, 133 ff.; Bertolacci, *The Distinction*; Germann, *Ibn Sīnā*; Lizzini, *Wuğūd-Mawğūd*, and eadem, *Ibn Sīnā’s Metaphysics*; Menn, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, especially 153–158; Galluzzo, *Two Senses*, 311–312. Menn and Wisnovsky, *Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī On the Four Scientific Questions*, 76, assert: “Avicenna, drawing on his distinction between essence and existence, denies that the quiddity has a third mode of existence. Although a quiddity can be considered in itself, it exists only as bound up either with the mind or with enmattered individuals.” Even scholars working on the Latin philosophical tradition and with Latin translations of Avicenna, such as M.M. Tweedale (*Duns Scotus’s Doctrine*, 85), have held this view, in spite of the fact that several medieval Latin interpreters of Avicenna developed a theory of *esse essentiae* on the basis of the Persian master’s works. As mentioned above, Bertolacci recommends speaking about the *relationship*, rather than the *distinction*, between essence and existence. Unlike the latter term, the former presupposes the necessary co-extensionality of these notions, which is presumably why Bertolacci opts for it. This nat-

eration itself as somehow existing in the mind *qua* consideration, its object or referent—quiddity in itself—would be deprived of any kind of positive and distinct existence in the mind.²⁴ Just as we can have a consideration of the nonexistent and of prime matter, this does not mean that the nonexistent and prime matter actually exist in the world. It may not even be the case that they exist as valid intelligible forms in our minds. They may, like the absolute void, be counted among what Avicenna in *Physics* II.8 calls “vain intelligibles” (sing., *ma‘qūl mafrūgh*). The most we can say regarding our mental consideration of these objects is that it may be located at the level of the imagination or estimation, rather than intellection proper.²⁵ Like-

usually implies that quiddity cannot exist on its own. Bertolacci, *The Distinction*, also contends that existence always precedes essence causally and ontologically in the concrete, extramental world, although it may be said to follow it conceptually in the mind. For Goodman, *Avicenna*, 78, as well, existence is “prior logically and ontologically to the full determination of any essence,” and there is “nothing prior to existence.” See also Lizzini, Wuğūd-Mawğūd, 120–121, 125, concerning the co-extensionality and priority of existence; Lizzini makes the same claims more forcefully in eadem, *A Mysterious Order*, 238, 254. Quite disarmingly, many of the scholars who uphold the strict co-extensionality of quiddity and existence do not comment in any detail on the Avicennian texts that focus on quiddity in itself and its ontological implications, topics which are broached, for example, in *Introduction* I.2 and I.12 and *Metaphysics* V.1 of *The Cure*. At any rate, since they uphold the necessary co-implicativeness of quiddity and existence, it is clear that they do not regard pure quiddity as constituting a special case of autonomous existence. Being devoid of existence, it is by definition ‘nothing’ or ‘something lesser than an existent,’ such as a logical object, so that quiddity exists only as a mental universal and/or as a concrete particular. In contrast, a recent article by Benevich, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz,’* has focused expressly on the issue of the ontological status of pure quiddity. Benevich develops a mereological interpretation and argues that the “divine existence” Avicenna mentions in *Metaphysics* V.1 (205.1–2) is that of quiddity in itself as it is caused to exist by God as a part of contingent existents both in the mind and the extramental world. Benevich provides valuable insight into the matter; in particular, he connects the issue of pure quiddity with other central issues in Avicenna’s philosophy, such as divine causality and human knowledge, and explores the interface between the ontological and epistemic planes in Avicenna. One aspect that is lacking in his study, however, is a detailed investigation of how pure quiddity relates to mental existence.

24 This point concerns the relation between a consideration (*i‘tibār*) and the object of a consideration. In other words, should one distinguish between the ontological status of a consideration in the mind and the ontological status of the object to which it refers? This point will be examined in more detail later on.

25 It remains unclear, however, whether prime matter should be placed in the same class of mental objects as the nonexistent. There are important epistemological and ontological differences between the two. As one learns in *Notes*, 135–136, section 181, matter is to be counted among the things that are simple (*al-basā‘it*). This, as in the case of other simple essences (the First Cause, the separate intellects), makes it difficult for the mind to actually apprehend it with clarity. Like the void and absolute nonexistence, pure matter can hardly be known in a scientific way, since no *positive* essence corresponds to it. But as Fariduddin Attar reminds me, Avicenna posits prime matter as the result of a philosophical reasoning that requires a fundamental substrate for all change. This reasoning may be intellectual in nature, and it is deployed in Avicenna’s works on physics and metaphysics. In this regard, McGinnis (*Space*, 61) defines prime matter as “a hypothetical limit of a process of abstraction that a full analysis of physical bodies requires.” What is more, Avicenna does not say that prime matter does not exist, but rather that it has potential existence (for the ambiguous ontological status of

wise, our having a consideration of quiddity in itself does not imply its independent existence, whether in the concrete world or as an intelligible form in the mind. This view seems to find some traction in Avicenna's famous statement in *Metaphysics* V.1 to the effect that "in itself, it [the pure quiddity horseness or *farasiyyah*] is nothing at all except horseness. For, in itself, it is neither one nor many and does not exist in concrete things and in the soul [*lā mawjūd fī l-a'yān wa-lā fī l-nafs*]."²⁶ Given that, on most scholars' account, these two modes of existence—mental/universal and concrete/particular—are the only ones posited by Avicenna, if horseness as such does not exist in the mind or separately in the concrete world, then it is tantamount to being a nonexistent or a philosophical chimera.

One could conclude, as some scholars have, that Avicenna denied any existence to quiddity in itself, in a manner reminiscent of the way in which some Stoics denied any substantive existence to the Platonic Forms and considered them mere 'nothings.'²⁷ Since quiddity and existence are strictly co-extensional, any 'excess' quiddity or essence that could be posited (such as, hypothetically, quiddity in itself) will have to be regarded as a nonexistent. Since Avicenna upheld the principle of the excluded middle, according to which something either exists or does not exist, quiddity in itself would either exist or not exist, and, if the former, it could only exist as a mental or extramental concrete existent. Hence, upholders of the thesis of the strict co-extensionality of essence and existence are compelled, on their own premises, to regard pure quiddity as nothing over and above the quiddities existing in these beings, since, on their view, quiddity is always accompanied by existence and actualized as an existent. Accordingly, quiddity in itself can be described as a 'nothing,' a nonexistent, or *at most* as a mere mental consideration or epistemic object produced by the rational mind, but one which in itself does not amount to true mental existence. From an ontological perspective, this consideration of pure quiddity will not be distinct from the universal aspect of quiddity, but will merely represent a different way of conceiving of the universal: thus the quiddity in itself 'horseness' and 'universal horse' in the mind are one and the same ontological entity, but amount to two dis-

prime matter, see section IV.2.6). So in spite of corresponding to a concept of pure potentiality in the mind, and not existing in itself actually in the world, prime matter is not tantamount to pure non-existence. It remains somehow intelligible and is also hypothetically a principle of physics.

26 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 196.11. Whether the statement *lā mawjūd fī l-a'yān wa-lā fī l-nafs* is best translated as "does not exist in concrete things and in the soul" or as "exists neither in concrete things nor in the soul" is secondary at the moment. The point here is that both formulations seem to leave little leeway for another kind or mode of existence that could hypothetically be ascribed to quiddity in itself. For on the traditional interpretation, Avicenna posits only two aspects or modes of existence in his works, which he often calls *al-wujūdayn*, literally "the two existences," i.e., mental and concrete existence.

27 Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, 111, 118, describes quiddity as "ontologically void." For the Stoic view, see Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 129 and 147; idem, *Universals Transformed*, 106–108.

tinct ways of considering or conceiving of the same concept. Their extensionality will be the same, but their intensionality will differ.²⁸

This ‘standard’ interpretation, however, is not without its difficulties. To claim that quiddity in itself is *merely* a consideration of the human mind, a logical or epistemic aspect that arises as a result of some mental operation, but which, as such, does not participate in mental existence, is problematic on various counts. First, it conflicts with the terminological evidence that can be gleaned from Avicenna’s works and with his technical descriptions of essence. This is especially true, not so much of the term *i’tibār*, but of the terms *ṣūrah*, *ma’nā*, and *ma’qūl*, which Avicenna frequently employs to describe pure quiddity, and which suggest that it does possess substantiality or an existential content in the mind. In addition, there is the problem of accounting for the doctrinal evidence in *Metaphysics* V.1–2, which includes frequent references to the “existence” (*wujūd*) of pure quiddity. Finally, this position would seem to go against the grain of recent research, which stresses the strong connection between logic and metaphysics in Avicenna’s works and which identifies a tendency in his thought to ‘ontologize’ logical categories and notions, in line with a particular reading of *Eisagoge*, the seminal logical work written by Porphyry (d. ca. 305 CE).²⁹

But perhaps more egregiously from a methodological perspective, the problem with this approach is that it raises the very question it attempts to answer. For in drawing attention to the fact that quiddity in itself is *merely* or *only* a logical construct or consideration, these scholars inadvertently point to the issue of what this consideration exactly amounts to ontologically in the human mind. What is the ontological status of this special object that is pure quiddity? And what *kind* of consideration or object are we talking about in the first place? Should we not assume that considerations (*i’tibārāt*), according to Avicenna, have mental existence, or, at the very least, that the intellectual ones do?³⁰ Recall in this connection that, for Avicen-

28 This is what Pini, *Absoluta*, 396–404, calls the “gnoseological interpretation” of the problem, since it draws a purely mental or epistemic distinction between pure quiddity and universal quiddity in the mind without ascribing a different ontological status to each one. This interpretation recognizes the existence of the universal alone and makes pure quiddity a mere epistemological aspect of the universal.

29 Bertolacci, The ‘Ontologization’; Kukkonen, Dividing Being.

30 In this fashion, a fundamental ambiguity undermines the analyses of many modern scholars who reject the existence of pure quiddity, and yet refuse to regard it as a mere ‘nothing.’ In their view, although a nonexistent, it is endowed with some kind of ‘reality,’ which, however, is not properly defined. Thus, Pasqua, *L’essence*, 79, writes: “Si l’essence n’est rien de réellement existant, elle a donc simplement une réalité intelligible représentant une réalité extra-mentale.” Likewise, Geoffroy tantalizingly mentions the “être définitionnel” of essence, while not ascribing to it a proper ontological status (in de Libera, *L’art*, 648, note 4). In his articles, Bäck repeats the claim according to which “quiddities in themselves do not exist, yet have ‘being’ (*kuwn*) [sic],” without, however, explaining in any way how this ‘being’ should be interpreted (Bäck, *The Triplex*, 134; idem, *Avicenna’s Ontological Pentagon*, 94). Elsewhere he writes: “he [Avicenna] insists that quiddities in themselves do not exist,

na, concepts and universals exist in the mind and are full-blown existents (*mawjūdāt*). This is true, of course, of the intelligibles, but it might also apply to a lesser extent to the objects of the estimation and imagination, which may also exist in the soul, albeit not *qua* intelligibles.³¹ At any rate, one needs to clarify the nature of an *i'tibār*, especially as it relates to intellectual entities, and to determine whether the very awareness and consideration of quiddity in itself, or, alternatively, whether its intellectual conceivability or conception, are implicative of mental existence. Since, for Avicenna, we can have a consideration of almost anything, regardless of how that thing relates to concrete existence, elucidating the relationship of an *i'tibār* to its object and to that which is being considered is crucial for the present inquiry. Admittedly, describing quiddity in itself as a consideration (*i'tibār*), a 'notion' or 'meaning' (*ma'nā*), and a form (*ṣūrah*) says nothing about its ontological status until these terms have been analyzed, their content identified, and their relationship to mental existence clarified.³² By way of illustration, in *Introduction* I.2 Avicenna also calls universal quiddity in the mind a 'consideration' (*i'tibār*), but in that case it can be unambiguously identified with an intellectual *existent*. These remarks call for a detailed examination of Avicenna's terminology, as well as of the criteria he attaches to mental existence in his philosophy.

Another approach to the present quandary consists in situating quiddity in itself in a sphere between existence and nonexistence and as describing it as something possessing ontological neutrality or ambiguity. Accordingly, pure quiddity can be said neither to exist nor not to exist; it is neither an existent (*mawjūd*) nor a nonexistent (*ma'dūm*), but might instead be said to 'subsist,' where subsistence means something quite different from actual existence. Some time ago, Gilson described quiddity in itself as "ontologically neutral" ("existentiellement neutre").³³ He was followed by

though they have a sort of reality" (The *Triplex*, 143). As I explain below, a similar ambiguity manifests itself in the studies of Izutsu and Marmura.

31 On this issue, see Black, *Mental Existence*; eadem, *Avicenna on the Ontological*. This last point, however, requires further clarification and will be examined later on.

32 In addition to Marmura, Bäck, *Avicenna's Conception*, 236, also keenly perceived this difficulty: "The problem lies in two areas: mental supposition and intellectual intuition. Does either of these suffice to generate something existing *in intellectu*?" Bäck adds that "what inevitably comes to exist *in intellectu* is the mental act of supposing or imagining or intuiting; what is the object or content of that mental act need not exist *in intellectu*." This point becomes even more problematic when one remembers that Avicenna distinguishes between the intellect, intellection, and its object in the case of human thought.

33 Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, 131. Here an important semantic clarification is called for. The expression "ontological neutrality" poses an interpretive problem, because it is ambiguous and has been used in different ways. On the one hand, there is a weak interpretation of quiddity's 'neutrality,' which has a long history in the reception of Avicenna's philosophy, and which refers to quiddity's ontological 'indifference' to actual mental and concrete existence. In this regard, scholars often speak of the 'indifference of essence'; cf. de Libera, *L'art*, 501, who refers to "l'indifférence de l'essence." In this case, it is used merely to stress that quiddities can exist either as concrete or mental beings, without a preference or preponderance for either mode of existence. This interpretation

Nuseibeh who, in a study devoted to Avicenna's epistemology, argued for a distinction between "subsistence" (*thubūt*) and "existence" (*wujūd*) and contended that the Avicennian quiddity in itself "subsists rather than exists."³⁴ More recently, an article by Marwan Rashed has dealt directly with this issue. Consisting largely of a comparative analysis between the views of the Christian philosopher Yaḥyā b. 'Adī (d. 974 CE) and Avicenna, it contextualizes the question in light of the philosophical dialogue they initiated with ancient authorities such as Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. ca. 200 CE) and Themistius (d. ca. 385 CE). Rashed argues that Avicenna borrowed and transformed Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's threefold scheme of existents ('natural,' 'logical,' and 'divine') and that he ascribed one of these three ontological modes to pure quiddity.³⁵ According to Rashed, the Avicennian pure essences fall neither under the class of mental objects nor under that of extramental existents. This third class is characterized by a special and distinct ontological status, which Rashed describes as ontologically neutral. In addition, Rashed argues that Avicenna located these neutrally existing quiddities in the divine mind. Hence, on Rashed's interpretation, Avicenna creatively modified Ibn 'Adī's threefold scheme in order to integrate this third and special type of entities, which would correspond to the divine quiddities in themselves. Rashed's study is by far the one that argues most clearly and forcefully for

goes hand in hand with Avicenna's claim that quiddity can be considered or envisaged logically in abstraction from mental and extramental existence. 'Indifference' and 'neutrality' in this case do not refer to a distinct and special ontological status that would be proper to quiddity in itself—in the sense that it would be neither existent nor non-existent—but rather to the fact that quiddity can be conceptually associated and dissociated from concrete or intellectual existence. In this regard, de Libera, *La querelle*, 240, also speaks of pure quiddity's "tolérance ontologique." On the other hand, there is a strong construal of the ontological neutrality of quiddity, according to which quiddity possesses its own special 'neutral' ontological status, which is identical neither with nonexistence nor with concrete and mental existence. In that case, it refers to a *third ontological status or mode* in Avicenna's philosophy that would belong exclusively to quiddity in itself. Although it is unclear in what sense Gilson originally used this formula, others, such as Izutsu, Nuseibeh, and Marwan Rashed seem to intend it in this strong sense; see below.

³⁴ Nuseibeh, *Al-'Aql al-Qudsi*, 48–49. Izutsu emphasizes a similar view. According to him, pure quiddity is "neither existent nor non-existent," and is "in itself neutral to both existence and non-existence" (*The Fundamental Structure*, 65). Although he does not elaborate on this point in this work, Izutsu appears in other writings (*Basic Problems*, 8 ff.) to regard pure quiddity as existing in an epistemically transcendent realm. It should be stressed that Izutsu's interpretation is deeply informed by the postclassical exegetical tradition on Avicenna as well as by modern European philosophy. In *La querelle*, de Libera also sometimes comes close to ascribing a special neutral ontological status to pure quiddity understood in this manner. He asks whether pure essence is "une chose intermédiaire entre l'abstrait et le séparé qui ne serait ni abstraite ni non abstraite, ni séparée ni non séparée, d'un mot : un objet *pur*, indifférent à toute existence comme à toute non-existence" (*La querelle*, 239). De Libera's allusion to an "objet *pur*" recalls Meinong's theory of objects. Yet, in his later work *L'art des généralités*, de Libera definitively rejects the hypothesis that pure quiddity has its own ontological mode, construed either in a neutral or positive way; see *L'art*, 577–584.

³⁵ Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; for an English translation and brief analysis of Yaḥyā's treatise, see Menn and Wisnovsky, *Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī On the Four Scientific Questions*.

the view that a third and distinct mode of existence be devoted exclusively to quiddity in itself. On his reconstruction, this third mode coincides with the ontological neutrality (construed in a ‘strong’ sense) of pure quiddity.³⁶

The modern proposition that Avicenna attributes a neutral ontological status to quiddity is not as odd as it may seem at first. It relies on certain classical and post-classical Islamic theories of ontological neutrality. Perhaps the most famous one is the Mu‘tazilite Bahshamite theory of the special ontological mode of the states (*aḥwāl*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*), which, according to the technical parlance of this school, are neither existent (*mawjūd*) nor nonexistent (*ma‘dūm*), but possess a special kind of reality or actuality (*thubūt*) that is proper to them. Another important instance occurs in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 1210 CE) metaphysics, which, at least according to a report by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274 CE), posits essences in the concrete world that possess a subsistence (*thubūt*) that is distinct and prior to their existence (*wujūd*).³⁷ It is in this regard that Rāzī has sometimes been described as advocating an extreme essentialist interpretation of Avicenna’s doctrines. At any rate, Rashed’s study opens new interpretive possibilities concerning Avicenna’s doctrine of quiddity and will prove useful for my own analysis in a subsequent chapter of this book. Nevertheless, for the present purposes, suffice to say that the contention concerning the ontological neutrality of pure quiddity is problematic, if it is understood as implying more than the mere logical ‘indifference’ of essence to mental and concrete existence. As I see it, there are two main problems with this thesis. First, Avicenna does not mention anything that could even remotely be taken to suggest ontological neutrality in the strong sense, nor is there an Arabic term or expression used in his

36 As Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī, puts it: “En maintenant le terme “ existence ”, *wujūd*, pour les quiddités pures, Avicenne conserve les trois grandes classes entitatives de son prédécesseur [Ibn ‘Adī]. Mais en substituant le propre à l’essentiel, il entend rompre avec un réalisme des quiddités...” (149–150); and 159; “elle [quiddity in itself] est coextensive au réel tout en jouissant d’un principe d’indépendance ontique dépassant un statut simplement logique” (113–114). Nevertheless, some ambiguity arises when one compares Rashed’s various claims and tries to pinpoint his exact views on the ontological status of these pure quiddities. For although Rashed endows the essences with an independent status of their own and claims that Avicenna regarded them as a third group of ontological entities—this suggests that Avicenna held a tri-partite ontology—he is at the same time reluctant to regard these essences as having positive existence or as existents proper. Thus, he mentions the “ontological neutrality” (“neutralité ontologique”) of the quiddities and the fact that they dwell in a realm “beyond existence” (“espace entitatif au-delà de l’existence”), and he also insists at times that they are not really existents (*mawjūdāt*) (see Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī, 122, 116, and 142 respectively). But in other places Rashed is keen to regard them as existents or at least as having some kind of existence (122, 130, 149–150). These various claims are not easy to reconcile. Nevertheless, for my purposes, Rashed’s contentions (a) that the pure quiddities have their own ontological status, and (b) that, as such, they are to be located in the divine mind, are inspirational. The present study builds on Rashed, although it also departs from his interpretation regarding the mode of existence of the pure quiddities.

37 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 462.24–463.1.

works that would correspond to this notion.³⁸ And while it is true that Avicenna was familiar with the views of previous and contemporary (especially Bahshamite) theologians who did employ the concept of ontological neutrality in their systems, and that Avicenna himself might have borrowed extensively from these *kalām* sources, there is virtual no evidence that the master was keen to elaborate on this specific aspect of their ontology.³⁹ In fact, Avicenna staunchly adhered to the principle of non-contradiction as formulated in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Γ.3, 1005b19–20, and he expressly criticized other scholars for failing to uphold this principle. According to this postulate, “the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect.” Translated to the context of Avicenna's metaphysics, this means that something either exists or does not exist, and there is no alternative or middle ground to these two options. The second difficulty with the notion of ontological neutrality is Avicenna's occasional ascription of existence (*wujūd*) to quiddity in itself, especially in *Metaphysics* V.1. This textual evidence indicates that, if an ontological status is to be ascribed to pure quiddity, then it would be a positive one rather than a neutral one.

It is the desire to bypass the conceptual pitfalls associated with these interpretations of quiddity that has motivated scholars to seek other solutions to the problem. Rather than deflating or plainly negating the existential status of quiddity in itself, attempts were made to salvage or rehabilitate it. Three distinct strategies have been implemented in this regard. The first is to identify pure quiddity with a mental existent and, hence, to attribute mental existence to it, but one distinct from the mental existence of the universals—and this, in spite of Avicenna's dictate that pure quiddity does not exist in the mind. This approach was briefly and hesitantly advocated—uniquely to my knowledge—by Michael Marmura in two important articles devoted to Avicenna's theory of essence.⁴⁰ Marmura, on the basis of a new distinction he established between quiddity ‘in itself’ and quiddity ‘by itself,’ argued that humans can envisage pure quiddity in their minds and that this conception must amount to a kind of mental existence alongside that of the universal. He proposed that while the former (‘quiddity in itself’) is merely a logical consideration, the latter (‘quiddity by itself’) seems to correspond to a kind of separate mental existent,

38 The interpretation articulated by some postclassical commentators on Avicenna as well as by some modern scholars such as Izutsu to the effect that quiddity is neither existent nor nonexistent is a later exegetical development that should be construed in light of Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite ontology and, more specifically, of attempts by postclassical scholars to reconcile Avicenna's philosophy with *kalām*. But the formula *lā mawjūd wa-lā ma'dūm*, which some of these theologians apply to the states (*ahwāl*) in their system, is to my knowledge never used in Avicenna's works to describe essence.

39 For Avicenna's reliance on *kalām* ideas in his metaphysics, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, II.7–8 and 13; idem, Notes.

40 Marmura, Quiddity and Universality; idem, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals, especially 46.

albeit one distinct from the universal existent.⁴¹ Although Marmura's suggestion is stimulating, it was merely hinted at in his study and not developed at any length. Moreover, this insight ultimately led him to a conundrum that he was unable to solve satisfactorily: the challenge of having to reconcile his interpretation of quiddity with Avicenna's statement to the effect that quiddity in itself exists neither in the concrete world nor in the mind. This obstacle notwithstanding, Marmura also experienced difficulty explaining exactly how pure quiddity could be regarded as an instance of mental existence. If it exists in a manner distinct from the universal in the mind, then what mode of existence does it possess? It would seem either that it is a universal, or that it does not exist at all. As a result, and ostensibly puzzled by this paradox, Marmura oscillated inconclusively with regard to the ontological status of pure quiddity.⁴²

41 Bäck, *The Triplex*; idem, *Avicenna's Ontological Pentagon*; idem, *Avicenna's Conception*, also focuses on the task of distinguishing between quiddity in itself and the universal aspect of quiddity in the mind (especially in the first study), but he approaches the problem mostly from a logical angle. As a result, he has little to say about the ontological status of pure quiddity.

42 Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, especially 83–86. Marmura recognizes this paradox when he states (*Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*, 38–39): “In places, he [Avicenna] insists that this essence is neither mental nor extramental. In other places ... he refers to it as existing only in the mind.” Overall, Marmura's analysis waivers between regarding quiddity as a distinct ontological entity and as a mere logical consideration. Izutsu appears to have hesitated between these two options as well, and his position is in any case not spelled out in detail. He sometimes describes quiddity in itself as a mere mental consideration or aspect, but at other times (e.g., Izutsu, *The Fundamental Structure*, 71–72) he designates it more straightforwardly as a “concept” in the human mind, which is suggestive of mental existence. In fact, Izutsu's position is mystifying, as illustrated by the following quotation: “The reason why it [existence] is regarded as ‘concomitant’ (*lāzim*) is that a ‘quiddity’ cannot subsist, whether in the external world of reality or in the mind, without ‘existence,’ although conceptually and on a high level of abstraction ‘quiddity’ can be differentiated from ‘existence’ and considered in itself as pure ‘quiddity’ without regard to ‘existence,’ whether external or mental” (69, note 18). Izutsu does not explain what this conception of quiddity at a “high level of abstraction” amounts to in the human intellect and why it should not qualify as a kind of mental existent. In fact, in another article (*Basic Problems*, 8 ff.) dealing with some postclassical sources, he is much more inclined to regard pure quiddity as somehow existing in the mind. According to Izutsu, some Muslim philosophers conceived of it as a kind of transcendental mental object that lies beyond consciousness and the reach of reason. It is “in a primary mode of being, and as such the light of consciousness is not shed upon it” (8). Izutsu's interpretation relies in part on the difficult and obscure concept of *nafs al-amr*—crucial for postclassical authors, but scarcely researched by modern scholars—which he construes here as being indicative of ontological reality. In the end, it is difficult to pinpoint Marmura's and Izutsu's exact understanding of the ontological status of pure quiddity, as they were visibly puzzled by the evidence they found in Avicenna. In spite of this, I believe that Marmura was correct in his main hypothesis and that he deserves credit for envisaging the mental existence of pure quiddity as a serious interpretive option. It should be noted that the key difference between Marmura's interpretation and the ‘standard’ one revolves around whether Avicenna's description of quiddity in itself as a distinct mental consideration or aspect (*i'tibār*) implies or entails any kind of mental existence of its own. In other words, is Avicenna's claim merely logical and epistemic, or ontological as well? While

A second and more common approach has been to adopt a mereological interpretation and to regard pure quiddity as existing merely as a *part* of the universal in the mind. Although Marmura himself envisaged the mereological construal of essence in connection with the universal, he was reluctant to emphasize this kind of existence as philosophically significant and confined himself generally to the epistemological aspects of quiddity. Others, on the other hand, have developed a more robust ontological interpretation of quiddity based on Avicenna's mereological theory, thereby exposing an important way in which existence could be ascribed to pure quiddity in a manner consistent with other Avicennian dictates.⁴³ In this case, the fundamental premise is that pure quiddity cannot exist on its own and autonomously from either universals or concrete beings, although it underlies them and forms a part of their ontological reality. This interpretation strikes one as a kind of compromise between Avicenna's insistent refutation of Platonic realism and his claims that pure quiddity somehow exists together with, or in, mental and concrete things. Needless to say, this approach raises a host of difficult questions regarding the exact mode of existence of pure quiddity *in* composite things and how it relates to the other 'parts' of the composite. For instance, it is not clear whether its being a 'part' of the universal in the mind is the same or different from its being a 'part' of the concrete entity; how it can be conceived of simultaneously as 'a part' and 'in itself'; whether it remains distinct even when it is with other things, etc. So this interpretation merely defers the key issue of the ontological status of quiddity taken 'in itself.' Moreover, this mereological approach appears to cover only certain specific comments that Avicenna makes, but seems inadequate to address others, such as his recognition of a distinct consideration of quiddity 'in itself' in *Introduction* I.2.

In view of the limitations inherent to a mereological approach, it is not surprising that some scholars have attributed a special sense or mode of being to pure quiddity that would correspond neither to the existence of the concrete things nor to the existence of the universals in the human mind. Accordingly, essence in itself would have a third and special ontological mode that is proper to it. This interpretation of Avicenna's metaphysics is associated with the reception of his philosophy in the Latin West and with scholastic theories of 'the being of essence' or *esse essentiae*. In the process of elaborating their own metaphysical systems, these philosophers simultaneously engaged in the task of interpreting Avicenna's philosophy, and in so doing they put forth a certain interpretation of his thought that was to have a lasting and consequential influence on the later philosophical tradition. Now, it is extremely challenging to provide a coherent and systematic account of the various ways in which the formula *esse essentiae* has been used in the medieval Latin context and

most scholars deny that pure quiddity exists in the mind, Marmura intuited that it did, although he struggled to explain how.

⁴³ See Pini, *Absoluta*, 396–404 (this is what Pini describes as his "ontological interpretation," which is one of two interpretations he articulates in his study); De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*; and especially Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz.'*

in the modern historiography.⁴⁴ This expression has been applied to a wide array of theories and views, which are not always compatible with one another. But quite apart from its intrinsic historiographical and philosophical interest, this scholastic legacy profoundly informed the modern reception of Avicenna's metaphysics. One witnesses its mark particularly in the neo-Thomistic circles that flourished in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As a result, a theory of essential being is—either implicitly or explicitly—ascribed to the master (often alongside a 'real' distinction of essence and existence) in the studies of M.D. Roland-Gosselin, Étienne Gilson, Louis Gardet, A.-M. Goichon, and Joseph Owens.⁴⁵ More recently, and working from different perspectives, Alain de Libera, Marwan Rashed, and Pasquale Porro have also resorted to the notion of *esse essentiae* in their interpretation of Avicenna.⁴⁶ It should be noted in this regard that modern scholars have understood it in different ways: either in connection with common nature and the extramental universals, or with a third ontological realm distinct from concrete and mental existence, or, more frequently, with an aspect of universality 'before multiplicity' that would be identical with the objects of God's thought.⁴⁷ According to the last interpretation, essence would have a special being, an 'essential being,' by virtue of existing in God's intellect, and, hence, in a state or mode distinct from that of concrete beings and concepts in the human mind. Even though the textual underpinnings of this view are rarely spelled out in detail, one assumes that Avicenna's rather cryptic reference to the "divine existence" of quiddity in *Metaphysics* (V.1, 205.1–2), combined with his insistence that the First knows all things in a universal way and his recognition, at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12, of a class of universals that exist "before multiplicity" (*qabl al-kathrah*), all played a key role in steering the discussion in this direc-

⁴⁴ I discuss this issue in more detail in section I.3.1.

⁴⁵ Goichon, *La distinction*, 31, 211, 222; eadem, *La philosophie*, 29–35; Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, especially 129–131; idem, *Being*, 76; Gardet, *La pensée religieuse*, 58–61; and Owens, *Common Nature*; idem, *The Relevance*, especially 44–46. Owens, for one, enthusiastically advocated this reading of Avicenna's metaphysics, which he took for granted from the works of the Scholastics. To his credit, however, his assessment of Avicenna's influence on the Latin tradition was largely positive and regarded as beneficial. Others, such as Goichon and Gilson, tend to regard the theory of essential being and other aspects of Avicenna's metaphysics (such as the essence/existence distinction) as fundamentally flawed, while at the same time acknowledging their influence on scholasticism, an ambivalent attitude that was common in Thomistic circles.

⁴⁶ De Libera, *La querelle*; Rashed, *Ibn 'Adi*; Porro, *Universaux*.

⁴⁷ I am not quite certain where to place the interpretation of other scholars, such as Marc Geoffroy, who regard the reference to *wujūd khāṣṣ* in *Metaphysics* I.5 as amounting to a kind of "definitional being" or "être définitionnel" (in de Libera, *L'art*, 648, note 4). Although Geoffroy presumably does not intend this "être définitionnel" as a distinct mode of existence in Avicenna, it is hard to conceive that it would not consist of a kind of intelligible being in the mind. So such an approach immediately raises the question of whether we are dealing here with another kind or mode of mental existence. This approach would intersect with some interpretations of *esse essentiae* that have been put forth, especially in the Latin tradition.

tion.⁴⁸ Among the Scholastics, this particular reconstruction of Avicennian metaphysics and theology was proposed notably by Henry of Ghent in *Quodlibeta* I.9 and III.9, as well as by Albert the Great and Duns Scotus along different lines from those of Henry. Although the view that the essences exist in God's mind is chiefly associated with the reception and interpretation of the *Avicenna latinus*, it has also been endorsed by specialists of Avicenna working within the Arabic tradition.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, this theological interpretation of essence is not without its own set of problems. First, are the quiddities to be located in God alone or in all the separate intellects? Scholars have oscillated on this question. While some have located them chiefly in God's mind, others have identified the Avicennian Giver of Forms (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*) or Agent Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*), rather than God, as the main seat of the pure quiddities, perhaps in an attempt to skirt a cluster of theological problems, which are formulated below. Second, what kind of mode of existence would these quiddities possess in their divine habitat? How would this divine intellectual existence differ from human intellectual existence? And are the quiddities contemplated by these intellects universal and, if so, according to what sense of universality? These points are fraught with ambiguity in the scholarship, where little effort has been dis-

48 The term 'divine,' *ilāhī* in Arabic, like the Greek term θεῖος, can refer to God or to any of the immaterial and eternal existents of ancient and medieval cosmology that exists in the superlunary world. Although not on a par with God or the One, the gods of Greek philosophical systems and the separate intellects (*al-'uqūl al-mufāriqah*) of Arabic philosophical systems possess many of the qualities that also define the Godhead, such as oneness, immateriality, eternity, immutability, intellection, etc. In Avicenna's cosmology, there is also the distinction between the Agent Intellect, the 'Giver of Forms,' and the other separate intellects. So one key question that arises here is that of the 'localization' of the quiddities in the divine world. Although by far the most common interpretation of the being of essence has been to locate the pure quiddities in God's mind, in which case the meaning of 'divine' is either confined to, or construed chiefly in connection with, the First Cause, another closely related trend has been to attribute knowledge of the pure quiddities to all the separate intellects of Avicenna's cosmology and especially to the Agent Intellect, the 'Giver of Forms.' The latter has been regarded by some as the main seat of the quiddities and forms in the divine world, removing God Himself from any kind of association with the essences.

49 See Bäck, *Avicenna's Conception*, 236; idem, *Avicenna on Existence*, 364–365; Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; Porro, *Universaux*; and de Libera, *La querelle*, 231–232; and idem, in *L'être et l'essence*, 24–26. Deborah Black touches on this subject in her study on fictional beings in Avicenna. Although she does not examine Avicenna's theory of quiddity in any depth, she nonetheless states that in "both the *Isagoge* and the *Metaphysics*, Avicenna recognizes that those quiddities which become universals in our minds have a prior existence in the pure intellects of God and the separate intelligences" (Black, *Avicenna*, 11); see also eadem, *Mental Existence*, 26–27, and 12: "And since Avicenna upholds the existential dependence of all beings upon God and the other separate intellects, all real quiddities must pre-exist in the divine intellect in some way." Black therefore sides with Bäck and Rashed in locating the quiddities in God's mind. Porro, *Universaux*, especially 38–40, and 44–46, provides a comparative analysis of the views of Henry of Ghent and Avicenna and argues that the latter likely endorsed a version of the theory of *esse essentialia*, which was also later ascribed to him by the Scholastics. In chapter V, I approach the problem of quiddity from this theological angle, reaching conclusions that are in many ways congruent with the views of these scholars.

pensed toward distinguishing between the divine and human modes of intellection and existence of the quiddities. One factor behind this uncertainty lies in Avicenna's theory of universality, which he ascribes to human and divine mental objects, but which is at the same time the subject of various criteria and qualifications.⁵⁰

Furthermore, if one locates the essences in God, a host of theological complications ensues. To begin with, this move raises the question of how these quiddities could exist in God without causing multiplicity in the divine essence. The issue at stake here is how God can remain one if His essence contains all the other essences and if He contemplates them in order to create external things.⁵¹ A second issue focuses on the idea that the actual existence of the quiddities in God would precede their actual existence in caused things. If the quiddities in themselves can be said to possess their own kind of existence and to assume a special ontological status in the divine mind, then it would seem that they can be said to somehow pre-exist the divine creation or causation of concrete beings in the external world. The question then becomes one of explaining how these two kinds of existence relate to one another and how existence can be superadded to existence, which seems tautological and absurd. The third issue runs as follows: if the quiddities exist in God, they are possible (*mumkin*) of existence and, hence, dwell in the divine mind *qua* a set of not yet realized possibles (*mumkināt*). But this would introduce possibility in the very core of the divine essence, which Avicenna describes as pure necessity or necessary existence. If God is said to necessarily exist in Himself and to necessarily

50 Some scholars, like Benevich, Die 'göttliche Existenz,' recognize only one kind of universal mental existents, which are ascribed to both human and divine thought. Porro, Universaux, especially 44, distinguishes between human mental existence and divine intellectual existence and argues that the special existence of essences should be construed in connection with the latter. It is not entirely clear, however, whether Porro regards the quiddities in the divine intellects as kinds of universals or as the pure quiddities Avicenna mentions in such passages as *Introduction* I.2; in fact, Porro does not elaborate on the difference between these two aspects of quiddity in connection with the divine world. But since he seems to ascribe a theory of *esse essentiae* to Avicenna (40, 46), it stands to reason that he would recognize three aspects or modes of existence of essence, the third of which would correspond, presumably, to the divine existence of the pure quiddities in the Agent Intellect or God. Rashed, Ibn 'Adī, provides valuable insight into this issue and an elegant solution concerning the existence of the quiddities in God.

51 To solve this problem, Rashed argues that the pure quiddities can be said to exist in God in a neutral state or in a state "beyond existence," and, hence, in a way that would not conflict with His perfect unity and simplicity. In contrast A.-M. Goichon, who also located the quiddities in God (*La distinction*, 211, 222, 276–284), believed that Avicenna had not convincingly addressed this point. She regarded this as one of the main shortcomings of his theology and metaphysics. Louis Gardet, *La pensée religieuse*, also implicitly maintained the theory of the divine existence of the quiddities and regarded this aspect of Avicenna's metaphysics as foundational in the master's explanation of creation, a theme dear to Muslim and Christian scholars alike. Unlike Goichon and Rashed, however, Gardet does not seem to think that this represents a theological problem. It should be noted that the issue of the divine provenance or localization of quiddity in itself is distinct from the issue of its ontological status, although they are obviously related. In other words, scholars need not agree on these two points in tandem.

cause things to exist from Himself (whence His name of Necessary of Existence, *wājib al-wujūd*), then how can this absolutely necessary being co-exist with a multitude of possible things?⁵² Finally, and to complete this rather disquieting account, Avicenna describes God's knowledge as being a universal kind of knowledge. But if one posits that the pure quiddities—which are by definition abstracted from universality—exist in God, then how could they constitute the basis of a *divine universal* knowledge?⁵³

It is apparent, then, that the theory of the *esse essentiae* that was ascribed to Avicenna—both in its medieval and modern articulations—has serious implications for his theology and metaphysics. To put it mildly, locating the quiddities in God or in the Agent Intellect raises a host of intricate questions that need to be addressed in detail. In light of the foregoing, one may legitimately wonder about the rationale for defending this thesis. If anything, Avicenna's discussion of quiddity in itself unfolds overwhelmingly within the context of human—not divine—noetics, so that locating these pure quiddities in the divine mind may seem an unwarranted interpretive leap. This approach also presents some textual difficulties. For example, is Avicenna's isolated reference to the "divine existence" (*wujūd ilāhī*) of quiddity in *Metaphysics* (V.1, 205.1–2) really to be construed as a statement about the localization of quiddities in God? Many scholars have denied this.⁵⁴ Moreover, why is it that Avicenna does not articulate more clearly a threefold scheme of existents that would include the pure quiddities in their divine environment, if that had in fact been his doctrine? In any case, one pressing issue associated with the move of attributing a special existence to the pure quiddities becomes that of *localization*: if these quiddities possess their own mode of existence (whether neutral or positive), where are they supposed to exist? Are they to be located solely in the human mind? In God's mind? In the Agent Intellect and in all the separate intellects? In a realm or sphere

52 This difficulty has been at the forefront of a dialogue between Zedler and Lizzini. Zedler, Saint Thomas and Avicenna, argues that an order or sphere of pure possibles (or pre-existing essences) must be posited to make sense of Avicenna's theology and theory of divine creation. Replying to Zedler's interpretation, Lizzini, A Mysterious Order, argues that the theory of the pre-existence of essence is incorrect, and she defends the co-extensionality thesis whereby all essences need correspond to a mental or concrete existent. In a nutshell, Lizzini argues that, for Avicenna, essence and existence are inseparable, that possibility and necessity attach only to the essence *qua* existing thing, and that God creates both the existence and essence of things (on this last point, see also Benevich, Die 'göttliche Existenz'). As a corollary, Lizzini argues that all possible essences either exist or must eventually come to exist, which leads her to conclude that Avicenna's philosophy posits a principle of plenitude. Lizzini's views reflect those of many other scholars working on the Arabic Avicenna, but that is not to say that there is even the shadow of a consensus looming, as the previous survey has shown.

53 The scholars mentioned above have not addressed these points in detail, even though the latter are a direct effect of locating the pure quiddities in the Agent Intellect and/or in God. With that being said, the expression *esse essentiae* is equivocal, since it can mean different things to different people, and can (but need not) be connected with existence *in* God. Providing qualifications is therefore a requisite in each individual case.

54 Menn, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 155 and note 25; Benevich, Die 'göttliche Existenz.'

of their own, as Platonic Forms or the pure objects posited by Alexius Meinong? This issue of localization cannot be avoided the moment one tackles the problem of the ontological status of pure quiddity in a committed way.

At this juncture, a word should be said about two important contributions to the topic by Alain de Libera. In his two massive surveys of the problem of the universals in medieval philosophy, *La querelle des universaux* (1996) and *L'art des généralités* (1999), de Libera devotes a detailed treatment to Avicenna's theory of essence and its impact on Latin scholasticism. Taken together, these sections amount to the most sustained and substantial analysis of Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity that has been offered in the modern literature.⁵⁵ In view of this, it is somewhat ironic that these studies were conducted chiefly (albeit not exclusively) on the basis of the Latin translations of Avicenna, in addition to translations of his works in modern European languages. In spite of this, de Libera articulates a highly engaging and sophisticated analysis of Avicenna's position on various issues, ranging from the topic of common nature in the concrete world to the conception of pure quiddity in the mind. Although he emphasizes in particular the logical aspects of the master's doctrines, de Libera also explores some of the ontological implications that arise from Avicenna's theory of essence and devotes some pages also to the theory of *esse essentialiae*. One remarkable feature of de Libera's analysis is that it weaves together material taken from the Greek, Arabic, and Latin traditions in an effort to precisely contextualize Avicenna's theories, especially vis-à-vis the late-antique and medieval debates regarding the universals and common things. Although de Libera insists on regarding Avicenna's works as aligned with what he calls "l'épistémé alexandrienne"⁵⁶ and as an elaboration on the views put forth by Alexander of Aphrodisias, he also evokes the potential influence of the Mu'tazilites on the master's thought and seeks to chart some key features of his Latin reception. In this regard, de Libera's contextualist approach represents a model for the present book.

When it comes to the more pointed issue of the ontological status of pure quiddity, de Libera's works are stimulating, but inconclusive. One reason for this is that his interpretation of the evidence underwent considerable change. The later work *L'art des généralités* decidedly shifts the emphasis away from ontology and towards logic and rejects unequivocally the hypothesis of 'the being of essence,' which had been envisaged in de Libera's earlier works. In *La querelle des universaux*, the author examines some key Avicennian passages that led to the formulation of the theory of *esse essentialiae* in the Latin context. In the process, he also recognizes the ambiguity of Avicenna's position on this issue and the possibility that the master may have entertained such a theory. This view is reiterated more explicitly in another work by de Libera published the same year.⁵⁷ But in *L'art des généralités*, the author depicts such

55 De Libera, *La querelle*, 223–262; idem, *L'art*, 499–607.

56 De Libera, *L'art*, 501.

57 De Libera, *La querelle*, 238–239, 261–262; idem, *L'être et l'essence*, 23–26.

interpretations of Avicenna as misguided and wrong: the Avicennian essence is neither endowed with its own being, nor is it comparable to the pure objects of Alexius Meinong. In fact, he perceives this work as an opportunity to “correct” these fallacious interpretations (“d’expliquer et de corriger ces deux erreurs”).⁵⁸ In that work, de Libera not only squarely rejects *esse essentiae*; he also aligns himself with a nominalist reading of Avicenna according to which the universals have absolutely no existence or reality in the exterior world.

Although it would be out of place to unduly criticize de Libera’s masterly studies, I wish to briefly highlight three problematic points that are relevant to the present book and have informed my analysis. The first is that although de Libera stresses the distinction between the concept of pure quiddity and the complex universal concept in the mind, he does not address in earnest the issue of the ontological status of the former in the context of human thought and of Avicenna’s theory of mental existence. In that regard, his analysis presents the same limitation as Marmura’s. Second, de Libera’s most consequential study of the subject, *L’art des généralités*, focuses exclusively on the epistemological and logical aspects of quiddity in the human mind. Unlike the earlier *La querelle*, it omits any contextualization of essence in Avicenna’s cosmology and does not discuss its relation to the divine world, the Agent Intellect, and God’s intellection. There is hardly any mention in *L’art* of the sense of universality ‘before multiplicity,’ which, following some Neoplatonists, Avicenna associates with the intellection of the First and the separate intellects, in spite of the fact that this connection had been duly acknowledged in *La querelle*. Finally, de Libera focuses disproportionately on the relation between Avicenna and Alexander, thereby neglecting other thinkers who may have been equally influential in shaping the master’s views.⁵⁹

The foregoing shows that we are far from having reached a scholarly consensus on the issue of the ontological status of pure quiddity. An overview of the most important and recent studies on the topic points to an unwieldy variety of approaches, arguments, and conclusions, most of which are incompatible with one another. Although a vibrant and constructive dialogue has arisen, partly within the field of Arabic philosophy, and partly between Arabists and Latinists working on the *Avicenna latinus*, the way in which Avicenna’s theory of quiddity in itself connects with other aspects of his philosophical system continues to puzzle scholars.⁶⁰ This is un-

58 De Libera, *L’art*, 577.

59 Given these points, it is not clear to me that *L’art des généralités* should be regarded as consistently improving on the earlier *La querelle des universaux*, in spite of de Libera’s claim to that effect. The latter often provides a more balanced account of Avicenna’s position, which addresses the cosmological and theological aspects of the problem in addition to the logical ones, and which seems less influenced by the staunch nominalist position that comes through in the former work.

60 There is no doubt that this dialogue will continue unimpeded and even perhaps amplify in the coming years, as new manuscripts of Avicenna continue to be edited and interpretations honed. For example—and purely hypothetically—the discovery of the complete text of the *Easterners*, in

derstandable, because this issue intersects with other key aspects of the master's metaphysics and epistemology. Furthermore, it should be stressed that the stakes concerning this problem are high: not only does it in itself represent a core element of Avicenna's metaphysics, but it also has a potentially decisive bearing on other aspects of his philosophical system, such as his views on divine knowledge and creation, his theory of causation, and human epistemology and psychology, not to mention the theories of determinism and the principle of plenitude, which have been frequently assigned to the *shaykh al-ra'is* in the modern literature. To recap, the contemporary reader must grapple with a rich array of views and interpretations regarding pure quiddity in Avicenna. This poses a serious challenge to the coherence of the Avicennian metaphysical system and to the proper understanding of its legacy. The various interpretations thus far advanced by scholars can be synopsized as follows:

- (1) Quiddity in itself does not exist distinctly, separately, or autonomously in any way and does not possess a special kind of existence, which would amount to a third ontological mode in Avicenna's philosophy; as such, it is a mere mental or logical consideration or aspect, which does not possess a distinct mental existence; all quiddities exist either as universals in the mind or as concrete individuals in the extramental world.⁶¹
- (1a) Quiddity in itself possesses a mereological kind of existence and is an irreducible part (*juz'*) of the universal concept and of the concrete existent that is not identical with these existents taken as complex entities. Thus, in the mental context, it does not exist distinctly from the universal, but rather *in* the universal. Its existence at any rate is tied to that of the universal, and the two considerations (of pure quiddity and the universal) do not amount to two distinct existents in the mind, but to a single entity. Like (1) above, this mereological approach correlates the pure quiddities with mental and concrete existents.⁶²

which Avicenna is said to have discussed subtle points related to essence, divine creation, and possibility, could impact our assessment of specific Avicennian metaphysical doctrines. Indeed, in two passages of his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 58.7–9 and 61.22–24, where Avicenna discusses the complicated issue of how possibility and multiplicity relate to quiddity, he notes that he explored this topic in detail in *Easterners* and uses this to justify his short treatment of it in the commentary.

⁶¹ This is by far the most common view among modern scholars and may be accordingly described as the 'standard' or 'default' position; for an example, see de Libera, *L'art*, 499–607.

⁶² This mereological approach has been hypothesized most lucidly by Pini, *Absoluta*, 396–404; Benévich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*; and De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*. Marmura's articles also delve into the mereological aspect of Avicenna's doctrines in connection with the mental universals.

- (2) Quiddity in itself possesses a neutral ontological status between existence and nonexistence or one that is ‘neither existent nor non-existent.’ There is therefore a third ontological mode corresponding to the essence’s ‘indifference’ or ‘neutrality.’⁶³
- (3) Quiddity in itself possesses a kind of mental existence that is distinct from the mental existence of the complex universals in the human mind.⁶⁴
- (4) Quiddity in itself possesses a special ‘divine’ existence and (a) is to be located in God’s mind, and/or (b) is to be located in the Agent Intellect.⁶⁵

Another convenient way of summarizing these various views would be to say that scholars have regarded the ontological status of quiddity in itself in a *positive* (1a, 3, 4a and 4b), *neutral* (2), or *negative* (1) way. The mereological construal of essence (1a) is complicated, because it is not clear on what grounds the existence of pure quiddity as a part of the composite substance is to be distinguished from the existence of the whole. Moreover, this mereological approach lends itself equally to epistemological and ontological distinctions.⁶⁶ At any rate, it should be noted that these various hypotheses are not mutually exclusive and have sometimes been combined with one another. This is especially true of hypotheses (2), (3), and (4a and 4b). Hypotheses (4a and 4b) in particular are reconcilable with hypotheses (2) and (3). Rashed, for instance, describes the ontological status of quiddity in itself as neutral (2), but also contends that it is to be located—in this neutral state—in God’s mind (4a). Benevich for his part construes the ‘divine existence’ of pure quiddity solely in terms of its mereological existence (1a). Here one gets a sense of the difficulty involved in delineating the various positions that have been articulated in the scholarship. This is chiefly due to the intertwinement of the various threads that together constitute the problematic of quiddity in Avicenna, as well as to the fact that scholars have combined different elements in their interpretations, often in an incompatible way. For this reason, there is a pressing need to disentangle these various elements and address them separately in the analysis.⁶⁷

63 This view has been intimated by Izutsu, Nuseibeh, and Rashed, although major differences between these scholars’ arguments also have to be highlighted. Moreover, as indicated above, Rashed’s position oscillates between (2) and (4).

64 This view was briefly and tentatively put forth by Marmura. Bäck and Izutsu seem at times to have oscillated between (1) and (3). Yet, none of these authors articulates an elaborate argument concerning the distinct mental existence of pure quiddity.

65 Goichon, Bäck, de Libera in *La querelle*, Porro, Black and Rashed all uphold a variant of this position.

66 Pini, Benevich, and De Haan do not tackle this issue in depth.

67 The complexity and interconnectedness of these various scholarly positions on Avicenna’s theory of quiddity have to be recognized fully before a new interpretation is proffered. Benevich’s overview

In hindsight, the studies listed above constitute the *status quaestionis* on the issue of the ontological status of quiddity in Avicenna. They have focused on various facets of the problem and have generated valuable insight without which further progress would not be possible. In spite of this, only few of these studies are devoted expressly to the issue of the *ontological status* of quiddity in itself. This specific question has in general been treated cursively in connection with other issues pertaining to essence or merely routinely in the context of a more general exposition of Avicenna's philosophy.⁶⁸ Moreover, the scholarly literature still does not include a comprehensive examination of the terminological and textual evidence pertaining to this issue. The tendency has been in general to focus on discrete textual segments, with the result that the interrelationships between the various passages in which Avicenna discusses quiddity have not been studied comparatively and systematically. In view of this, the aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive and systematic discussion of this topic by building on the previous scholarship and by exploring a cluster of key concepts and issues that lie at the heart of Avicenna's doctrine of quiddity. But before turning to this material, and as a propaedeutic to my own analysis, I wish to address what are in my eyes some of the main conceptual and terminological difficulties involved with the study of quiddity in itself in Avicenna. The following considerations, it is hoped, will also serve as an aid to those wishing to take a future stab at the problem.

3 Theoretical and methodological considerations

3.1 Whence *esse essentiae*?

Avicenna's influence on the development of medieval Latin philosophy has long been recognized by scholars. Even though the master's works had a significant impact on disciplines as varied as medicine, logic, psychology, physics, and metaphysics, it is arguably his metaphysical legacy that proved the most complex and momentous.⁶⁹ From the twelfth century onward—a time when some of his works become widely accessible in Latin—Avicenna's views were instrumental in shaping most of the discussions of essence and existence that were articulated by the Christian thinkers. More precisely, Avicenna's works are one of the sources—in many

of the scholarship on the topic of the ontological status of quiddity (Die 'göttliche Existenz,' 104–105) is incomplete and conveys an oversimplified picture of the variety of scholarly opinions that have been put forth, as well as of the major points of disagreement.

⁶⁸ Two exceptions are the studies by Rashed and Beneviseh mentioned above.

⁶⁹ For some insight, see Goichon, *La philosophie d'Avicenne*; Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima*; idem, *Influence*; and the various contributions in Hasse and Bertolacci (eds.), *The Arabic*. A general study that would survey the reception of Avicenna's metaphysics in Latin philosophy and provide a list of quotations and mentions of the Arabic thinker by name in the Latin sources is a desideratum.

cases, the main source—for a cluster of issues that lie at the heart of these medieval debates: the ‘real’ distinction between essence and existence; essence *qua* common nature in concrete beings; the tripartite division of the universals ‘before,’ ‘in,’ and ‘after multiplicity’; the pure conception of essence in the mind; and the ontology of essence, and especially the notion of *esse essentiae*.

The expression *esse essentiae* finds its origin in some medieval Latin texts written under the direct influence of Avicenna’s theory of essence. In developing their views on essence, these Latin authors relied on some of the translations from Arabic that had been achieved during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE, mostly in the city of Toledo in Spain under the supervision of Abraham Ibn Daud and Dominic Gundissalinus or Gundisalvi (both flourished in the latter part of the twelfth century CE).⁷⁰ Although used primarily to qualify scholastic theories, the expression *esse essentiae* came by extension to describe the thought of other philosophers, including Avicenna himself. From a textual perspective, the key passages that informed this notion are *Metaphysics* I.5, where Avicenna ascribes one sense of existence, *wujūd khāṣṣ* (proper being), to essence, and *Metaphysics* V.1, where he discusses the existence (*wujūd*) of essence and alludes on one occasion to its “divine existence” (*wujūd ilāhī*). These texts inspired the Latin theories of *esse proprium* (the direct translation of *wujūd khāṣṣ*) and various notions of essential being. Two additional passages from *Introduction* further contributed to the development of this notion: the first in I.2, which displays Avicenna’s famous threefold distinction of essence, one of which is the essence taken ‘in itself’; and the other in I.12, where the master, following late-antique examples, distinguishes between the universals ‘before,’ ‘in,’ and ‘after multiplicity.’ Starting with Albert the Great, the latter text appears to have been responsible for the diffusion and wide endorsement of this tripartite paradigm in the Latin West.⁷¹

In spite of the direct textual and historical connection between Avicenna and theories of essential being in the Latin West, one wonders how relevant this expression really is in the context of Islamic philosophy, and whether it can be used constructively to study Avicenna’s system. This question is all the more relevant, given that modern scholars sometimes rely on the notion of essential being to study the Avicennian system, sometimes within a comparative approach and in relation to Latin thought.⁷² To begin with, it should be pointed out that even in the context of medieval Latin philosophy, the expression *esse essentiae* is ambiguous, because it

⁷⁰ For an overview of the translation movement from Arabic to Latin, see Burnett, *Arabic into Latin*; idem, *The Coherence*.

⁷¹ De Libera, *La querelle*, 322–335; Wéber, *Le thème avicennien*; for Albert’s relation to Arabic philosophy, see Endress, *Der arabische Aristoteles*.

⁷² This is true both of scholars who ascribe a theory of ‘essential being’ to Avicenna and of those who oppose it: see Owens, *Common Nature*; Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, 87–88; Rashed, *Ibn ‘Adī*, 114–115, note 12; Porro, *Universaux*; Gracia, *Cutting the Gordian Knot*; and Black, *Mental Existence*, 25–27.

can refer to a wide range of views on the relation between essence and existence and on the ontological status of essence. In no way can it be made to neatly encapsulate all the theories articulated on these topics. Although primarily associated with Henry of Ghent and his distinction between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae*, the notion of essential being is also discussed in one form or other in the works of many other Scholastics, such as Martin of Dacia (d. 1304 CE), Boethius of Dacia (fl. 1275 CE), Siger of Brabant (d. c. 1284 CE), Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, John Wyclif (d. 1384 CE), Richard of Clive (d. after 1306 CE), John Capreolus (d. 1444 CE), Thomas Cajetan (d. 1534 CE), and Francisco Suárez. As Alain de Libera has shown, it seems that essential being was understood in at least three distinct ways: (a) as pointing to the special ontological status of the essence in itself—or to the ontological ‘indifference’ of essence—in abstraction from mental and concrete existence; (b) in connection with the divine intellection and as corresponding to the objects of God’s thought; and (c) as referring merely to mental existence or the existence of the universals in the mind.⁷³ (a) can be associated chiefly with Henry, although his position might bear also a relation to (b). (b) refers to the aspect of the universals ‘before multiplicity’ and can be reconciled, as in the works of Albert the Great and Aquinas, with a reading of the Platonic forms or the essences as existing in the mind of the Creator; (c) has sometimes been equated with a theory of mental existence, where essential being refers merely to the objects in the intellect. A rich set of terms was devised to buttress these theories, which bear varying relations to the notion of essential being. Among them are quidditative being (*esse quidditativum*), intentional being (*esse intentionale*), intramental being (*esse in anima*), proper being (*esse proprium*), diminutive being (*esse diminutum*), being as known (*esse cognitum*), objective being (*esse obiectivum*), and rational being (*esse rationis*). As some of these terms suggest, many Latin thinkers conceived of essential being—if they did at all—in a manner that bears a close relation to intelligible and conceptual being.⁷⁴ Overall, then, the expression ‘*esse essentiae*’ is relevant not because it refers to a specific interpretation of Avicenna, but rather because it captures the general awareness

73 de Libera, *L’art*, 578–579; idem, *La querelle*, 258–259.

74 The literature on these topics is too vast to be cited exhaustively. For general discussions of *esse essentiae* and the relation between essence and existence in the Latin West, see Owens, *Common Nature*; Wippel, *Essence and Existence*; DeGrood, *Philosophies of Essence*; Conti, *Essenza*; de Libera, *La querelle*, especially 255–262; idem, *L’art*, 577–580; Bertolacci, *The Reception of Avicenna*; and Twetten, *Really Distinguishing*. The theory of *esse essentiae* taken in a robust sense is associated chiefly with Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibeta* I.9 and III.9, who distinguishes between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae* (see Porro, *Universaux*; idem, *Henry*). Godfrey of Fontaines discusses *esse essentiae*, but chiefly in order to refute Henry (Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought*, 136–138). Starting from a different angle in Avicenna, Duns Scotus explores essential being, or rather the existence of the universals, in connection with both human thought and the ‘common natures’ (sing. *natura communis*) of concrete beings (Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot*; Cross, *Scotus’s Collatio*). See also Wood, Aquinas; Wippel, *The Reality*. For Wyclif’s construal of *esse essentiae*, see Conti, *John Wyclif*. For Cajetan, see Muñoz, *Dificultades*. Sanz, *La doctrina*, explores for his part the relationship between Henry and Suárez.

on the part of the medieval Latin philosophers that the master had articulated an ontology of essence.

As I argue in this book, it is plausible that these three principled ways of interpreting essential being are prefigured in the Avicennian works. In spite of this, they are best regarded as elaborations on the *Avicenna latinus* proper to medieval Europe, and they represent an important and intriguing feature of the scholastic discussions about essence and existence from Albert the Great to Francisco Suárez and beyond. It would seem at first glance that the theory—or rather the theories—of *esse essentiae* as they came to be articulated in the medieval European context have no counterpart in the Islamic tradition, at least not in the well-defined form in which they are found in the Latin texts. What is more, there is no standard Arabic equivalent to the Latin formula *esse essentiae* that promptly comes to mind and that would have been used by generations of Muslim thinkers. In fact, one struggles to find a correlate in the context of Avicenna's philosophy, who was the main responsible for triggering this trend in the West. Yet, it would be inaccurate to infer from these observations that notions of essential being were never discussed in the Islamic context, especially if one maintains a certain flexibility in the way in which this notion is understood. Discussions of mental existence and the objects of God's knowledge thrived in the classical and postclassical periods of Islamic thought. Hence, it would be surprising if the idea of essential being had never been envisaged in these ontological contexts. The first great Arabic philosopher, Kindī (d. c. 870 CE), broaches this topic when he defends a theological position (comparable in many ways to that of the Mu'tazilites) that subsumes all of the divine attributes under the divine essence. For Kindī, God exists and is one essentially, and he seeks to distinguish these senses of essential being and essential oneness from those that are predicated accidentally of all the other beings. So it is quite clear that for Kindī, God exists and is one 'by essence.'⁷⁵ Several years later, the Arabic Christian theologian and philosopher Yaḥyā b. 'Adī promotes a threefold distinction of essence modelled on late-antique sources, which also corresponds to three 'kinds' of existence (*aṣnāf al-wujūd*), and which puts forth a doctrine of the essential being of essence. On his account, there is one aspect of essence or form that has "essential existence" (*wujūd dhātī*) and "divine existence" (*wujūd ilāhī*).⁷⁶ As for Miskawayh (d. 1030), who was a contemporary of Avicenna, in his work entitled *Book of Triumph* (*Kitāb al-Fawz al-aṣghar*) he distinguishes between existence that is accidental (*al-wujūd bi-l-'araḍ*), which belongs to all contingent things, and existence that is essential (*al-wujūd bi-l-dhāt*), which belongs to God alone.⁷⁷ These precedents probably informed Avicenna's approach to metaphysics and theology: the First, or the Necessary Existent, for Avicenna, exists by virtue of Its essence; it has being essentially; and its quiddity is Its existence. What is more, Avicenna in *Metaphysics* V.1

⁷⁵ Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 47 ff.; idem, *Before Essence*.

⁷⁶ See Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 96; Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; and sections III.4.2 and IV.2.2.3 of this book.

⁷⁷ Miskawayh, *Book of Triumph*, 54.13–55.1; see also Gutas, *Avicenna*, 296–297.

describes pure quiddity as having ‘existence’ and even ‘divine existence.’ In a different context in *Physics*, he refers to the fact that form “is prior to it [matter] with regard to essential being [*mutaqaddiman ‘alayhā fī l-wujūd al-dhātī*].”⁷⁸ Shortly after the master’s death, Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) in *The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Unbelief* (*Fayṣal al-tafrīqah bayna l-islām wa-l-zandaqah*) provides a breakdown of the various senses of existence, one of which is essential being (*al-wujūd al-dhātī*), even though he uses this notion in a way that differs markedly from both Ibn ‘Adī and Avicenna.⁷⁹ Furthermore, there is evidence that the question of the ontological status of quiddity in itself was sometimes pointedly raised in the Arabic sources. Apart from Avicenna’s works, which constitute the *locus classicus* for this question, one finds this issue broached explicitly in Bahmanyār’s (d. 1066 CE) magnum opus, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*. There he asks: “Does humanness inasmuch as it is humanness exist or does not exist?”⁸⁰ Two centuries later, Taftāzānī notes that some philosophers uphold the mental existence of a fully abstract and ‘negatively-conditioned’ aspect of quiddity in the mind and proceeds to refute this position.⁸¹ Finally, when it comes to the other (not strictly Aristotelian) traditions in Islam, one could argue that both the Mu‘tazilite theory of the nonexistent things (*ashyā’ ma’dūmah*) and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s theory of the fixed entities (*a’yān thābitah*) attribute a special and intrinsic ontological status to nonexistent objects, in a manner that recalls Alexius Meinong’s theory of the pure objects.

As we can see from these various examples, the presumption that some objects have a kind of essential being (regardless of the corollary issue of whether they are to be located in the human mind, in the divine mind, or in a realm of their own) has been occasionally entertained in Islamic intellectual history. This problematic is reflected in the use of such explicit Arabic terms as *wujūd dhātī*, *wujūd ilāhī*, *wujūd ‘aqlī*, as well as Avicenna’s celebrated formula *wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātīhi*, which means literally, ‘the Necessary of Existence by virtue of Its essence.’ These all imply a certain notion of essential being. But what is striking in this regard is that, as in the Latin context, the various aspects discussed by Arabic scholars that pertain to essential being cannot be grouped under a single heading, but belong to different fields, including theology, epistemology, ontology, and logic; and they bridge issues as diverse as the objects of God’s knowledge; the status of intellectual forms in the human mind; the status of natures and essences in real concrete beings; and the notion of uncaused existence as it applies to God. As a result, the nexus of

⁷⁸ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.10, 66.9. McGinnis translates this segment as “essentially prior in existence to [the matter],” but the Arabic syntax connects *dhātī* to *wujūd*.

⁷⁹ Ghazālī, *The Decisive Criterion*, 43, 45, and 49; for an analysis of this passage, see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī*, 111–115. By *wujūd dhātī*, Ghazālī apparently intends the true existence of things in the exterior world, along the lines of an Ash‘arite position where existence and essence are one and the same thing.

⁸⁰ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 499.14–15.

⁸¹ Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Aims*, vol. 1, 404.

issues linked to the notion of essential being amounts to different philosophical problematics in the Islamic tradition, as it does in the Latin tradition. Finally, the formula *esse essentiae*, when it is used with regard to Islamic intellectual history, has the added disadvantage that it is imported from a foreign field. As a result, scholars may inadvertently minimize the differences between the Latin and Arabic contexts and draw comparisons whose value is questionable. Thus, if the expression *esse essentiae* seems inadequate to describe the diversity of views elaborated by Latin thinkers, it seems doubly inadequate to study the Arabic philosophical texts.

In light of these comments, we may conclude that one of the main obstacles in approaching the problem of essential being in the Islamic philosophical and theological traditions is terminological and definitional in nature. The formula *esse essentiae* appears imprecise, reductionist, and even misleading. Moreover, inasmuch as this notion can be amplified or distended to include such diverse problematics as mental existence, God's knowledge, the essential nature of concrete beings, or the ontological status of nonexistent things, it can be said to have traction in the Islamic context, albeit without contributing anything precise to the analysis at hand. In sum, it is not that this notion bears no relation to Islamic intellectual history, but rather that it should be studied through the terminological and textual evidence that characterizes that tradition. In view of this, I have systematically avoided using the term *esse essentiae* in this book and have prioritized the Arabic terminology instead. It is mentioned only when a direct connection is made between Avicenna's legacy and Latin philosophy.

3.2 Essence and the meaning of 'in itself' (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*)

Many of the conceptual issues at play in this study are intricately connected with the terminological evidence that can be found in Avicenna's works, so that in most cases their investigation has to be accompanied by a process of terminological disambiguation. As can be expected from a study dealing with the ontological status of pure quiddity, the two concepts that will lie at the core of the forthcoming analysis are 'quiddity' and 'existence.' Let me provide some pointed remarks concerning each term. One vital task concerning the first term is to understand what Avicenna means exactly by the expression quiddity *in itself*, which is a shorthand in English for a variety of expressions one finds in the Arabic sources. On one interpretation, quiddity *in itself* refers to the state of quiddity considered in abstraction from everything else—that is, in a state of distinctness or separateness from all other things. But it is not obvious whether the qualification *in itself* here refers merely to an epistemic consideration or to an ontological state, or to both, albeit in different ways. In other words, *in itself* could be interpreted along different lines, as meaning either 'epistemologically distinct' or 'ontologically distinct or separate.' What is more, one should also differentiate between a state of 'ontological separateness' in a strong sense, i.e., as pertaining to the concrete world, and in a weak or secondary sense, i.e., as refer-

ring to distinct existents in the mind—which is what I shall call a state of ‘ontological distinctness.’ These distinctions can lead to widely divergent metaphysical implications and conclusions. Now, although there is surely one sense in which this qualification of distinctness is immediately true from an epistemological or psychological perspective—Avicenna assures us that we can have a consideration and a mental realization of quiddity *in itself* by abstracting it from all other things in our mind—it is unclear whether this psychological state *in itself* also corresponds to a putative ontological state *in itself* in the mind.

What is more, to limit one’s interpretation of *in itself* as expressing merely abstraction, distinctness, or separation (whether in an epistemic or ontological sense) would be reductionist, because Avicenna also believes that there is a sense in which quiddity in itself is *irreducible* and is present or exists *in* other things. Accordingly, another possible reading of Avicenna’s argument here is that quiddity exists as a simple and irreducible part, aspect, or principle of more complex existents. At *Metaphysics* V.1, the master explains that

The consideration of ‘animal in itself’ is possible [*i’tibār al-ḥayawān bi-dhātihi jā’izan*], even when it is with another [thing], because it [always] remains itself even when it is with another. Its essence, therefore, belongs to it in itself [*fa-dhātuhu lahu bi-dhātihi*], whereas its being with another is [merely] an accidental occurrence or a certain concomitant of its nature [*amr ‘arīḍ lahu aw lāzim mā li-ṭabī‘atihi*], as in the case of animalness and humanness.⁸²

This mereological approach appears to be vindicated on the grounds that, according to Avicenna, concrete and mental complex existents are composed of pure quiddity and extraneous concomitants and accidents that attach to it. What is more, Avicenna and (especially) his later commentators appear to have endorsed a realist or formalist version of this mereological theory and not merely a conceptual and definitional one: pure quiddity exists in each concrete existent as a common nature and form. Accordingly, quiddity or nature *qua* ‘part’ can be said to exist in a different mode from the synthetic whole to which it belongs. In these cases, *in itself* can hardly be glossed over as meaning ‘separate,’ ‘in abstraction from,’ or ‘in isolation of.’ Rather, *in itself* here would convey a meaning closer to ‘irreducible’ or ‘foundational,’ with the idea that quiddity (in itself) always remains quiddity (in itself) and preserves its fundamental identity, regardless of whether it is envisaged as a distinct object or combined with other things. Here the qualification *in itself* would point to an irreducible, self-contained, simple, and constant entity, regardless of whether it can also be said to exist *with* other things.

The key distinction that emerges from these two cases is not one between quiddity *in itself* and quiddity *not in itself*, but rather one between quiddity *in itself in abstraction from all other things* and quiddity *in itself taken together with other things*. In other words, quiddity is always *in itself* according to one meaning (i. e., irreducibil-

⁸² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.8–10.

ity), even though it may not be *in itself* according to the other (i.e., distinctness or separateness). Avicenna's argumentation fully exploits these two conceptual aspects in subtle ways, and it is crucial to grasp this basic distinction in order to avoid dire misunderstandings concerning his terminology and doctrine of essence. At the same time, these remarks point to the inherent limitations of the English translations that have been relied upon to render the plethora of Arabic terms and expressions Avicenna uses when describing quiddity, which convey different meanings and intentions. At any rate, it is important to recognize from the outset that the problem of the ontological status of pure quiddity transcends the mere qualification of it as something *in itself qua* 'distinct' or 'separable,' and that the inquiry will consequently also focus on the alternative meaning of irreducibility.⁸³ In order to cope with these conceptual challenges, the present study will introduce a new methodological framework intended to facilitate the analysis. One fundamental feature of this framework involves the distinction between (a) essential irreducibility, and (b) essential distinctness, both of which qualify pure quiddity, and both of which can be intended by the Arabic expressions *fī nafsihi*, *min ḥaythu hiya hiya*, etc. This distinction is particularly useful in the context of human thought and intellectuality, where quiddity can be conceived of either as an irreducible part of a larger whole (viz., the complex universal concept), or in a distinct and abstracted state. These various distinctions and qualifications may or may not apply to the same aspect of quiddity, and it will be precisely the task of this study to examine how they can be said to apply to it in each case.

In light of the foregoing, the present study assumes that some of the major conundrums and scholarly disagreements associated with quiddity in Avicenna have arisen primarily from terminological or translational haziness. Accordingly, a systematic investigation into the technical vocabulary associated with quiddity can help to alleviate many of these concerns. Indeed, many other key terms that appear in the Avicennian sources, such as *i'tibār* and *ma'nā*, could be mentioned to illustrate the need for terminological scrutiny. But nowhere is this desideratum more strongly felt than with regard to the notion of existence (*wujūd*). For the apparently daunting questions regarding the co-extensionality of essence and existence and whether es-

83 For a recent exploration of the notion of irreducibility (among many others) in a logical context, see Strobino, *Per se*. Some scholars have recognized that 'in itself' can designate a kind of essential irreducibility in Avicenna's philosophy. McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, 170, writes: "he [Avicenna] is claiming that existing in the body or in the intellect are different descriptions of the essence in itself, neither one of which necessarily and essentially belongs to the essence in itself." Benevich's analysis also relies on a certain notion of essential irreducibility. He construes the 'divine existence' mentioned by Avicenna at *Metaphysics* V.1, 205.1–2, as referring to the existence of pure quiddity *in* composite things. However, Benevich restricts the divine existence of quiddity solely to this mereological reality, which he also regards primarily as an epistemic (as opposed to an ontological) aspect. In sum, it is not so much the idea of the irreducibility of quiddity that has proven controversial in the scholarship, as the hypothesis of its existing as a distinct or separate entity, which can also theoretically be implied by the expression 'in itself.'

sence possesses its own ontological mode depend entirely on one's definition and understanding of existence in Avicenna's philosophy.⁸⁴ These questions are liable to receiving nuanced answers based on a set of ontological distinctions Avicenna makes in his works. These distinctions need to be fleshed out for a proper assessment of his position on the ontology of quiddity to emerge.

3.3 Modulation (*tashkīk*)

The issue of whether existence (*wujūd*) for Avicenna is best described as a univocal, equivocal, ambiguous, analogical, or modulated notion is one that has preoccupied the minds of medieval and modern interpreters alike and received divergent answers over the centuries.⁸⁵ Following some recent studies on the topic, I shall argue in chapter IV that existence for Avicenna is neither a pure univocal nor a pure equivocal term, but rather 'a modulated term' (*ism mushakkīk*) and that, as a corollary, his doctrine of being is one of 'ontological modulation' (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). The analysis of *wujūd* as a modulated notion enables a reassessment and reconsideration of how existence relates to quiddity and a reframing of the issue of the co-extensionality of essence and existence. In this regard, Alexander Treiger's study on ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) was the first to emphasize the importance of this notion in Avicenna's metaphysics. Building on an earlier article by Wolfson, it also traces the roots of this notion in ancient Greek and classical Arabic philosophy.⁸⁶ What has not been sufficiently appreciated, however, is the fact that Avicenna extends the notion of modulation or *tashkīk* to many of the crucial concepts underlying his physical and metaphysical system, and not just to existence or *wujūd*. In fact, most of the key philosophical terms used by the master are modulated or said 'by modulation' (*bi-l-tashkīk*). This is the case of oneness (*waḥdah*),⁸⁷ priority (*taqaddum*),⁸⁸ necessity (*wujūb*),⁸⁹ form (*ṣūrah*), matter (*māddah*), and privation ('*adam*),⁹⁰ as well as univer-

84 It is somewhat ironic that, although the subject of the present study is quiddity, much of the discussion will revolve around Avicenna's understanding of existence. In particular Avicenna's views on the various modes, aspects, and senses of existence are elusive and have led to divergent scholarly interpretations. Yet, this point impacts directly on the inquiry into pure quiddity, for the issue of whether quiddity exists depends partly on a clarification of what one intends by existence.

85 The issue of how to interpret the Avicennian concept of *wujūd* flares into a full-fledged debate already in the works of Shahrastānī, Ṭūsī, and Rāzī and extends all the way to the present day.

86 Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*; see also Wolfson, *The Amphibolous Terms*.

87 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, beginning of III.2.

88 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, beginning of IV.3.

89 Avicenna, *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*, 31v.7–11 of the ms. Nuruosmaniye 2763, from Benevich, *Essentialität*, 57.

90 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.3, 31.

sality (*kulliyah*),⁹¹ in addition to existence (*wujūd*).⁹² Given that this point has not been firmly established in the scholarship, but that it will play a vital role later on in this study in fashioning a new interpretive paradigm of Avicenna's philosophy, it seems important to briefly go over some of the main features of modulation.

Avicenna is keen to point out that many of the central notions of his philosophy are modulated. For example, he begins chapters III.2 and IV.3 of *Metaphysics of The Cure*, which are devoted to oneness and priority respectively, by explaining that these notions are said "according to modulation" (*bi-l-tashkīk*), and that it is by virtue of their modulated nature that they should not be regarded as pure equivocals. He also makes the same statement with regard to existence in various parts of his corpus, arguing that *wujūd* possesses a focal meaning, which, even though it can be modulated, does not result in pure semantic ambiguity or equivocity. As Wolfson and more recently Treiger and Wisnovsky have shown, Avicenna's discussion of existence as a modulated term is inscribed in a long philosophical tradition and was informed by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources.⁹³ One may hypothesize that Avicenna extended the notion of modulation he applies to existence to other notions of his philosophy. In this respect, the various 'senses' of core philosophical terms Aristotle outlines in Book Δ of *Metaphysics* was also likely a source of inspiration for the *shaykh al-ra'īs*, who similarly proceeds to disambiguate key notions of his metaphysics before engaging in their analysis proper. What is more, the idea that modulation characterizes a core set of philosophical terms and notions appears to have been endorsed also by some of Avicenna's immediate disciples.⁹⁴

As we can see from these remarks, modulation, for Avicenna, is not some haphazard idea, but a well-thought out theory that is consistently applied to the central concepts of his physical and metaphysical system. It is discussed in various works of the master and in different contexts (logic, physics, psychology, and metaphysics). As I will show later on, it is also grounded in, and articulated by, a set of well-defined modes or aspects (*anḥā'*, *aḥkām*). In the case of existence, these modes include such notions as priority and posteriority, possibility and necessity, autonomy and need, and even strength and weakness. Although the last two notions were trivial for Avicenna, they came to play a crucial role in the postclassical understanding of *tashkīk al-wujūd*, particularly in the works of Mullā Ṣadrā. At any rate, these modes explain how modulation functions and also justify why existence or *wujūd* is best regarded as a modulated term as opposed to a strict univocal or equivocal term.

⁹¹ Avicenna does not explicitly describe universality (*al-kulliyah*) as being modulated, but many of his comments seem to support such an interpretation; see Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.2, 207, and the analysis in chapters III and IV, especially III.2.5 and IV.3.

⁹² For a detailed discussion of the modulation of existence, see chapter IV.

⁹³ Wolfson, *The Amphibolous Terms*; Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*; and Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 35.16; 467.4; 281; and 294, who regards 'priority' and 'existence' as modulated notions.

The implications that derive from regarding the Avicennian philosophical terminology as a flexible, adaptable, and modulated one, as opposed to a rigid and fixed one, are momentous. For this hypothesis suggests that many of the issues that have plagued Avicennian studies up to the present day cannot, by definition, receive a dichotomic answer, and that they require instead a nuanced treatment that systematically takes into account the notion of modulation. Accordingly, such questions as: Is pure quiddity *universal*? Does pure quiddity *exist*? Is essence in any way *prior* to realized or established existence? What is the ontological status of a *form* (*ṣūrah*)? etc., cannot be answered simply in the affirmative or the negative, but call for an investigation of Avicenna's theory of modulation and of exactly how these terms are used in any given context. In light of these considerations, much attention will be paid in the present study to Avicenna's theory of modulation, particularly with regard to the three following questions: What are the aspects and structural features that inform and provide the rationale for modulation? In what way can modulation be regarded as a systemic feature of Avicenna's philosophy and one that is deliberately implemented to solve philosophical problems? Is its scope limited to the predicamental or categorial level or does it apply also to the transcendental or theological level? In other words, can modulation be invoked to explain God's existence and attributes as well? It is my contention that addressing these various queries will in turn cast some light on the central issues related to quiddity. The reason is that Avicenna explicitly and deliberately applies several of these modulated notions to pure quiddity. The challenge that confronts us then is to understand exactly how, and with what end in mind, he uses them to describe essence.

3.4 Mental existence

Mental existence remains a nebulous area of Avicenna's philosophy. But it is also a crucial one, which requires to be carefully probed in connection with quiddity.⁹⁵ Given that this thinker is sometimes credited with "the discovery of mental existence,"⁹⁶ one would assume that there would be a special link between this ontological mode and the equally original Avicennian theory of the essence in itself. Although this assumption seems compelling, we need first to adequately delineate Avicenna's theory of mental existence. Yet, this task is far from simple, and one can from the outset identify a series of difficulties. The first one is terminological. Avicenna relies on a wide array of terms and expressions to designate mental entities, such as *ma'ānī*, *ma'qūlāt*, *mawjūdāt*, *i'tibārāt*, etc. Moreover, these can be 'in

⁹⁵ For valuable insight into mental existence in Avicenna, see Marmura, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals; Black, Mental Existence; eadem, Avicenna on the Ontological; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*; Beneich, Die 'göttliche Existenz'; idem, The Reality; and idem, *Essentialität*, 63–70, 368 ff.

⁹⁶ Adamson, Existence. Although one may object that this statement is an exaggeration, it adequately captures in my eyes the importance Avicenna devotes to this ontological mode in his various works.

the intellect' (*fī l-'aql*), 'in the mind' (*fī l-dhihn*), 'in conception' (*fī l-taṣawwur*), 'in the estimation' (*fī l-wahm*, *fī l-awhām*), and, more generally, 'in the soul' (*fī l-nafs*), with the last expression theoretically encompassing all the others. It is not always clear whether the master employs these terms synonymously and with the same extension and scope or whether they are intended to convey subtle differences in meaning. In spite of these terminological variations, when Avicenna speaks of a 'mental' or 'intellectual existent' (*mawjūd dhihnī* or *mawjūd 'aqlī*), he usually means a universal form (*ṣūrah*), idea (*ma'nā*), and intelligible (*ma'qūl*) in the human intellect, such as the universal idea of 'human' or 'triangle.'

But these considerations immediately raise another issue, which can be called the 'faculty issue.' This new problem concerns the possibility that other, sub-intellectual entities or objects could be said to exist in the mind or in the soul, albeit in a weaker sense. These objects would not fulfil all the criteria of the universal forms or intelligibles, but would be associated with the other psychological faculties, such as the inner senses of imagination, estimation, or memory. The point is that although they would not share the robust sense of mental existence that characterizes the universal forms in the intellect, these other kinds or classes of mental objects would nevertheless possess some kind of existence, presence, or reality in the mind according to some weaker sense. This problem is compounded by the fact that some of the terms used in Avicenna's psychology, such as *ma'nā*, are applied equally to the intelligibles in the intellect and to the objects of the estimation.⁹⁷ Hence, the hypothesis of sub-intellectual mental existents needs to be carefully tested by future scholarship, as it seems to find some traction in certain comments Avicenna makes regarding entities in the estimation or imagination. The key issue for my purposes will be to determine whether the notion of pure quiddity, which Avicenna often describes as a *ma'nā*, falls on the side of intellectual or sub-intellectual objects.

Unfortunately, Avicenna remains vague about the various classes of mental existents, and he does not at any rate provide a definitive and exhaustive list of the criteria that define mental existence. Although immateriality and universality are obvious candidates for mental existence to obtain, it is not clear that they apply exclusively to the intellectual forms. Objects of the inner senses, for example, apparently enjoy some degree of abstraction from matter. What is more, the modulated nature of universality and the fact that Avicenna recognizes various senses of 'the universal' (*al-kullī*) makes the issue more intricate. The questions of what exactly qualifies as a mental existent and of how many classes of mental existents there are still represent elusive points in the master's philosophy. This problem is compounded by Avicenna's use of the term 'consideration' or *i'tibār*, which is applied to a wide variety of objects in the mind, while remaining ontologically vague. In this regard, the fictional and artificial forms represent a particularly problematic

⁹⁷ On this point, see Hall, *Intellect*, 65 and 80.

set of entities in Avicenna's philosophy whose ontological status remains unclear. Scholars have pondered extensively on the various classes of universals Avicenna outlines in *Metaphysics* V.1 of *The Cure* and on what constitutes a valid universal and a valid mental existent, but these questions are still a matter of ongoing discussion.⁹⁸ Many of these points are picked up later in chapter II.

Then there is the issue of 'cognitive identity.' Is the existence of the mental object distinct from that of the intellect or identical with it? Avicenna generally holds to the position that, in God, intellect, intellection, and intellectual object are absolutely one and fully identical, but that, in the case of human intellection, there is an irreducible difference between thinker (*'āqil*) and object of thought (*ma'qūl*). This is because, were the intellect ontologically identical with its object, it could only ever think one single thing and could not move from one intelligible to another. The only exception Avicenna seems to allow in this context focuses on self-awareness or self-knowledge, since this implies an irreducible, intuitive, and reflexive kind of cognition, where knower and thing known are essentially one.⁹⁹ But when it comes to the intellection of external intelligibles, thinker and object of thought appear to be always distinct. Yet, although the thinker is its own separate substance and possesses a distinct existence vis-à-vis the intelligible, it would seem, on the other hand, that we can conflate the act of thought or intellect (*'aql*) with its object (*ma'qūl*); that is to say, the existence of the act of intellection would be identical with the existence of the object of intellection, for as long as the thinking process lasts.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, this hypothesis does not help us much with regard to the previous question about the different objects that could potentially be said to exist in the mind or in the soul. But it does suggest that whatever is thought of or reflected upon at the level of the intellect must necessarily exist in one way or other. All of the things that we can actually apprehend intellectually must somehow exist in the mind according to Avicenna.

Finally, there is a 'category' or 'context issue' pertaining to mental existence. What is the relation between human and divine mental existence? A basic distinction between *human intellectual existence* and *divine intellectual existence* has been maintained by some scholars and applied to their treatment of quiddity,¹⁰¹ but the exact conditions corresponding to these ontological modes have not been fleshed out in a satisfactory manner, particularly when it comes to the mental accidents and concomitants of essence, which seem to accompany human intellection, but would presum-

⁹⁸ Black, Avicenna, and Druart, *Avicennan Troubles*.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of self-awareness in Avicenna, see Kaukua, *Self-Awareness*; Adamson, *Avicenna*; and Alwishah, *Avicenna*.

¹⁰⁰ Avicenna, *Notes*, 4.5–6, section 1: "Knowledge [*al-'ilm*] is a pattern that exists in the knower, and which exists with the existence of the object of thought [*wujūd al-ma'lūm*], and is cancelled with the latter's disappearance."

¹⁰¹ See, for instance, Adamson, *Non-Discursive Thought*; and Porro, *Universaux*. But this basic distinction implicitly underlies most modern discussions of intellection in Avicenna.

ably be absent from divine intellection.¹⁰² More specifically, there is the issue of whether the objects of human and divine intellection are characterized by the same kind of universality, whose primary definition according to Avicenna is a mental concomitant of essence in the human mind. This issue has rarely been addressed in earnest.

Avicenna's terminology is, yet again, partly responsible for this state of affairs, since the human and divine intellects can be described by resorting to the same set of Arabic terms and expressions (*'aql*, *ma'qūl*, *wujūd 'aqlī*, *kullī*, *ma'nā*, etc.). In addition, the master uses the same set of terms (*kullī*, *kullīyyah*) to designate the universals and universality in the human mind and in the supernal intellects. Thus, the Agent Intellect and God Himself are defined by Avicenna as separate intellects (sing., *'aql mufāriq*) that reflect universals (*kulliyāt*). But this is potentially misleading, because when Avicenna talks about a mental or intellectual existent in connection with quiddity, and when he talks about universality in the mind, he is almost always referring to human thought and psychology. This is clear from the very wording he relies on: 'existent in the mind' (*mawjūd fī l-dhihn*), 'existent in the estimation' (*mawjūd fī l-awhām*), 'existent in the soul' (*mawjūd fī l-nafs*), and even—in most cases—*mawjūd fī l-'aql* ('existent in the intellect') typically refer to *human* psychology and not to some divine intellect. Only the last expression, *mawjūd fī l-'aql*, together with the related expressions *wujūd 'aqlī* ('intellectual existence') and *mawjūd 'aqlī* ('intellectual existent'), are ambiguous, since they can potentially refer to the separate intellects, in addition to the human intellect. As we can see, a key desideratum is to engage in a nuanced analysis of Avicenna's terminology and theory of mental existence, and especially to delineate its relation to key notions such as universality and conceivability. Any attempt to locate the quiddities in God or in the Agent Intellect—a thesis that has been proposed by some scholars—calls for precise qualifications regarding the category of intellectual existence and its attributes, especially universality. Claiming that quiddity has an 'intellectual' and 'universal' existence in God or in the Agent Intellect says little about its exact ontological mode, apart from the fact that it is obviously an immaterial one. What would distinguish this mode of intellectual existence from that of the universals in the human mind? And on what grounds could they equally be called 'universal'? In this study, I shall discriminate between two distinct problems pertaining to mental existence: the problem of the intelligible mode of existence of pure quiddity, and the problem of its localization. Although these two questions are interrelated, they are not identical and call for a separate treatment. In addition, the analysis will attempt to disambiguate the problematic term *kullī*, which is loaded with late-antique philosophical connotations in Avicenna's philosophy.

102 This specific issue is broached in McGinnis, *Logic and Science*; idem, *Making Abstraction*; and Hasse, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*.

The topic of mental existence acquires a new significance, and also a new level of difficulty, when it is connected specifically with Avicenna's theory of essence. The reason for this stems from his claim that we can conceive of quiddity in itself without thinking about existence. This immediately raises the question of the ontological status of the conception of pure quiddity in the mind. More specifically, the question of whether pure quiddity can be regarded as an instance of mental existence, as an existent mental object (*mawjūd dhihnī* or *'aqlī*), or as something entirely different is a crucial one for the present inquiry. First raised by Marmura in an acute way, it has recently been the object of some scholarly scrutiny, but remains understudied.¹⁰³ In addressing this problem, I shall follow Marmura's initiative and rely on a series of studies he devoted to this subject. Yet, although Marmura provided groundbreaking insight into this issue, his conclusions were ultimately marred by his inability to produce a consistent and compelling account of how mental existence relates to quiddity. Perhaps baffled by the refractory nature of the evidence, Marmura wavered inconclusively between regarding quiddity in itself as a distinct mental existent and regarding it merely as a logical aspect in the mind. But it should be noted that this ambiguity is not idiosyncratic to Marmura and other modern scholars; it also underpins many of the postclassical commentaries written on the Avicennian works. In fact, the challenge of determining whether one should assign a distinct mental status to quiddity is an issue that generated much concern in the postclassical period. During this time, Arabic philosophers and theologians were faced with the task of interpreting Avicenna's philosophy, including his views on mental existence and its relation to essence.¹⁰⁴ This exercise in philosophical exegesis often assumed a highly theoretical or technical form, which suggests that the issue of how pure quiddity relates to mental existence was particularly perplexing to the generations of thinkers who came after the master. This issue underlies much of the postclassical discussion about quiddity, from Rāzī and Ṭūsī to Ḥillī (d. 1325 CE), Qushjī (d. 1474 CE), and beyond. Given the proliferation of answers they formulated, Avicennian thinkers of the postclassical period appear to have been highly interested in, and somewhat baffled by, this issue, to the extent that the distinctions they make between various aspects

103 Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, 82, had already pinpointed this as one of the crucial issues to be investigated further: "A main ambiguity in his [Avicenna's] writings is the relation of the quiddity in itself to mental existence." In my eyes, subsequent scholars have not sufficiently paid heed to Marmura's observation, and this has led to a conceptual quagmire in the scholarship. Generally speaking, scholars have endorsed Avicenna's claim that we can have a mental consideration of quiddity in itself, but interpreted it in purely logical terms, so that they have omitted to clarify its ontological status and exactly what this consideration amounts to in the mind. A detailed discussion of this crucial point is absent, for instance, from Pini's and Benevich's articles, as well as Tahiri's monograph, all of which nevertheless discuss aspects linked to intentionality and epistemology.

104 On this issue, see Benevich, *The Reality*; idem, *The Metaphysics*; and idem, *The Essence-Existence Distinction*.

of quiddity are often difficult to unravel with precision—at least, at this early stage in the study of postclassical Islamic intellectual history.¹⁰⁵

I believe there are three main factors that contributed to this state of perplexity concerning the relationship between pure quiddity and mental existence in the post-Avicennian tradition and in the modern scholarship on Avicenna. The first is the paradoxical evidence that can be found in the Avicennian works regarding this topic: at *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1.196.11, Avicenna claims that quiddity in itself exists “neither in the mind nor in the concrete world,” but in other passages of the same work, such as V.1.205.5–9 and especially V.1.204.1–7, he appears to claim that quiddity in itself does exist in the mind.¹⁰⁶ These contradictory claims can lead, and in some cases have actually led, scholars to two divergent and incompatible conclusions: either that pure quiddity exists *neither* in the concrete world *nor* in the mind; or that it exists *only* in the mind. The second factor stems from a reasoning that at first blush appears sensible, but which ultimately leads to a conundrum: (a) Avicenna contends that it is possible to have a consideration (*i'tibār*) and conception or conceptualization (*taṣawwur*) of quiddity in itself; (b) this conception would presumably amount to true knowledge, insofar as it focuses on the essence of a thing and is closely tied to its definition; (c) but any true cognition and scientific object of knowledge according to Avicenna must be a universal form and intelligible in the mind; (d) hence, the consideration of quiddity in itself must be a universal in the mind. Yet, confusedly, (e) Avicenna is keen to distinguish the consideration of pure quiddity from that of the universal, so that pure quiddity cannot ultimately amount to a universal existent, hence the paradox. The third reason emerges from the terminological and conceptual confusion surrounding the various qualifications or conditions (*sharṭ/shurūṭ*) Avicenna attaches to quiddity, and which he discusses in such central texts as *Introduction*, *Salvation*, and *Metaphysics V.1: lā bi-sharṭ shay'*, *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*, and *bi-sharṭ shay'*.¹⁰⁷ Although valuable insight into these conditions has been generated in the

105 This is the case notably of the distinction between quiddity in itself and universal quiddity, which is discussed in connection with mental existence. This distinction often becomes blurred in the works of postclassical authors and is difficult to delineate with precision (see sections I.3 and II.8). The category of mental existence generally appears to have greatly preoccupied these thinkers, and with good reason, since it was discussed extensively by Avicenna and his early commentators, so that one priority for any thinker who flourished after them was to clarify what these scholars had to say about it. But there were other causes and incentives as well, such as the development of a more sophisticated mathematical system, which raised questions pertaining to the mental status of mathematical objects and the planetary models hypothesized by mathematical astronomy; for insight into this issue, see Fazhoğlu, *Between Reality. The advent of algebra and the development of a highly theoretical realm of mathematical thought* also likely played a role; see Roshdi Rashed, *Mathématiques*, 34–35; and Tahiri, *Mathematics*.

106 Cf. Marmura, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*, 38–39, and note 30 above.

107 Clarifying these various conditions and their epistemic and ontological implications represents one of the keys to solving the problem of quiddity in Avicenna's philosophy and in subsequent Avicennian philosophical systems. I have accordingly devoted much attention to this aspect of the problem.

modern literature, especially with regard to their logical dimension, there is still no systematic analysis available detailing the various ontological implications of these conditions as they apply to quiddity. This shortcoming affects not only our appreciation of Avicenna's metaphysics, but also our understanding of the later reception of his thought. For much of the postclassical discourse (from Rāzī and Ṭūsī to Qushji) that grew out of these seminal Avicennian passages centers on the issue of how these conditions relate to the mental and concrete existence (*wujūd*) of quiddity. What is more, post-Avicennian thinkers appear to have used these expressions quite freely and creatively to suit their philosophical agenda, no doubt in an attempt to adapt Avicenna's concepts and theories to their own system, thereby articulating ideas that were not necessarily the ones Avicenna had in mind when he first composed *The Cure*.¹⁰⁸ In order to adequately explain some of these later argumentative elaborations, one must first elucidate how Avicenna himself intended these conditions and how, on his view, they relate to the various ontological contexts of quiddity.

There is therefore a concrete difficulty involved in pinning down the criteria of mental existence in Avicenna. As a result, scholars have attempted to devise useful methodological tools in order to cope with this problem, as well as with the more pointed issue of how pure essence relates to mental existence. One such proposal is to distinguish between 'the epistemic' and 'the ontological.' It points to one of the crucial features of the problem of quiddity in Avicenna: the need to distinguish between the cognitive, epistemological, and logical dimensions of his discourse of

108 These remarks illustrate the kinds of risks involved in using post-Avicennian commentaries to try to better understand Avicenna's own doctrines. With this in mind, I have devoted special sections of this book to discussing the reception of Avicenna's theory of quiddity in the works—commentaries on the master as well as independent treatises—of some major post-Avicennian thinkers. Although I often use this later material as additional evidence to support my own interpretations, the analysis of Avicenna and of his commentators is divided in discrete units in the book, and I try as much as possible to keep both issues separate. One should also be aware of the intentional differences between Avicenna and his later commentators, whose philosophical agendas and objectives differed drastically. But the later tradition is also studied for its own sake and for the fascinating insight it provides into the reception and transformation of Avicenna's doctrines. In that sense, I enthusiastically embrace Wisnovsky's distinction between "Avicenna's philosophy" and (the later) "Avicennian philosophy." As I shall argue, when taken in its details, Avicenna's position was idiosyncratic, but some of its main features appear to have been endorsed by many later exegetes, who subjected them to close scrutiny and elaborated on them considerably. With regard to mental existence specifically, there is an ambiguity running through the later exegetical tradition on the Avicennian texts: it is often unclear whether these authors are talking about quiddity in the mind *qua* universal existent or *qua* quiddity in itself. These two aspects of quiddity, which Avicenna goes through great pains to distinguish, are not clearly differentiated in their exposition; this is the case, for instance, of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Qushjī. It is often difficult to grasp how exactly they envisaged quiddity in itself in relation to universal quiddity or whether they even followed Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity. For insight into another post-Avicennian interpretation of this issue, see Ibrahim's analysis of Rāzī (Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*). As Ibrahim shows, Rāzī's works display salient departures from Avicenna's doctrines. Hence, every subsequent reading of Avicenna's theory of quiddity was tantamount to a transformation of his views.

quiddity, on the one hand—this includes how we can know quiddity, what we can say about it, what logical qualifications or conditions attach to it in the mind—and the ontological dimension of the problem, on the other, which concerns how, and in what mode, quiddity can be said to exist in the mind and in the concrete world, regardless of the human intentionality that is often attached to it. Fundamentally, these are two distinct problems that should receive two distinct answers. I have accordingly attempted to separate them as much as possible. For example, and for argument’s sake, one could argue that Avicenna recognized the epistemic distinctness and abstractedness of pure quiddity as an object in the mind, while at the same time denying that it could actually exist in this very intellectual state. This view represents the majority opinion on the mental status of pure quiddity.¹⁰⁹

With that being said, the epistemological and ontological planes are also intimately connected in Avicenna’s philosophy, and the interface between them is more slippery than might first appear. For one thing, Avicenna performs a highly ontological reading of Aristotle’s logical treatises and of Porphyry’s *Eisagoge*, a fact which he himself freely admits to in *Introduction* and *Categories*, and which modern scholars have been increasingly keen to emphasize.¹¹⁰ This point is further compounded by the importance Avicenna places on mental existence and the centrality of this notion in his philosophy. In this context, one cannot convincingly raise the question of the epistemological status of quiddity in itself in the mind while at the same time entirely ignoring the corollary question of its ontological status. This is because the concepts that convey true scientific knowledge in Avicenna’s epistemology also happen to be mental existents proper. Just because we can envisage pure quiddity as a concept in abstraction from existence—a claim that seems to be purely epistemic in nature—need not entail that pure quiddity *qua* this same concept is actually devoid of, or unconnected with, intelligible existence. In fact, in the context of Avicenna’s philosophy, the epistemic aspect could be said to presuppose and even depend on the ontological one. For if pure quiddity did not exist in any way, it would presumably not be possible for us to conceive it in the first place. In this regard, one needs to examine how conceivability is linked to mental existence in Avicenna’s noetics. What is more: it would seem that for Avicenna we can know pure quiddity in an intellectual way. But if the consideration (*i’tibār*) of pure quiddity turns out to be an intellectual kind of consideration, does this not imply an *intellectual object* and *intellectual existence* of some kind? These questions suggest that the tendency to summarily pit ‘the epistemic’ against ‘the ontological’ is an oversimplistic and ultimately unproductive way to proceed, for it fails to provide a nuanced account of how these planes interface in Avicenna’s philosophy. This is especially true of the various

109 The approaches endorsed by de Libera, *La querelle*, 223–262, and *L’art*, 499–607, as well as Pini, *Absoluta*, are articulated along the lines of a distinction between ‘the ontological’ and ‘the epistemological’ in Avicenna. See also Porro, *Immateriality*, especially 299–303, where this author distinguishes between the “eidetic” and the “ontological” or “metaphysical.”

110 Bertolacci, *The ‘Ontologization,’* notes the “ontologization of logic” in Avicenna’s philosophy.

conditions (*shurūt*) Avicenna applies to quiddity, which are particularly problematic, precisely because they carry both epistemological and ontological implications.¹¹¹

Hence, notwithstanding the fact that I myself have adopted the distinction between ‘the epistemic’ or ‘epistemological’ and ‘the ontological’ as part of my basic framework, I believe that scholars have sometimes gone too far in their advocacy of this distinction as a tool to interpret the master’s philosophy. Avicenna himself seems to have been frequently engaged in negotiating and clarifying the boundary between these two spheres. But his position regarding mental existence and the fact that he defines intelligible entities as full-fledged existents should stand as caveats for those advocating a sharp or robust distinction between the two domains. The mental sphere for Avicenna is not some second hand or sub-ontological domain. It is a legitimate and fundamental sphere of existence, which applies to all intellectual beings. Avicenna regards intelligible forms in the mind as existents on a par with, albeit existing in a different mode from, the concrete individual existents. In fact, mental existence is arguably the *primary* and *real* sphere of existence, given that the higher principles of Avicenna’s metaphysics enjoy exclusively this kind of intellectual, immaterial existence and are themselves constantly engaged in the act of apprehending concepts. Hence, intellectual or intelligible existence essentially precedes material existence. Or, as Avicenna puts it in *Metaphysics* I.2, “the existent inasmuch as it is existent [*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd*], as well as its principles and accidents ... are all prior in existence to matter [*mutaqaddim al-wujūd ‘alā l-māddah*].”¹¹² As we shall see in this book, this holds true not only for the separate intellects, but also for the objects or intelligibles contemplated by these intellects and especially by the Agent Intellect before the emanation of the species-forms from the latter onto the world of nature.

These points are particularly important for the present inquiry, given that one of the main issues revolves around whether—and if so, how—pure quiddity can be granted the status of a mental existent when it is considered in the human intellect as a distinct epistemic object. As Marmura aptly perceived, one interpretive priority when it comes to pure quiddity is to solve the issue of its status *in the human mind*, since it is in this context that essence is most frequently discussed in the Avicennian works. In this case, maintaining a sharp distinction between the purely epistemolog-

111 It is perhaps similar considerations that led Benevich, Die ‘göttliche Existenz,’ to describe pure quiddity in the mind as possessing a kind of “epistemological existence.” Here Benevich proposes to merge the two notions. In this connection, he construes the statement about the “divine existence” of quiddity in *Metaphysics* V.1 chiefly in an epistemic—not an ontological or metaphysical—way, and he contrasts metaphysical existence with epistemic or epistemological existence. However, these two spheres are not precisely defined in his paper, nor is the distinction between epistemic existence and intellectual existence. This is problematic, because for Avicenna intellectual existence is a valid and real mode of existence, and not some derivative mode that is opposed to ‘metaphysical existence.’

112 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, I.2, 15.14–15.

ical and the ontological is not helpful, since these two planes are inextricably meshed in Avicenna's writings. It is more precise to say that the issue of how pure quiddity relates to the human mind is simultaneously an epistemological *and* an ontological question, and that these aspects should be tackled side by side. Finally, it is important to point out that the interface of ontology and epistemology is an issue that applies not only to quiddity in the mind—where, given Avicenna's elaborate doctrine of mental existence, it is raised in a stark manner—but also with regard to how it can be said to exist in the concrete world. In this case, the question of the relation between what we can know about quiddity in the concrete world and how it actually exists in the concrete world comes to the fore and constitutes a thorny problem. There has been a marked tendency in the modern scholarship to regard Avicenna's position as being thoroughly conceptualist and opposed to a realist stance, according to which quiddities would exist in the exterior concrete world independently of our cognition of them. The trend hitherto has been to emphasize the logical and epistemological elements in Avicenna's doctrine of quiddity, with the result that his position has been implicitly or explicitly described as conceptualist or nominalist in nature.¹¹³ Yet, this aspect of Avicenna's doctrine of quiddity, and more specifically the questions of how it intersects with his mereological and hylomorphic theories, as well as his theory of the universals and their relation to the physical world, have received relatively little attention from scholars and have been the object of a rather partial examination. This is regrettable, because this topic has decisive implications concerning Avicenna's theology, theory of causality, and psychology (notably his theory of abstraction). It was also the focus of a rich and sustained discussion in the post-Avicennian tradition, whose main interpretive trajectories are philosophically significant and deserve to be outlined. Hence, one central objective of the present book is to explore the ontological and epistemological scope of Avicenna's theory of quiddity as it applies to the concrete world, as well as its relation to the mental aspects of quiddity. This issue is tackled in chapter III of this book.

3.5 Modes, contexts, and senses of existence

The previous considerations about mental existence point to a more general problem in studies on Avicenna, namely, the uncertainty regarding the number of modes of existence in his philosophy. On the 'standard' interpretation of his metaphysics, Avicenna posits only two modes of existence: concrete individual existence and universal mental existence. But are these two modes really exhaustive of the Avicennian conception of existence? Can they really accommodate all the entities of his ontolo-

¹¹³ See, for instance, Counet, *Avicenne*, 243–246; these aspects are also emphasized in the approaches of Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz,'* and De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*.

gy? And to what extent are they really different? What is more, how do these modes relate to the senses (*ma'āni*) of existence Avicenna mentions at *Metaphysics* I.5?

Avicenna in his works frequently distinguishes between existence in the mind or in the intellect (*wujūd fī l-dhihn* or *fī l-'aql*) and existence in concrete reality (*wujūd fī l-a'yān*). Scholars have traditionally taken this to mean that some existents exist in an immaterial and universal state in the human mind, while others exist in a concrete, extramental state in the world around us. Accordingly, they have described these notions in terms of ontological modes, each requiring different criteria. This view seems to cohere with Avicenna's parallel use of the expression 'the two modes of existence' (*al-wujūdayn*)—literally, 'the two existences'—which overlaps with the former distinction. Although this approach seems warranted, it is not clear, on the other hand, that all existents within these two realms share the exact same mode of existence; that is to say, it is not clear that all entities in the mind share a single mode of existence, and that all entities in the concrete world share another single mode of existence. In light of this, it remains an open question whether these expressions are best construed as referring to 'modes' of existence or to 'contexts' of existence. The point is that the notion of an ontological mode in Avicenna is more directly conveyed by the terms *naḥw al-wujūd* and *kayfiyyat al-wujūd*. In this regard, Avicenna never explicitly states that there are only two modes of existence that would be exhaustive of all things. Upon closer scrutiny, it becomes quite obvious that the categories *fī l-a'yān* and *fī l-'aql* do not encompass all the modes of existence and that they are more helpfully understood as pointing to general 'contexts' or 'domains' of existence. Among the extramental existents, or existents that are found 'in the concrete world,' one finds perishable, material entities (rocks, trees), eternal and unchanging celestial bodies (the moon), immaterial separate intellects, and even, on one construal of the expression, God Himself. But these various beings evidently do not share an identical mode of existence, however it may be conceived of. Rather, if they can all be said to exist *fī l-a'yān* or in the concrete, extramental world, defined here as a general domain or context of existence, each class of these entities possesses its own mode of existence. Even if God and the separate intellects are excluded from this picture and removed from the realm of things that are *fī l-a'yān*, the fact remains that distinct modes of existence have to be posited to account for these special ontological cases, and that these modes would not coincide with the general ontological mode of the beings that are *fī l-a'yān*.

A similar point applies to entities in the mind or in the intellect. Are we to assume that the intelligibles in the human mind and those in the supernal intellects and in God's mind have exactly the same mode of existence? There are several reasons to think otherwise: Avicenna's distinction between universals 'before multiplicity' (*qabl al-kathrah*) and those 'after multiplicity' (*ba'd al-kathrah*) in *Introduction* I.12; his distinction between simple, nondiscursive knowledge and complex, discursive knowledge; and the composite or synthetic nature of the universal forms in the human mind, which, *qua* compounds of pure quiddity and its various mental and accidents and concomitants, seem proper to it, and may not be the very same objects

contemplated by the separate intellects. An inverse argument to the above can be made that leads broadly to the same conclusion. If existents in the mind and concrete beings share obvious differences—the former are immaterial and universal, the latter material and particular—they also share numerous commonalities. Mental and concrete existents are caused, contingent, and composite or complex in some way. They are all, on Avicenna's view, 'possible in themselves' and 'necessary with respect to another,' which means that they require a cause. Approached from this angle, the mode of existence of these various concrete and mental entities would be the same; and this ontological mode would stand in contrast to another, special mode that would coincide with God's essential existence, His being Necessary of Existence in Itself. Thus, if the metaphysical and causal commonalities, rather than the differences, between mental and concrete beings are stressed, one could argue that they share an identical mode of existence marked by causedness, contingency, and complexity, even though they exist in different ontological realms or domains viz., mentally and extramentally. On this interpretation, then, what would differentiate mental from concrete beings would be not so much a different 'mode' of existence as a different 'context' or 'domain' of existence. Ultimately, *all* existing things apart from God are, according to Avicenna, possible of existence in themselves and necessary of existence through their cause. Yet, they can exist in different context or domains of existence.

These considerations show how slippery the notion of an ontological mode is in Avicenna's philosophy. They also highlight the need to precisely define what constitutes a valid mode of existence and how many such modes the master recognizes in his metaphysics. To limit the modes of existence to merely two seems schematic and oversimplistic. Rather, it would seem that beings exist in different ways in the intellect and in the concrete world, and that whenever Avicenna is referring in general terms to mental and concrete existence, he has in mind broad 'domains' or 'contexts' of existence, rather than an exhaustive list of ontological modes proper. If one hypothesizes—be it only for argument's sake—that Avicenna's metaphysics allows for more than the two ontological modes that are routinely recognized by scholars—and this, in line with the idea that existence is modulated (*mushakkik*)—then this would call for a reassessment of the issues of the co-extensionality of essence and existence and of whether there is a distinct mode of existence that could be said to belong to essence alone. Interestingly, there are a few precedents for this approach in the modern literature, although they diverge widely in scope and intent. One thought-provoking attempt was made by Marwan Rashed, who ascribes a threefold scheme of existence to Avicenna (the third one corresponding to the ontological state of the quiddities in the divine mind) and who argues that this feature of Avicenna's doctrine was modeled on Ibn 'Adi's metaphysics.¹¹⁴ Pasquale Porro, for his part, appears to distinguish between human intellectual existence and divine intellectual

114 Rashed, Ibn 'Adi.

existence, identifying only the latter with a kind of *esse essentiae*.¹¹⁵ As for Pini, Benevich, and De Haan, they have advocated a mereological interpretation of quiddity and suggested that pure quiddity *qua* part of substantial composites could possess its own ontological status. It is this mereological aspect that would seem to characterize the special ontological mode of pure quiddity.¹¹⁶ Likewise, the interpretation tentatively proffered by Marmura, which grants a special mental and entitative status to quiddity in itself in the mind that is distinct from that of the universal, also respects the basic dictate of the co-extensionality thesis, but at the same time goes beyond the traditional dual ontological scheme of mental vs. concrete existence recognized by most scholars.

As one can see, these interpretations do not bluntly deny existence to quiddity, but entertain the possibility that a special mode or aspect of existence can be attributed to it. According to some of these interpretations, pure quiddity would be characterized by a third mode of existence, one, however, which is not recognized by the 'standard' approach. By implication, however, quiddity would never be found without existence, so that the co-extensionality thesis would in the end be preserved, even if through a different route.¹¹⁷ In sum, we notice that the problem of co-exten-

115 Porro, *Universaux*.

116 Pini, *Absoluta*; Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*; and De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*. Benevich raises this issue and ascribes a kind of 'epistemological existence' to quiddity in the mind. But in the final analysis, this author appears to abide by the traditional dual mode of existence in Avicenna's philosophy (concrete and mental), since he does not conceive of the divine existence of quiddity as a full-fledged and distinct ontological mode in itself. In fact, the more general question of how additional ontological modes (to particular concrete and universal mental existence) could be posited on the basis of the Avicennian texts has been rarely discussed in detail; Rashed, *Ibn 'Adī*, comes closest to introducing a third ontological mode in Avicenna. In contrast, Menn and Wisnovsky, *Yahyā ibn 'Adī On the Four Scientific Questions*, who also discuss Avicenna's position in connection with Yahyā's treatise, maintain the twofold scheme of existents and claim that Avicenna rejected the threefold scheme he found in *Ibn 'Adī*. It is true that Avicenna nowhere explicitly outlines in his works a threefold scheme of existents in the manner achieved by Yahyā and advocated by Rashed, and this notwithstanding the fact that he presumably knew about the 'Adian treatises dealing with this subject. The fact that Avicenna is otherwise remarkably consistent in *The Cure* (see, among other passages, *Metaphysics*, III.8; *Introduction*, I.2, 15.1–7; I.6, 34.5–35.5; *Categories*, II.1, 62.3–4) and in his other works (*Pointers*, vol. 1, 202.4–5) in maintaining a twofold scheme of existents, and not a threefold one, would seem to undermine the attempt to ascribe such a theory to him. The only element that could, at first glance, be used to support a threefold distinction of existents is the scheme *before, in, and after multiplicity* that is described (but not, at first sight, explicitly endorsed) by Avicenna in *Introduction* I.12, where he explains that this manner of conceiving essence was a trope in the (ancient?) philosophical schools. Nevertheless, this scheme seems to pertain primarily to the relation between the universals and multiplicity or matter, and it is not at any rate a statement on the ontological status of quiddities. So this distinction may not entail different *kinds of existents*, but rather different *ways of looking at the universals*. In spite of this, and as we will see, I believe Rashed is correct in maintaining the view that quiddity amounts to a third ontological mode in Avicenna.

117 Marmura's, Rashed's, and Porro's interpretations are equally consistent with regard to the thesis of the overlap of essence and existence in Avicenna, since ultimately even the pure quiddities would

sionality hinges on one's definition of the number and nature of the ontological modes in Avicenna's philosophy. Denying that there are only two modes of existence, as per the 'standard' interpretation, does not necessarily entail rejecting the thesis of co-extensionality, but rather consists in articulating an alternative account of the relation of essence and existence that takes into consideration additional ontological aspects or new ways of conceiving of Avicenna's ontology.¹¹⁸

Building on these studies, I intend to reconstruct a model of Avicenna's metaphysics that can specifically accommodate what one could call *an ontology of quiddity*. I argue in the present book that analyzing the modes of existence in Avicenna's philosophy eventually necessitates a reformulation of the relationship between essence and existence in a quite drastic way. For if a certain, distinct mode of existence can be identified that would belong to the pure essence alone, then this finding would call for a re-evaluation of how existence relates to essence. The co-extensionality thesis and the theory of essential being would both turn out to be correct. This hypothesis, according to my analysis, needs to be approached in connection with the notions of modes, contexts, and conditions that are applied to quiddity. As this study will endeavor to explain in detail, the various conditions (*shart/shurūt*) posited by Avicenna in relation to quiddity represent one of the keys to a proper understanding of the problem. Far from being limited to a logical scope, they possess ontological implications that specify the mode or context of existence of quiddity. So that whenever Avicenna appears to affirm or negate something about the existence of quiddity by means of these conditions, these individual statements should not be taken absolutely (as has sometimes been the case in the modern literature), but rather as reflecting one ontological aspect of quiddity that the master wishes to highlight in a particular passage, context, or discipline. This is why he can (coherently) claim, as he in fact does in various places, that pure quiddity exists neither in the concrete world nor in the human mind; that it exists in concrete beings and in universal concepts; and that it exists distinctly in the human mind and in the divine intellects. If construed absolutely or exhaustively, each one of these statements would be false,

not be devoid of existence, although they would exist according to a special mode. In that sense their views do not differ from the 'standard' approach and the co-extensionality thesis. Yet, these scholars construe the essence/existence relationship and Avicenna's ontology in divergent ways, which necessitates a reframing of the 'standard' approach.

118 In other words, if quiddity in itself is shown to possess its own, special kind of existence, then one could argue that the co-extensionality thesis is preserved on the grounds that even quiddity in itself would not be found in total abstraction from existence. In light of this, even the *esse essentiae* thesis found in the Latin tradition would respect this basic dictate of the co-extensionality thesis, even though it rests on a redefinition of existence and its various modes in Avicenna. It should be pointed out also that previous studies on Avicenna's theory of essence have not discussed it in relation to *tashkik al-wujūd*; this is a desideratum that is tackled in the present book.

because it would make an exclusivist claim that Avicenna never intended and would therefore obscure other equally important facets of his ontology of quiddity.¹¹⁹

In light of the foregoing, I shall deploy in the course of the analysis a set of distinctions whose purpose is to highlight the differences between ‘modes,’ ‘contexts,’ ‘aspects,’ and ‘senses’ of existence in Avicenna’s works. These terms are intended to introduce some order in my analysis of the master’s discussion of existence *in specific relation to quiddity*. Let us start by disambiguating the first three notions. A ‘context’ of existence relates to the question of *where* quiddity may be said to exist. In other words, it concerns the issue of the *localization* of pure quiddity, without, however, tending to the issue of exactly how, or in what mode, quiddity can be said to exist. In his works, Avicenna mentions several ‘contexts’ of existence in connection with quiddity: the extramental concrete world; the sphere of human thought and intellectuality; the divine intellects; and God’s knowledge and essence. In contrast, an ‘aspect’ introduces a qualification concerning the context in which quiddity is discussed. It therefore provides additional information on the context, without, again, conveying information about the ontology of quiddity *per se*. It seems important to implement the notion of ‘aspect’ especially in the context of human thought and noetics, where the analysis requires more subtle distinctions that are not conveyed by the notion of ‘context.’ An example concerns Avicenna’s distinctions of various ‘aspects’ or ‘considerations’ of quiddity in *Introduction* I.2. In that passage, the master refers only to two ‘contexts’ of quiddity (in the mind and in the concrete world). But with regard to quiddity in the mind, he specifies that it can be considered either ‘in itself’ or as a universal, which are two different ‘aspects’ of how quiddity can be envisaged mentally. Yet, in this very passage, Avicenna does not proceed to explain what ‘modes’ of existence, if any, characterizes these various aspects of quiddity in the mind (this, of course, raises the question of their relation to mental existence and what ontological mode should be ascribed to them). On the basis of this example, it is easy to perceive the difference between a context, an aspect, and a mode.

The notion of a ‘mode’ of existence is by far the most delicate to define. It should be noted from the outset that it does not correspond strictly to the Avicennian ‘modalities’ (*jihāt*) of ‘the possible,’ ‘the necessary,’ and ‘the impossible.’ As it turns out, the modalities taken as a whole are only one of the various aspects of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) that Avicenna theorizes in his works: others include priority and posteriority, autonomy and need, and relevance and priority (see chapter IV). And although they form a central feature of his metaphysics and have justifiably been the focus of extensive scholarship, they are somewhat inadequate to study

119 This has made my assessment of, and response to, the previous scholarly interpretations of quiddity in Avicenna a particularly painstaking and difficult process. Many of the arguments that have been advanced by scholars are correct and insightful when taken individually, but they are often accompanied by an exclusivist claim regarding the place of quiddity in Avicenna that leaves out equally important aspects of the problem or prevents a comprehensive picture to emerge.

quiddity.¹²⁰ One reason for this is that the modalities do not qualify quiddity taken ‘in itself,’ but rather its relation to an external cause and to realized existence and, hence, to the composite thing as it comes to exist in actuality. Much more useful for my purpose is the ontological mode of ‘priority and posteriority’ (*al-taqaddum wa-l-ta’akhhur*), which Avicenna narrowly connects with ontological modulation, and which seems to be its foremost marker. At any rate, these aspects of modulation determine the basic structure and divisions of Avicenna’s ontology, of which the modalities are only one facet. Hence, a mode (*naḥw*) of existence is really the manner (*kayfiyyah*) according to which something exists, which is defined by the sum of the aspects constituting ontological modulation, of which the modalities (*jihāt*) are only one among many. All of this, as we saw, is to be differentiated from the general context (human and divine, mental or extramental) in which something exists.

Naturally, there is some overlap between the notions of ‘contexts,’ ‘aspects,’ and ‘modes’ of existence, which suggests that this framework should not be used rigidly, but rather flexibly and heuristically. For instance, the extramental and concrete world is an ‘ontological context’ that also happens to correspond generally to a ‘mode’ of existence that involves concrete and material substances—both can be connected with the expression *wujūd fī l-a’yān*. Likewise, a universal concept is located in and exists in the context of human thought and intellectuality—or simply ‘in the intellect’ (*fī-l-‘aql*)—and it also possesses an intellectual mode of existence (*wujūd ‘aqlī* or *dhihni*), which is defined as immaterial, universal, and abstract. At the same time, however, there need not be any symmetry between these various notions, particularly when it comes to essence. For example, on any straightforward reading of *Introduction* I.2, pure quiddity is an ‘aspect’ and a ‘consideration’ located in the ‘context’ of the human mind, but it is not attributed any ‘mode’ of existence by Avicenna, at least in this very passage. What is more, it is as yet unclear whether, in Avicenna’s psychology, all mental and intentional objects (*ma‘ānī*)—that is, all notions and intentions located in the ‘context’ or ‘domain’ of the human soul and human thought—are characterized by the same mode of mental existence.¹²¹ Finally, God and the separate intellects can be regarded as existing extramentally and individually (*fī l-a’yān*), but they obviously do not share the same mode of existence as the material beings located in this context. As mentioned above, one can even make the case—quite convincingly on my view—that God’s existence represents a distinct mode of existence *sui generis*. This seems substantiated not only from the

120 Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, provides a rich and detailed discussion of the modalities.

121 Briefly put, the issue is whether conceivability is necessarily synonymous with mental existence, or whether the latter category is restricted to the universal concepts. This would make, say, logical considerations a kind of mental ‘notions’ or ‘aspects’ that in themselves would not amount to mental existents proper. This issue also intersects with the distinction between the intellect and the internal senses in Avicenna; in what way can imaginative and estimative forms be said to exist, and how does their existence differ from the intelligible forms? These issues are picked up in chapter II in connection with the consideration of pure quiddity.

point of view of the modalities, since God is the only being in Avicenna's ontology that is Necessary of Existence in Itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*); but also by the fact that the sense of 'realized' or 'acquired existence' (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) Avicenna formulates in *Metaphysics* I.5 can only awkwardly be ascribed to God (I elaborate this point below).

This set of terms and distinctions will prove particularly valuable when exploring the issue of the ontological status of quiddity. This is because pure quiddity for Avicenna can be said to exist in different *contexts* (extramental and intramental, human and divine) and, within a single context (e.g., the intellectual), under different *aspects* (as 'a part of' and 'with other things,' and 'distinctly'), while also potentially maintaining its own distinct and unique ontological *mode* and status. In other words, this conceptual framework enables us to entertain the possibility that the ontological mode of pure quiddity could remain the same, even though the contexts and aspects related to it may change. This hypothesis finds traction in the dual notion of quidditative irreducibility and distinctness I adumbrated earlier, which suggests that quiddity can be regarded from different angles and in varying relations to things, while remaining strictly itself.¹²² The above distinctions between ontological contexts, aspects, and modes are helpful for the very reason that quiddity in itself disrupts the standard account of the relationship between contexts and modes of existence in Avicenna's philosophy. Together with God's existence, pure quiddity would seem to represent an exception to what would otherwise be a quite symmetrical ontological picture in Avicenna's philosophy between modes and contexts of existence (i.e., *fī l-a'yān* vs. *fī l-'aql*, particular vs. universal, etc.).

Intricately connected to the inquiry into the ontological modes and contexts is the one focusing on the various senses (*ma'ānī*) of existence that Avicenna outlines in his works, especially in *Metaphysics* I.5. In that passage, the master draws a distinction between "established existence" (*wujūd ithbātī*), which is also synonymous to "realized" or "acquired" existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*), on the one hand, and "proper existence" (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), on the other. What is the relation, if any, between these senses and the modes and contexts of existence described above? Moreover, how do these senses relate to ontological modulation and the various aspects that constitute it? More fundamentally, how are we to construe these two senses of *wujūd*? These are difficult questions, the first two of which have to my knowledge not been tackled in the modern literature on Avicenna. As for the last one, it has given rise to conflicting views, and there is to this date no consensus regarding its proper interpretation. Suf-

122 One helpful analogy to illustrate this distinction focuses on the notion of the atom in ancient philosophical systems. The *mode* of existence of an atom is irreducible and remains the same regardless of its ontological *contexts* and the *aspects* under which it is considered, that is, either in itself or as part of a larger entity such as a body. Naturally, the analogy falls apart the second one contrasts the materiality of the atom with the conceptual nature of quiddity. But the analogy adequately illustrates, I believe, the point I am trying to make here between modes, aspects, and contexts, on the one hand, and between irreducibility and distinctness, on the other.

fice to say here that by far the most prevalent interpretation construes ‘established’ or ‘realized’ existence as encompassing all the existent things in the concrete world and in the mind. This means that this sense of existence could be applied to the two basic modes of existence traditionally identified by scholars: concrete, particular realized existence and mental, intellectual realized existence. These two modes would together constitute the realm of the existents (*al-mawjūdāt*) in Avicenna’s ontology. Yet, as we saw, this classification raises certain problems. The question of whether God’s existence represents a separate and distinct mode and whether the predicate *mawjūd* can be rightly applied to Him illustrate this difficulty. In a similar manner, it is unclear whether God’s existence can be defined by the sense of ‘established’ and ‘realized’ existence that is mentioned in that passage. Equally problematic is how these senses relate to quiddity. Recently, Stephen Menn has offered a thought-provoking interpretation of these two senses: ‘established existence’ would bear some connection to Fārābī’s (d. 950 CE) ‘being-as-truth,’ while ‘proper existence’ is the being of the categories outside the mind.¹²³ As we can see, various and often incompatible interpretations of the evidence have been proposed, which, moreover, focus only on a single aspect of the problem.¹²⁴

One novel assumption made in the present book is that the issues regarding (a) ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), (b) the modes of existence (*naḥw al-wujūd*, *kayfiyyat al-wujūd*), and (c) senses of existence (*ma‘ānī l-wujūd*) are all interconnected in Avicenna’s philosophy and need to be analyzed in relation to one another. This methodological perspective has not been sufficiently emphasized—or even for that matter recognized—in the previous literature, partly because of the fact that Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation remains poorly understood to this day, and partly due to the lasting—and mostly nefarious—assumption that there are only two modes of existence in Avicenna’s philosophy. In view of the foregoing, it appears that the crux of the debate regarding the ontological status of quiddity, as well as the relation between essence and existence, hinges directly on one’s construal of *wujūd*. For scholars to agree on the issue of co-extensionality, they would need first to explain precisely how they construe the various modes and senses of existence in Avicenna’s philosophy. If one, following the ‘standard’ interpretation of Avicenna’s ontology, recognizes only two modes of existence, i.e., those of concrete particulars and mental universals, or maintains a single sense of existence coinciding with ‘realized’ or ‘acquired’ existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*), which necessarily entails such notions as complexity, causedness, and contingency,

123 Menn, Fārābī; idem, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*.

124 Indeed, I say nothing here about scholars’ interpretations of ‘proper existence,’ which are equally divergent. For Black, *Mental Existence*, 26, “to the extent that the nature’s proper being has any truly existential force for Avicenna himself, it is to be identified with divine existence, that is, with the preexistence of the nature in the providential knowledge of the separate intellects.” This is exactly the interpretation of proper existence that other scholars, such as Menn and Benevich, reject. These points are discussed in detail in chapter IV.

and which pertains to all the particular composite beings in the concrete world and the complex entities in the mind, then it is clear that any supposition of quiddity that does not conform to these ontological criteria and that is not immediately subsumed within them would result in the greater extensionality of essence over existence. This is the kind of scenario that Wisnovsky exposes in his book, when he pinpoints the tension between Avicenna's description of *two modes of existence*, but of *three aspects of quiddity*.¹²⁵ On the basis of this evidence, there would be quiddities that lie outside and beyond existence, thereby suggesting that quiddity is indeed extensionally broader than existence. But reconfiguring this 'standard' ontological framework allows for alternative interpretations of the status of pure quiddity and its relation to existence.

3.6 Conclusion

The foregoing considerations have clarified some important conceptual issues involved in the modern study of Avicenna's theory of quiddity. It has also oriented the investigation towards two specific queries: first, the relationship between quiddity in itself and mental existence; and second, and more generally, the number and nature of the various modes of existence Avicenna outlines in his works and how they connect with the ontology of quiddity. One may also note from the foregoing that the debate regarding the ontological status of quiddity has centered to a large extent on the question of *whether* quiddity in itself exists—with most scholars reaching a negative conclusion. This is in spite of the fact that the more relevant and thought-provoking questions might very well be *how* and *in what mode* it could be said to exist. This of course implies that the Avicennian theory of existence is actually richer and more flexible than previously thought, a hypothesis that will be substantiated in the remaining chapters of this book. One could argue that this general shortcoming in our understanding of Avicenna's ontology, and more specifically of his categorization of the various modes or states in which something can be said to exist, has affected and even conditioned our understanding of the ontological status of pure quiddity. One priority in this regard is to explore Avicenna's doctrine of ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*) in order to better understand how it applies to quiddity. For, from the moment one argues that quiddity in itself is not 'nothing' or a mere mental or logical aspect devoid of an ontological status, then it becomes imperative to qualify what mode of existence could be ascribed to this pure quiddity; and modulation, it would seem, provides a way to do so.

125 Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Islamic Reception*, 202.

Chapter II: Quiddity in Itself and Mental Existence

1 The terminological inquiry

1.1 Quiddity in itself as *i'tibār*

Avicenna provides some of the most extensive discussions of quiddity in itself in *Introduction* I.2 and *Metaphysics* V.1 of *The Cure*, and it is accordingly with these texts that we shall begin our inquiry.¹ In these two works, his analysis relies on a cluster of technical terms that should be subjected to minute examination.² In that connection,

1 Some striking differences with regard to the treatment of quiddity in *Introduction* I.2, on the one hand, and *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1, on the other, should be stressed right away. In the latter work, the discussion of essence and existence unfolds against a metaphysical, not a logical, background, even though the language and arguments Avicenna uses in this work are often borrowed directly from the logical sphere and buttressed with logical terms and notions. In that sense, Avicenna's metaphysical exposition depends directly on the logical treatises that precede it. At any rate, the master focuses more readily on the ontological aspects of quiddity in *Metaphysics*; accordingly, he opens the analysis with a pointed discussion of the relationship between 'thing' and 'existent' and 'quiddity' and 'existence,' rather than the various epistemological aspects or considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity, as he does in *Introduction*. Nevertheless, I will argue that the general picture that arises from Avicenna's logical and metaphysical works is fully consistent.

2 In these and other passages, Avicenna resorts to a rich and diverse technical vocabulary to describe quiddity in itself (see Appendix 1 for a detailed list of terms and expressions). In general, these terms are broadly synonymous, but reflect different aspects of quiddity depending on the context and the exact meaning Avicenna wants to convey. These various nuances and aspects will be teased out in the course of the analysis. Suffice to say here that this terminology aims to convey the basic notion of self-identity and of pure quiddity as an object considered in itself and in abstraction from everything else. This is the case, for example, of the expressions *al-māhiyyah min haythu hiya hiya*, *al-māhiyyah bi-mā hiya tilka l-māhiyyah*, and *al-ḥayawān bi-dhātīhi* (or *bi-mā huwa ḥayawān* or *fī ḥaqīqatīhi*), among many other examples. 'Animalness' (*al-ḥayawāniyyah*) and 'humanness' (*al-insāniyyah*) are the two standard examples Avicenna exploits in his writings. As already mentioned in the introduction, the meaning *in itself* conveyed by these various terms is ambiguous, because it can be construed in two basic ways: either as meaning 'distinctness' or 'separation,' or as meaning 'irreducibility' and 'foundationality.' These two senses will be explained in the course of the study. Other terms are attached to quiddity whose interpretation is not immediately obvious and needs to be fleshed out: this is the case, for example, of "abstract quiddity" (*al-māhiyyah al-mujarradah*), or of the various conditions (*shurūt*) applied to quiddity. Finally, there is a wide list of synonyms of quiddity Avicenna uses, which require much unpacking, and which play a crucial role in his philosophy. They consist mostly of the following: nature (*ṭabī'ah*), reality (*ḥaqīqah*), thingness (*shay'iyah*), and meaning or entity (*ma'nā*). The terms nature and reality appear mostly in the context of Avicenna's discussion of quiddity in the concrete world, although they also pertain to the status of pure quiddity in the mind; this topic is discussed in detail in chapter III. The term *shay'iyah* refers primarily to the intelligible reality of essence and, hence, to quiddity as a pure notion in the mind. This study will not have much to say about *dhāt* and *shay'*, which point primarily to the essence of a concrete existent and

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what one notices from the outset is the intentional, mental, or mind-dependent nature of most of these terms, as well as (for some of them) their logical implications: Avicenna refers to quiddity as a consideration (*i'tibār*), an aspect or mode (*naḥw* and *wajh*), a meaning or idea (*ma'nā*), and an intelligible form (*ṣūrah* and *ṣūrah ma'qūlah*). It is these mind-related or mind-dependent terms that will detain us here, insofar as they can help to illuminate the issue of how quiddity in itself relates to mental existence.

Introduction I.2, extensively analyzed by Marmura in two important articles, provides perhaps the best entry point into the problem of quiddity in Avicenna. This treatise is, as its very name (*al-Madkhal*) indicates, a propaedeutic to logic, and, through logic, to philosophy as a whole. Although based on Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, and following a long line of late-antique Greek and early Arabic commentaries on this seminal work, this treatise is a free and personal disquisition on some of the fundamental notions and terms used in philosophical analysis as well as on the relation between logic and ontology. It is in the course of his exposition in Book I that Avicenna broaches the topic of quiddity. In a famous passage, he explains that there are three aspects or considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity (*māhiyyah*): one aspect of quiddity is associated with universal mental existents (I shall refer to it henceforth as 'universal quiddity'); the other aspect is associated with concrete particular existents in the extramental world ('extramental or concrete quiddity'); and the third aspect is quiddity in itself, taken in abstraction from these two modes of existence (mental and concrete) as well as with the concomitants and accidents connected with them. Although Avicenna also describes quiddity as having various considerations (*i'tibārāt*) in *Metaphysics of The Cure*, *Introduction* I.2 provides the most condensed and schematic exposition of this doctrine. Below is a translation of the key passage:

Text 1: The quiddities of things can be either in concrete beings or in the act of conceiving [i.e., in the mind, *fī-l-taṣawwur*], and they are subject to three considerations [*i'tibārāt*]: (a) the consideration of quiddity inasmuch as it is that very quiddity [*al-māhiyyah bi-mā hiya tilka l-māhiyyah*] unconnected to either mode [or aspect] of existence [*al-wujūdāyn*] and to what follows from it [quiddity] insofar as it is like that [*wa-mā yalḥaqūhā min ḥaythu hiya ka-dhālika*, i.e., in one of these two modes]; (b) the consideration of it [quiddity] insofar as it is in concrete beings [*fī l-a'yān*], in which case there are accidents attached to it that specify its [mode of] existence [*takhuṣṣu wujūdahā*]; and [finally] (c) the consideration of it insofar as it is in the mind, in which case there are [also] accidents attached to it that specify its [mode of] existence, such as

which are fully co-extensional with 'the existent' (*al-mawjūd*); for the difference between *māhiyyah* and *shay'*, see Bertolacci, *The Distinction*; De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*. In view of this, the work that lies ahead consists to a large degree in providing disambiguation and analysis of these key terms. In what follows, I will use the expressions 'pure quiddity' and 'quiddity in itself' as my default expressions and treat them as fully synonymous.

subject and predicate, universality and particularity in predication, what is essential [i.e., constitutive] and accidental in predication, and other such things as you will learn [shortly].³

Although it may seem at first blush that this passage encapsulates an entirely new of way of looking at quiddity—and this is indeed true to some extent—it is nevertheless to be connected to ancient philosophical discussions regarding the various aspects of the forms and the universals, especially those that had unfolded in late-antique Neoplatonic circles aiming to reconcile Plato’s and Aristotle’s views on the universals. To begin with, Avicenna’s account is directly related to the Neoplatonic tripartite schematization of ‘the common things’ (sing., τὸ κοινόν) and universals (sing., τὸ καθόλου) into what is ‘before,’ ‘in,’ and ‘after’ multiplicity. Two of the aspects Avicenna outlines above intersect directly with this classification: (b) corresponds to universals in concrete things, while (c) corresponds to the universals *qua* concepts in the human mind. As for (a), I will show later on that it corresponds—albeit only partially—to what is ‘before’ multiplicity.⁴ Given that Avicenna was aware of this Neoplatonic tripartite scheme—he reports it at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12—it is reasonable to assume that it stands in the background of his account of quiddity in chapter I.2 as well. After all, the threefold distinction in I.2 can be easily mapped onto the one that is outlined later in I.12. This point seems further corroborated by the fact that this threefold distinction, as well as its implementation to effect a typology of universals, forms, or essences, also underpins the works of some of Avicenna’s predecessors, such as those of the Jacobite theologian and philosopher Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, whose metaphysics appears to have exerted a deep influence on the *shaykh al-ra’īs*. Both Yaḥyā and Avicenna tackle the issue of the ontological status of the *kullīyyāt* and *umūr ‘āmmah*, Arabic terms which correspond directly to the Greek words for ‘universals’ (καθόλου) and ‘common things’ (κοινά) respectively, and they also conceive of these

³ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.2, 15.1–6. I am grateful to Frank Griffel for his valuable help and advice in translating this passage.

⁴ See, in particular, Ammonius, *Commentary on Eisagoge*, 41.17–20; 42.10–21; and 104.27–31; Philoponus (?), *Commentary on Posterior Analytics*, 2, 435.28–30; Simplicius, *Commentary on Categories*, 82.35–83.20; 69.19–71.2 (all in *CAG*); as well as Proclus, *Commentary on Euclid’s Elements*, 50.16–51.9 (I owe these references to Sorabji, *Universals Transformed*). The literature focusing on this tripartite Neoplatonic classification of the universals and its influence on medieval thought is extensive. Here I provide only a few references to orient the reader: Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 128 ff.; idem, *Universals Transformed*; and de Libera, *La querelle*, 230 ff. The scholastic treatment of this topic seems inextricably linked to the reception of Avicenna in the medieval Latin world; see Owens, *Common Nature*; Wéber, *Le thème avicennien*; Erismann, *Immanent Realism*; and de Libera, *L’art*. Other references are given in due course. As I explained in the introduction, each chapter of the present book can be regarded as tackling one of these three aspects, albeit in reverse order. One should bear in mind, however, that this tripartite scheme represents only one of many frameworks Avicenna adopts to elaborate his doctrine of quiddity. Given that he inherits this scheme from the ancient sources, it is not surprising that there is only a partial overlap with his theory of quiddity. The differences have to do mostly with Avicenna’s strict differentiation between quiddity and universality and how quiddity relates to ontology, issues that will be discussed later on.

notions in close relation to form and essence.⁵ In addition, Yaḥyā differentiates between three aspects of the forms or universals on the basis of their relation to multiplicity, which he describes as ‘divine,’ ‘natural,’ and ‘logical.’⁶ There can be little doubt that Yaḥyā’s approach was inspired by the Neoplatonic scheme outlined above and that it provided a model for Avicenna’s understanding of this topic.

Furthermore, Avicenna’s account in *Introduction* I.2 should be read in light of Porphyry’s discussion of the universals at the very beginning of *Eisagoge* (1.9–16).⁷ In this section of his work, Porphyry formulates three questions that were to have a lasting impact on later philosophers: (a) do the universals exist or are they mere concepts?; (b) if they exist, are they corporeal?; and (c) do they exist separately or in concrete things? In late antiquity, a wide number of commentaries and works were written that addressed these questions, often within an overarching Platonic metaphysical framework and in connection with the theory of the forms. The general outlines of this philosophical debate were undoubtedly known to the early Arabic philosophers as a result of the translation movements from Greek and Syriac to Arabic. Avicenna is no exception, and it is apparent from his works that he was fully aware of the long discussions this text had given rise to in the late-antique philosophical circles. In fact, there can be little doubt that in broaching the issue of the various ontological contexts of quiddity, Avicenna was responding directly to Porphyry’s own interrogations about the universals in *Eisagoge*.⁸ Notice, however, that

5 See, for instance, Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *Treatise on Unity*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 400.16–17, which mentions the “universals and common things” (*hiya l-kulliyāt wa-l-umūr al-‘āmmiyyah*); and Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.1, who relies on both terms in his analysis.

6 See Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī; Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*. As Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*; and Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī have shown, Yaḥyā anticipated some key features of Avicenna’s account of essence and the universals, one of which is a threefold distinction that closely resembles the one provided by Avicenna in *Introduction*. More specifically, Yaḥyā argues that the idea, meaning, or entity (*ma’nā*) man or animal is neither universal nor particular, and that universality amounts to another *ma’nā* added to it in the mind. Accordingly, the *ma’nā* human or animal can be in the particular, in the mind, or considered as an absolute (*muṭlaq*), a statement that anticipates Avicenna’s argumentation; see Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 153–157. Although Yaḥyā has rightly been regarded as a crucial link between the late-antique philosophers and Avicenna, there are also important differences concerning the way in which these two thinkers regard the universals, which, I think, have not been sufficiently highlighted. I will have many occasions throughout this study to return to the parallels between these two thinkers.

7 For the Arabic version of this key passage, which quite faithfully reproduces the Greek original, see Porphyry, *Isāghūjī*, 67.9–12. For the place and influence of Porphyry in the Aristotelian tradition that was bequeathed to the Islamic world, see Chiaradonna, *Porphyry*. For additional insight into the Arabic reception of *Eisagoge*, see Gyekye, *Arabic Logic*, 13–22. This text played a crucial role in shaping the development of not only Arabic logic, but also, due to its ontological implications, of Arabic metaphysics and theology. Numerous commentaries on this work in Arabic and Persian have survived, which testify to the sustained interest it generated in Islamic intellectual history.

8 Avicenna further exposes his awareness of the ontological implications connected with the discussion of the universals in another passage of the same work (27.7–14); the statements he makes there can also be seen as a direct response to the questions asked by Porphyry. Avicenna will proceed to

unlike the Greek sources, Avicenna in this passage is not discussing common things, but only quiddity (*māhiyyah*). In other words, he is talking about the various ontological contexts of quiddity, not of the common things or universals, as the problem was usually framed in the late-antique sources. This is an important difference. Although some late-antique philosophers, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, seem to have differentiated terminologically between the common thing (*κοινόν*), which somehow exists in extramental reality, and the universal (*καθόλου*), which exists only in the mind, the boundary between these notions in the Greek texts is slippery, and in any case the crux of the discussion focused on the common thing/universal, not on quiddity or essence.⁹ For Avicenna, in contrast, the core issue focuses on the various aspects of quiddity. Universality is merely a mental concomitant of quiddity, and universals as such are concepts that exist only in the mind.

Moreover, the ontological implications of the various questions raised by Porphyry acquire new depth in Avicenna's philosophy as a result of the latter's distinction between genus and species, on the one hand, and pure quiddity, on the other. So, for Avicenna, the issue at stake is not only: What is the ontological status of essence-genus and essence-species?, but also: What is the ontological status of the essence in itself, once it has been stripped of genusness and speciesness? And whereas Porphyry presents these points as philosophical conundrums in his work and relinquishes the responsibility of actually having to resolve them, Avicenna is describing what appears to be an established point or theory that is well anchored in his system.

address some of these points also in *Metaphysics of The Cure*. In chapter I.4, 26.3–5, Avicenna formulates a series of questions that strongly recalls the Porphyrian passage: in the discipline of metaphysics, he writes, “it is proper to acquaint ourselves with the state of the universal and particular ... the manner of existence of the universal natures, whether they have an existence in external particulars, the manner of their existence in the soul, and whether they have an existence separate from [both] external particulars and from the soul” (translated by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 20). Some scholars have, understandably, approached Avicenna's ontology chiefly through the lens of the ancient and medieval debates about the universals; this is the case, for instance, of Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, 107–129. Although it represents a crucial dimension of the problem, it must be complemented with an investigation of other traditions and issues, such as early Islamic *kalām* ontology and especially its disquisitions on the ontological status of ‘the thing.’ It is the confluence of these two major ontological traditions in the works of Avicenna that informs the present analysis.

⁹ For this distinction in Alexander, see Pines, *A New Fragment*, 80–83. At any rate, some of these nuances may have been lost in the Arabic tradition, given that ‘the common thing’ and ‘the universal’ were often translated by means of the single Arabic word *kullī*. In spite of this, one does also encounter the expressions *al-umūr al-‘āmmah* and *al-ashyā’ al-‘āmmah* in the Arabic texts, which must refer to the Greek *κοινά*. It is found, for instance, and relevantly, in a treatise by Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī entitled *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things (Fī tabyīn wujūd al-umūr al-‘āmmiyyah)*, as well as in the title of section V.1 of *Metaphysics of The Cure*, ‘On General Things and the Mode of their Existence’ (*Fī l-umūr al-‘āmmah wa-kayfiyyat wujūdihā*). Finally, Pines notes that Alexander's notion of the common thing bears some connection to that of essence, and that both are to be contrasted to the universal as a concept in the mind. This might prefigure an important distinction also in Avicenna between pure quiddity and the universal. I return to this issue later on.

These differences notwithstanding, both Porphyry and Avicenna address the problem of the mental and concrete contexts in which the common things and quiddity could be said to exist. Avicenna has reformulated in his own words and addressed some the main philosophical queries articulated by Porphyry at the beginning of his logical treatise.

What is more, Avicenna's claim that we can have a conception or consideration of quiddity 'in itself' in contradistinction to that of the universal stands out quite clearly in this passage and represents another difference with Porphyry's account and the Neoplatonic tripartite scheme. At first sight, this statement looks like an innovation on Avicenna's part, and it seems to go hand in hand with his extensive interest in human psychology and epistemology. It is to be connected especially with the capacity the human mind has to divide, analyze, and posit or nullify relations between things, in this case between quiddity and its concomitants and accidents.

In spite of this, the idea that essence, or form, or the universal, can be apprehended 'in itself' does have several precedents in the history of philosophy. One frequently cited starting point is Aristotle's attempt to disentangle essence from existence in his exposition of demonstration and definition in *Posterior Analytics* II.7, which is a text that underpins Avicenna's entire approach to this issue.¹⁰ In a very different context, some Neoplatonists sometimes speak of a form 'in itself,' such as 'the animal in itself,' which is identified as one of the Platonic forms.¹¹ Equally relevant here is Alexander's endeavor in some *Quaestia* and other texts to separate the nature of a thing from its universality and to regard the latter merely as a mental accident. This would seem to imply that the human mind can apprehend the natures in themselves.¹² This argument was transmitted to the Islamic world and expanded by Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, who argues in some of his treatises that essence and universality

10 In particular, Aristotle's statements that definition cannot account for both the essence and existence of a thing because "definition does not prove that the thing defined exists," (92b19) and that "what human nature is and the fact that man exists are not the same thing" (92b10–11) can be said to constitute one of the premises of Avicenna's own exploration of the topic of quiddity. The latter will expend much effort trying to clarify the relationship between these two concepts in his logical and metaphysical works.

11 This is the case, for example, of Simplicius in his *Commentary on Categories* (I discuss the relevant passage later on). It should be stressed from the outset that, in spite of some terminological and doctrinal parallels, Avicenna's doctrine of essence is not grounded in Plato's metaphysics and that he rejects the theory of independently and transcendentally existing Forms. But bringing a Platonic metaphysical framework on board is not altogether ludicrous. I will argue in chapters IV and V that it plays a role (in its Neoplatonic permutation) in understanding the status of quiddity in the divine world and as objects of divine intellection.

12 See Tweedale, Alexander; idem, Duns Scotus's Doctrine; Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 155. The impact of Alexander's works on the history of Arabic philosophy, including Avicenna's philosophical system, is well known and has been highlighted on numerous occasions. For my purposes, scholars have pointed to the Arabic translations of some of Alexander's treatises as possible sources of inspiration for Avicenna's theory of essence and universality.

are two different meanings or ideas (*mā'ānī*), which can be conceived of separately.¹³ Finally, the potential influence of Mu'tazilite epistemology and ontology on Avicenna should be acknowledged and represents an equally important aspect of the problem. The Mu'tazilites, who were active long before Avicenna, distinguished sharply between 'the thing' and 'the existent' and made this conceptual distinction the basis of their epistemology and ontology. What is more, the Baṣrian Mu'tazilite Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī sometimes speak of 'an attribute of the essence' (*ṣifat al-dhāt*), which refers to the way a thing is in itself and in abstraction from all other things. It designates, to quote R.M. Frank, "the thing's total identity with itself as it is predicated of itself without any implication of duality."¹⁴ This doctrine anticipates in some important ways Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity and underlines the need to include the early history of *kalām* in order to get a broader picture of the master's sources and philosophical interlocutors.¹⁵

Although these sources help to contextualize Avicenna's own approach to this issue, they do not lucidly convey the various epistemological and mental distinctions he makes between quiddity and the various external accidents and concomitants that attach to it. In that sense, the account in *Introduction* I.2 represents Avicenna's own elaboration, and at any rate it finds no counterpart in Porphyry's *Eisagoge*. One remarkable feature in the Avicennian text is the claim that quiddity can be the object of various mental considerations (*i'tibārāt*). It should be noted that a similar argument can be found in two other works by the master, the early *Provenance and Destination* and the late *Notes*, which suggests that Avicenna consistently held to this view throughout his life.¹⁶ On this account, human beings can envisage quiddity in different contexts and either strictly in itself or in relation to other things. Hence, the master appears to be making an epistemological or logical point, which hinges to a large extent on the term *i'tibār* itself. Avicenna employs the term *i'tibār* frequently in his writings, and in many cases it does not seem to carry any technical meaning.¹⁷ However, it always implies a kind of mental or logical consideration or process that unfolds in the mind. Moreover, in other instances, the noun *i'tibār* and the corresponding adjective *i'tibārī* do seem to assume a more spe-

13 See, for instance, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *Notes on Various [Philosophical] Notions*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 171.6–13; see also Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; and Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 153–157.

14 Frank, *Beings*, 53.

15 The parallels between Avicenna and the Mu'tazilites regarding this specific issue have to my knowledge not been thoroughly explored in the scholarship. I will have several opportunities to return to them in the course of my analysis. For brief but cogent discussions of the Mu'tazilite Attribute of the Essence, see Frank, *Beings*, 53–57; and Thiele, Abū Hāshim.

16 Avicenna, *Provenance*, 3.4–6: "The consideration of the relation and connection [of a thing] is other than the consideration of the very essence of that thing [*i'tibār nafs dhāt al-shay'*]" ; and *Notes*, 200, section 304: "Considering the essence [of a thing] is one thing, and considering it as being in a [certain] state is another thing" (*i'tibār al-dhāt shay' wa-i'tibār kawnihi bi-ḥāl shay' ākhar*).

17 Use of a search engine has enabled me to establish that Avicenna uses the term *i'tibār* at least 324 times in the logical, physical, and metaphysical works of *The Cure*.

cific sense and are used expressly to emphasize an object's mental or conceptual nature, as opposed to something more concrete, such as when Avicenna in *Discussions* distinguishes between "sensual and conceptual premises" (*muqaddimāt ḥissiyyah wa-i'tibāriyyah*).¹⁸ Avicenna is one of the first thinkers in Islam to make such extensive use of the term *i'tibār*, and he is certainly the first to apply it with such consistency to quiddity.¹⁹ Yet, partly as a result of the lack of a clear philosophical precedent in Arabic, and partly because this topic has not been studied systematically, the meaning of *i'tibār* in Avicenna's philosophy is difficult to establish. At root, it means a 'conceptual,' 'mental,' or 'psychological aspect' or 'consideration,' that is, something that unfolds in the human mind when the latter is engaged in actual thought and deliberating about a specific object. It has been diversely translated by modern scholars as a "consideration," "mental construct," "mental aspect," and "contemplation," to quote only a few of the available renditions. Regardless of which translation is preferred, notice that they all stress the intentional and mind-dependent nature of an *i'tibār*, although they say virtually nothing about its relation to mental existence and of what kind of mental act it consists.²⁰ Because it involves a reflective or rati-

18 Avicenna, *Discussions*, 210, section 622; cf. 204, section 608, which mentions "consideration based on the senses" (*al-i'tibār al-ḥissī*).

19 To my knowledge, the term *i'tibār* does not play a significant role in the philosophical literature prior to Avicenna. At any rate, it is not part of the basic technical vocabulary of Kindī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Fārābī. Likewise, although it plays a key role in post-Avicennian *kalām*, it is not used in a systematic way in the early theological sources. Nevertheless, some early authors do discuss this term in some detail. One of them is al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857 CE), who, in *Book of Instructions* (*al-Waṣāyā*), 288, devotes a section to this term (I am grateful to Salimeh Maghsoudlou for this reference). According to this author, an *i'tibār* is "an inference from one thing to another thing" (*al-istiḍlāl bi-l-shay' 'alā l-shay'*). Al-Muḥāsibī goes on to describe this in turn as a kind of certain knowledge stemming from the heart (*qalb*). Clearly, this author attributes a different meaning to *i'tibār* from the philosophical one and integrates it in a distinctively Sufi framework. For this reason it is unlikely that his works—or those of other early Sufis for that matter—had any impact on the Avicennian philosophical conception of this term. On the other hand, Avicenna's repeated technical use of this notion had a profound impact on later discussions of quiddity in *kalām* and *falsafah*. It was later to become a salient feature of the post-Avicennian philosophical terminology, starting with Bahmanyār and especially with the works of Suhrawardī (d. 1191 CE), Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghḍādī (d. 1165 CE), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, up to the later commentaries of Qushjī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī (d. 1311 CE), and many others. It figures prominently in a work as recent (given the time span covered in this study) as Ṭabāṭabā'i's (d. 1981 CE) *Introduction to Philosophy* (*Bidāyat al-ḥikmah*), also translated as *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*, published around 1970. Given its importance in Avicenna's philosophy as well as its extraordinarily rich fate in the postclassical tradition, it deserves attentive commentary, which is provided below.

20 Given its importance in the Arabic philosophical and theological traditions, it is surprising that the term *i'tibār* has not received more attention in the modern historiography. What follows is an overview of the main, but always brief, attempts at defining it in the modern scholarship. Surprisingly, neither Afnan, *Philosophical Terminology*, nor Goichon, *Lexique*, dedicates an entry to this term. For some insight into the use of *i'tibār* in Avicenna and especially in the post-Avicennian tradition, see Izutsu, in Sabzavāri, *The Metaphysics*, 9, 42–43; idem, *The Fundamental Structure*, especially 65 ff.; and idem, *Basic Problems*, which focuses explicitly on the issue of quiddity in the postclassical

ocinative process, it would appear that in most cases an *i'tibār* is to be connected with the intellect (*'aql*), a connection that is occasionally explicitly made in the Avicennian texts.²¹ This explains why the term appears frequently in Avicenna's discussions of celestial noetics to describe the various objects of thought of the separate intellects, in addition to his logical writings. In spite of this, an *i'tibār* need not be strictly limited to the intellect and may also solicit the lower faculties of the soul, such as the estimative and imaginative faculties. At any rate, this last point requires further research.

Bearing these points in mind, Avicenna's main objective in *Introduction* I.2 seems *not* to be to discuss the ontological status of quiddity, but to explicate the various ways in which quiddities can be envisaged by the human mind as logical, intentional, or psychological notions—an objective that seems perfectly aligned with the logical scope of the treatise. Accordingly, one does not expect a protracted discussion focusing on the ontology of quiddity, since this topic falls outside the scope of the treatise. Avicenna intends here to discuss the three “considerations” of quiddity, a term which does not in itself suggest existential content, but merely points to a conceptual or epistemological distinction of this notion. At any rate, this threefold dis-

tradition. Izutsu describes *i'tibār* as “an aspect” and “a subjective manner of looking at a thing” (Izutsu, *The Fundamental Structure*, 65), “something mentally posited” (Izutsu, in Sabzavāri, *The Metaphysics*, 9), as well as, with regard to the present topic, “the various possible ways in which ‘quiddity’ can be viewed at the level of conceptual analysis” (Basic Problems, 4). Although he discusses the notion of *i'tibār* in connection with quiddity in some detail, Izutsu does not directly tackle the issue of its relation to mental existence. Furthermore, his tendency to move back and forth between Avicenna and his later exegetes and to interpret the former's doctrine in light of the postclassical tradition is methodologically problematic and somewhat obscures the contours of Avicenna's thought. For instance, Izutsu's claim that Avicenna regarded pure quiddity has “neither existent nor non-existent” (*The Fundamental Structure*, 65) is a later exegetical development, which was probably influenced by *kalām* theories, and which is not stated in this way by the *shaykh* himself; see section II.3. Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, especially 27, note 2, alternates between the translations “aspect” and “consideration” in his study on the reception of Avicenna's metaphysics, while Fazlioğlu, *Between Reality*, has recently opted to translate *i'tibār* as “mental construct.” Walbridge's and Ziai's take on this is more committal, as they render *i'tibār* in Suhrawardī's philosophy as “a being of reason” (Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, xxii, xxv). They explain: “these attributes have no being outside the mind and are actually products of our thought about things.” It can be inferred from their study and especially from their translation “a being of reason” that they regard an *i'tibār* as referring specifically to a mental existent (cf. the Arabic text, 52.10–11), although Walbridge elsewhere alternately translates this key term as “intellectual fiction” (Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 45–46). At any rate, its ontological status in Suhrawardī's philosophy remains to be precisely delineated. Finally, for a discussion of *i'tibār* in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his interpretation of Avicenna, see Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*, 243–289, especially 255–256, 266–269, 272 n. 410. For the purposes of this study, I follow the standard translations of *i'tibār* as “consideration” or “mental aspect,” with an emphasis on its epistemological role and formal meaning.

21 See for instance *Categories*, 242, where the expression *fī i'tibār al-'aql* occurs. And in *Discussion*, 308, section 865, he glosses *i'tibār* as “intellectual form” (*dhālīka l-i'tibār ayḍan ṣūrah 'aqliyyah*). Cf. also *Discussions*, 308–309, sections 864–865.

tion is established from the point of view of the human mind pondering about a fundamental epistemological notion, which it can scrutinize under various angles. This conceptual or logical approach seems appropriate, given the genre of the work, which not only opens Avicenna's treatment of the *Organon*, but also inaugurates the entire oeuvre of *The Cure*.

Notice in this connection that Avicenna describes quiddity in itself as *one of three considerations* that the human mind can entertain with regard to quiddity in general.²² It is important to stress that his intention in this passage is not to posit three different 'kinds' or 'types' of essences, but to posit three ways of considering quiddity in the mind from a rational or logical viewpoint. Hence, it is only the *relation* of quiddity to its external concomitants (whether corporeal or mental) that changes according to these various considerations, not quiddity itself. In fact, for Avicenna, 'quiddity in itself' is just quiddity and nothing more, and it is its association with mental and corporeal concomitants or lack thereof that determine its mode of existence. So Avicenna is not by any means enumerating *kinds* of essences that would be distinct one from the other. He is explaining how the same quiddity, say horseness, can be envisaged in relation to its concomitants and accidents and, by extension, to the modes of mental and extramental existence that characterize it, even though in itself the quiddity horseness always remains quiddity and possesses an irreducible nature.²³ With that being said, Avicenna in this passage does broach the issue of how these various considerations relate to existence, and in this regard

22 Interestingly, in the postclassical tradition, the focus set by Avicenna in this passage appears to have shifted. For while Avicenna describes quiddity in itself as *one of three considerations of essence* in *Introduction* I.2, later authors often speak of the *various considerations added to quiddity in itself*, with the implication that there need not be a consideration of pure quiddity itself. In other words, the question of whether there is such a thing as a pristine consideration of pure quiddity itself without any of its concomitants and any other consideration being attached to it (as Avicenna seems to suggest in *Introduction* I.2) is not clearly addressed in most of the later, postclassical works. But this inquiry in any case depends on a precise evaluation of each individual author; cf. the brief analysis below of Rāzī, Ṭūsī, and Qushjī, to name only three important authors. In fact, later thinkers often regarded the various considerations of pure quiddity as corresponding directly to the concomitants and attributes that attach to it, for instance, the consideration of universality as it attaches to quiddity. This issue is, of course, directly related to these thinkers' stance regarding mental existence and whether they allow abstract mental objects to count as existents proper. But this represents an interesting development of the later commentatorial tradition, which adopted a creative and transformative approach to Avicenna's doctrines, and which ultimately gave rise, as Wisnovsky suggests, to 'Avicennism' or to an 'Avicennian' or 'Avicennizing' philosophical tradition (to be distinguished from Avicenna's philosophy proper); see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Islamic Reception*; idem, *Towards a Genealogy*; and idem, *Essence and Existence*.

23 In recognizing a distinct consideration of pure quiddity that excludes its concomitants and even existence, Avicenna may be elaborating on Aristotle's claims in *Posterior Analytics* II.7. There Aristotle explains that the definition of essence or of "essential nature," strictly speaking, does not indicate whether a thing exists and, hence, does not include existence. Aristotle, however, does not in this passage use the expressions 'pure quiddity' or 'quiddity in itself.' This seems to be an Avicennian terminological innovation.

he puts forth several vital points. First, he makes an important claim with regard to mental existence. Although the three considerations Avicenna enumerates are all ‘mental,’ in the sense that they take place in the mind and are apprehended from the point of view of a rational, thinking subject, only one of them can be straightforwardly connected with a mental existent, namely, the consideration of quiddity in the mind as a universal form.²⁴ This is because this aspect of quiddity presupposes the mental concomitants attached to existence in the mind, chief among them being universality. In being the object of a universal kind of knowledge, this aspect of quiddity correlates with an intelligible form or existent, and it is tantamount to what Avicenna otherwise calls an intelligible (*ma‘qūl*), a universal (*al-kullī*), an intelligible form (*ṣūrah ma‘qūlah*), as well as a mental existent (*mawjūd fī l-dhihn*). Apart from being immaterial, what these intelligibles all have in common is a universal

24 In this study, the expressions *mawjūd fī l-dhihn* (existent in the mind), *fī l-‘aql* (in the intellect), and *fī l-taṣawwur* (in conception) will be treated as being broadly synonymous and as designating mental or intellectual existents. What is more, inasmuch as we are dealing here with intellectual existents, the expression *mawjūd fī l-naḥs* (existent in the soul) and *mawjūd fī l-awḥām* or *fī l-tawahhum* (existent in the estimation) will also in many cases be construed in a similar way, even though *naḥs* is, strictly speaking and admittedly, a term that encompasses much more than rational thought, and although *tawahhum* means literally ‘estimation.’ I shall distinguish between these expressions and the various psychological nuances they convey only when raising the specific question of whether Avicenna recognizes *sub-intellectual psychological existents*; in this case, distinguishing between existence ‘in the intellect,’ ‘in the mind,’ ‘in the estimation,’ and ‘in the soul’ becomes more relevant. It should be noted, however, that in most cases Avicenna appears to use all of these expressions quite loosely to refer to intellectual existents. Lizzini, *Intellectus*, argues for a sharper semantic distinction between the terms *‘aql* and *dhihn* in Avicenna. As Lizzini explains, *‘aql* can apply to both human and divine (or superlunary) intellection, while *dhihn* is applied only to human thought. Moreover, there is the question of whether existents ‘in the mind’ overlap neatly with those ‘in the intellect,’ if one posits a potential difference in the way the human mind and intellect relates to the exterior world and especially to the forms in the Agent Intellect (it should be noted that fictional forms represent a particularly problematic case in this regard, since on this line of reasoning they could be said to exist ‘in the mind,’ but not necessarily ‘in the intellect’). This prompts Lizzini to distinguish epistemologically between the intellect (whose objects are commensurate with those in the Agent Intellect) and the mind (which can include human error, possibility, or doubt). I agree with Lizzini that *dhihn* and *dhihnī* apply to human minds, not the divine intellects. But these points notwithstanding, and with regard to the majority of cases in which Avicenna uses these terms, I think it is difficult to establish a significant difference in meaning between them, especially when they relate to the universal intelligibles in the human mind. It seems to me that, on the whole, Avicenna employs these terms synonymously, and that whenever he speaks of existents ‘in the mind,’ these are in essence the same as existents ‘in the intellect.’ One example will suffice to illustrate this: in *Introduction*, I.12, 66, Avicenna shifts back and forth between the terms *dhihn* and *‘aql* when discussing quiddity, but throughout this passage he is employing these terms with the same meaning. He refers to the mind’s (*al-dhihn*) apprehension of the “intelligible form of animalness,” and later to the fact that the meaning of animal is “in the intellect” (*fī l-‘aql*). In brief, it would seem that context is the only way to discern whether Avicenna in each case intends a significant difference in meaning between these terms. As mentioned above, one problematic case concerns the fictional forms, which call for further investigation.

quality, which, on Avicenna's definition of universality, means that they are potentially predicable of a multiplicity of existents.²⁵

As for the other two considerations, they do not at first sight qualify as mental *existents*: the consideration of quiddity in concrete beings entails considering quiddity together with material accidents and concomitants, and hence cannot amount to an intellectual concept *per se*, since it would not be immaterial. Rather, it would seem to represent a kind of sensual, imaginative, or estimative consideration, and at any rate one whose level of abstraction is below that of the pure intelligibles.²⁶ As for the consideration of quiddity in itself, its exact nature and status are not clarified in this passage. These points help to explain why Avicenna states that we can have three *considerations* (*i'tibārāt*), and not three *intellectual concepts*, of quiddity. Nevertheless, part of the issue at stake is to determine whether the consideration of pure quiddity amounts to an intellectual consideration, like that of universal quiddity, or to a consideration located at a lower cognitive level, comparable to that of quiddity taken together with its material trappings. A second point to bear in mind is that whereas the two considerations of quiddity as a universal and in concrete beings refer to an object that is not co-extensive with quiddity itself—since that object includes external concomitants and accidents in addition to the quiddity itself—the consideration of pure quiddity seems to have only itself as an object and is therefore fully abstracted from all other things.

Hence, in spite of the logical focus of *Introduction*, Avicenna (like Porphyry and other early commentators such as Boethius) is keen already in this prefatory work to introduce the issue of the ontological status of quiddity or at least to raise some questions concerning the relation of quiddity and existence (*wujūd*) taken in both its mental and extramental modes. This is keeping in line with his view about the congruence of logic and metaphysics, but it has the effect of immediately and starkly raising the problem of the ontological status of quiddity in itself. Notice that Avicenna partially correlates two aspects of quiddity with two modes of existence [*al-wujūdāyn*], but leaves the third one, quiddity in itself, indeterminate with regard to either mode of existence. He opens this passage by mentioning two ontological states for quiddities: “in concrete things” (*fī a'yān al-ashyā'*), or as concrete extramental existents, and “in (human) conception” (*fī l-taṣawwur*), or as mental existents, a division which is reiterated some lines below. This distinction, it should be noted, is main-

²⁵ In fact, a universal is predicable of (at the very least) one individual existent, either potentially (a fictitious or artificial form) or actually (a species having only one individual in existence, such as the Sun). But in the majority of cases, it is predicable of several existents (a natural form, e. g., horse). The relation between quiddity and universality is treated in depth below; see also Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, and *idem*, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals.

²⁶ But Avicenna's views on this point are more complex than might first appear, since he believes not only that we can somehow conceive of quiddity as it exists in concrete beings intellectually, but also abstract this quidditative meaning from the concrete individuals; see chapter III.

tained consistently throughout the Avicennian corpus.²⁷ But the *shaykh al-ra'īs* remains silent about the ontological status of the third—and seemingly purely conceptual—sense of quiddity he tantalizingly refers to in this passage. These pure quiddities are not granted any positive existential status and seem to represent merely an epistemological aspect under which they can be considered by the mind.

Now, the fact that this passage suggests that this particular consideration of quiddity corresponds to neither existential mode, while the other two each correspond to one mode respectively, should *not* automatically be taken to imply that these quiddities constitute a third, autonomous ontological group, and that they should be regarded as existents (*mawjūdāt*) distinct from mental and extramental existents. Such a symmetrical typology of essences and existents appears to have been put forth by Avicenna's predecessor Yaḥyā b. 'Adī.²⁸ But for argument's sake, even if Avicenna had intended this, one would not expect him to discuss the ontological implications of this third aspect of quiddity in this very passage, since we are dealing here with a treatise on logic. What this passage implicitly does, however, is raise the question of how the logical consideration of quiddity in itself relates to existence, and more specifically to mental existence, given that a consideration is an act or operation unfolding in the subject's mind.²⁹ In its emphasis on intentionality and mentality, the term *i'tibār*, which figures conspicuously in this passage of *Introduction*, is vital to the present query and should be examined with care. In this regard, two points should be stressed. First, it should be noted that it appears consistently in Avicenna's logical and metaphysical works in connection with pure quiddity. For example, it is used repeatedly in *Metaphysics* V.1–2 of *The Cure*, where it fulfills basically the same semantic purpose as in *Introduction*. Avicenna explains in that work that the human mind has the capacity to “envisage” or “consider” essences or quiddities in themselves (e. g., horseness as such) in abstraction from the concomitants and accidents that attach to the mental and extramental existents. Avicenna affirms, for instance, that “considering animal in itself is possible” (*i'tibār al-ḥayawān bi-dhātihi jā'izan*),³⁰ and he also alludes to our “consideration” (*naẓarunā*) of humanness (*in-sāniyyah*) in abstraction from its concomitants and the things that attach to it.³¹ Avicenna goes on to say that quiddity in itself is something that can be “considered” or “reckoned” (*manẓūr, nuẓira, bi-i'tibār*)³² as having a distinct meaning (*ma'nā*).³³ All

27 Avicenna, *Introduction*, 15.17.

28 See Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; and Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*.

29 Even though *Introduction* 1.2 can be taken as advocating the broader extensionality of essence over existence, it is of course not immediately apparent to the reader that it should be construed in this manner, and in any case it sheds little light on the issue of the *ontological status* of quiddity in itself. See the discussion in Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 158–160, 178–180, who relies heavily on this passage in his discussion of essence and existence.

30 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.8.

31 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 198.7–8.

32 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 200.15; 203.4–5; 203.12–14.

33 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 203.6–7.

in all, there is a remarkable terminological and doctrinal overlap between the two texts. Avicenna's consistent use of the term *i'tibār* in these works to refer to quiddity in itself is particularly striking. As will be made clear, the terminology and views expounded in *Introduction* are not only fully compatible with the evidence that can be found in *Metaphysics*; they are also elaborated upon in the latter work.

Second, the term *i'tibār* weighs on the issue of the ontological status of pure quiddity in the mind in two direct ways. First, given the general ambiguity and vagueness surrounding this term in the context of Avicenna's psychology, there is a distinct possibility that the *i'tibār* of quiddity in itself could be something sub-intellectual, perhaps to be associated with the estimative or imaginative faculties. This possibility was alluded to previously, and it needs to be reckoned with, since human beings can have various kinds of considerations, not all of which are presumably of an intellectual nature. What is more, the psychological elasticity of the term finds some textual corroboration in the postclassical tradition in the wake of the diffusion and appropriation of the Avicennian terminology by various groups of theologians and philosophers. This may be called the problem of the *intellectuality* of *i'tibār*.³⁴ The second problem concerns the criteria required to make an *i'tibār* an intellectual existent proper once the assumption of its intellectuality has been endorsed. This problematic can be delineated with some precision and corresponds to actual arguments that are carefully deployed by Avicenna and other thinkers. At play here are the issues of the mental concomitants and accidents that are required to posit mental existence and whether the *i'tibār* of pure quiddity meets these specific criteria. For according to Avicenna and many Arabic philosophers who followed his doctrines, to be an intellectual existent is to exist according to a special ontological mode, which presupposes mental concomitants, such as universality, oneness, actuality, etc. Hence, to exist intellectually in the real sense of the word is to possess these mental qualities. So, even if an *i'tibār* is granted the status of an intellectual or mental object and is defined as an intellectual consideration specifically, it may still not be conceived of strictly as a mental existent, because it could be present in the mind while being devoid of these concomitants and hence ultimately fail to meet the requisite criteria of mental existence.³⁵

³⁴ It should be noted that this argument can be extrapolated from the Arabic sources, but is not explicitly adduced by any of the thinkers whose works I have browsed in order to reject the mental existence of pure quiddity. Rather, later authors will rely instead on the argument that the intellect can have conjectural or suppositional considerations that, while intellectual in nature, do not amount to real existents in the mind. From our standpoint, however, the question of the intellectuality of *i'tibār* and of whether it always corresponds to a rational or intellectual process—as opposed to something sub-intellectual involving, for instance, the imagination—is worth asking.

³⁵ For this discussion, which dominates the postclassical literature on quiddity and mental existence, see Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Aims*, vol. 1, 404; Qushji, *Commentary*, 400–406; Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424; and Izutsu, *Basic Problems*.

In line with this reasoning, some later Arabic and Persian scholars posit a dichotomy between true mental existents (*mawjūdāt dhīhniyyah*) and suppositional or conjectural quiddities (*māhiyyāt i'tibāriyyah*), also grouped under the generic heading of 'conjectural considerations' (*i'tibārāt*).³⁶ On this construal, something that is *i'tibārī* is *merely* conceptual or conjectural, but not grounded in true existence. This can be called the problem of the *existentiality* of *i'tibār*.³⁷ The question that emerges is whether this kind of argumentation finds any traction in the Avicennian works themselves. On either view, then, the *i'tibār* of pure quiddity would not qualify as an intellectual existent, either because it lacks intellectuality, or because, while being nominally a mental or intellectual object, it is purely logical or conceptual and lacks the criteria of true mental existence, or for both reasons. Many Arabic and Persian thinkers who flourished after Avicenna deftly deploy variants of these arguments in order to reject the mental existence of pure quiddity and certain categories of mental objects. These points will be addressed in more detail below.

1.1.1 *i'tibār* and conceptual unity and multiplicity

One key aspect of *i'tibār* is its relation to conceptual unity and multiplicity. According to Avicenna and many thinkers who followed in his stead, such as Ṭūsī, the human mind can devise various considerations of a single object, without this activity resulting in a real multiplicity in the concrete world. This means that the human mind has

³⁶ See, for instance, Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 272.16; Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424; Izutsu, *Basic Problems*; Fazlōğlu, *Between Reality*, 28 ff. It is unclear to me at this point whether the postclassical sources articulate two arguments or merely one argument against the ontology of an *i'tibār*. The first argument outlined above seems corroborated by the evidence in the postclassical sources, although it finds its point of origin in Avicenna's works: it revolves around the mental concomitants of quiddity, how these relate to pure quiddity, and whether these concomitants are necessary to posit the mental existence of quiddity. On this view, pure quiddity would correspond merely to an *i'tibār*, but not to a mental existent proper, since it is devoid of the requisite concomitants that characterize mental existence. Much of the analysis developed in this study focuses on this issue. A second—potentially distinct, yet closely related—argument could focus instead on the relation of mental notions to an independent and self-referential realm of truth called 'the thing in itself' or 'the fact of the matter' (*nafs al-amr*) in the Arabic sources and on their correspondence (*muṭābaqah*) with the exterior world of actual existents. The idea here is that only those intelligibles that conform to those found in God's mind—if this indeed is how *nafs al-amr* is to be understood—could be said to truly exist. These terms find a precedent in Avicenna's works, but it is likely that the post-Avicennian authors used them in idiosyncratic ways that find no exact match in Avicenna. Furthermore, there is a terminological difficulty involved here, inasmuch as the objects that fail to qualify as intellectual existents according to this second argument appear to have been described also as *i'tibārāt*, i. e., mere suppositional or conjectural considerations, thereby potentially blurring the lines between the two categories of mental objects described above. At any rate, the questions of how these various ideas and arguments interconnect in the postclassical literature and their exact relationship to Avicenna's thought are intricate and deserve further research.

³⁷ For some insight into this issue in the works of Ibn Kammūna, see Eichner, *The Chapter*, especially 156 and 166.

the ability to multiply considerations about a single entity at will and to regard it from different angles, aspects, or perspectives, thereby generating and embracing a mental multiplicity that need not have a counterpart in the object's concrete nature. For example, in their discussions of the First Cause, Avicenna and Ṭūsī articulate the divine act of self-intellection into a trinity of thinker, thought, and object of thought. Although these three aspects or considerations are conceptually distinguishable, they all correspond to a single and simple reality in God, since the divine intellect, its intellection, and the object of its intellection are one and the same thing in the divine being.³⁸ In that case, then, these various considerations (*i'tibārāt*) do not correspond to a real multiplicity in the divine being and consist only of a plurality of mental aspects and, hence, to a purely conceptual multiplicity.³⁹ These multifarious aspects are generated thanks to the mind's ability to establish various relations with respect to the same object.⁴⁰

In another passage of his commentary, Ṭūsī further explains that considering the privation of existence (or nonexistence) of a thing (*i'tibār 'adam shay'*) does not entail any multiplicity in the real world, lest existing things become composite as a result of the addition of various nonexistent things associated with them. As he states, "the condition of nonexistence [or privation] is something added only conceptually" (*sharḥ al-'adam amr zā'id fī l-i'tibār faqaṭ*).⁴¹ Since considerations can be multiplied infinitely, this conceptual multiplicity would exist in the concrete world if there was a strict correspondence between the two spheres.⁴² Hence, like many other interpreters

38 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.6–7; the main argument is mirrored in *Notes*, 206, section 322; and in *Salvation*, 587–590, where Avicenna argues that the distinction between thinker (*'āqil*) and object of thought (*ma'qūl*) in God does not entail a duality either in His essence (*fī l-dhāt*) or even in terms of human consideration (*fī l-i'tibār*); and Fārābī, *On the One*, section 23, who also uses this example. Avicenna, *Commentary on Book Lambda*, chapter 9, elaborates on this point, but with the proviso (73.275–276) that if these various aspects are one in God, they are not necessarily one in the case of other beings (i. e., in human beings, the intellect does not become identical with the object of intellection).

39 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VIII.6, especially 358.7–13. Unsurprisingly, the term *i'tibār* appears repeatedly in Avicenna's theological exposition in VIII.6. Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 2, 152.19, provides another example: he explains that on one consideration (*i'tibār*), nature is matter (*māddah*), but on another consideration, it can be regarded as genus and species. In another passage (Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 456.11–14), he explicates that some things can be distinguished in the concrete world (*qad takhtalifu bi-l-a'yān*), while others are distinguishable only conceptually (*bi-l-i'tibār*) and remain one and united in external reality; to illustrate the latter, he provides the example of the distinction between knower and object of knowledge. Ṭūsī is implicitly referring to the divine intellect in this passage. Establishing a distinction between things that are actually divisible or multiple in the real world and things that are so only conceptually in the human mind is a step Ṭūsī deems important to prove God's absolute oneness in extramental reality.

40 Accordingly, the term *i'tibār* often appears in discussions that involve relations between a thing and other things; thus, according to different *i'tibārāt*, the same thing may be prior and posterior to other things, general and specific, possible and necessary, etc.

41 See Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 478.15–16.

42 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 2, 341.20.

of Avicenna, Ṭūsi is therefore keen to construe an *i'tibār* as something merely mental that need not have any correspondence or relation to the external world. Another instance of this use of *i'tibār*, as it was largely practiced by the post-Avicennian tradition, was to regard the essence/existence distinction purely as a conceptual or mental (*i'tibārī*) distinction, not as a real distinction. In this case, the conceptual duality of essence and existence would have no ontological counterpart in the concrete world, where essence and existence exist as one inseparable thing in concrete individuals.⁴³

At the level of mental activity, an *i'tibār* inevitably leads to the production of relations. At the very least, there will be a relation between the thinking mind and the various objects of thought, which may be purely mental and without necessarily implying counterparts in the extramental world. At *Physics* I.3, Avicenna alludes to the accidental and limitless “relational considerations” (*al-i'tibārāt al-iḍāfiyyah*) that we may entertain about a thing.⁴⁴ A consideration may or may not have a counterpart in the concrete world (e.g., the form of horse vs. a mathematical object or a fictional form). Regardless, the fundamental and irreducible relation between the mind and its object seems to underlie the very core of an *i'tibār*. In addition, other relata can be introduced between the mind and various aspects pertaining to the same object. The mind has the power to produce and distinguish various considerations pertaining to the same object: the relations between the object and the mind will be multiple, although this multiplicity will not affect the object itself. Thus, as Avicenna explains in *Physics* I.6, nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and form (*ṣūrah*) are identical in simple elements (*basā'it*), such as water, but the mind can nevertheless apprehend either principle distinctly according to a different *i'tibār*: nature, according to the *i'tibār* connected with the power of motion, and form, according to the *i'tibār* connected with the power of the subsistence of species.⁴⁵ As the previous examples illustrate, *i'tibār* is a highly flexible notion that is applied to domains as different as physics and theology. This in turn explains why some post-Avicennian thinkers sometimes frame the discussion of the divine attributes in terms of notional or conceptual relations (*nisab*), which also correspond to considerations in the mind (*i'tibārāt*).⁴⁶ Their use of the term *i'tibārāt* to express the relations between the mind and the various aspects of an object is comparable to the way that some Arabic Aristotelians employ this term to gloss Aristotle's distinction between intellect, intellection, and intellect-ed in Book Lambda 9. In these examples, the term *i'tibār* is closely related to a plu-

⁴³ For this important epistemological and metaphysical development, see Izutsu, *Basic Problems*; Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*; Rizvi, *Roots of an Aporia*.

⁴⁴ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.3, 31.2.

⁴⁵ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.6, 45.7–11.

⁴⁶ One example is 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī's *The Essence of Truth*, 38–39, wherein he explains that God's attributes can be regarded as one or many depending on our considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of their relations (*nisab*). I wish to thank Salimeh Maghsoudlou for this reference and insight into 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's use of this term.

rality of relations, which nevertheless all have their basis or source in the thinking mind. Yet, establishing conceptual relations between things in the mind through *i'tibārāt* may not lead to the multiplication of existing entities outside the mind, but it may suggest that these things and relations somehow exist in the mind.

Now, it should be noted that the aptitude to multiply mental objects at will is described by Avicenna as a faculty of the intellect (*'aql*), which suggests that we are dealing here first and foremost with intellectual considerations.⁴⁷ At any rate, the human capacity to conceptually multiply the considerations of a single object at will raises the hypothesis that this is exactly what Avicenna is doing in *Introduction* I.2 when he enumerates the three aspects of quiddity. Accordingly, he would not be describing three different types or kinds of quiddities, but three ways of looking at the same thing, three aspects of what is fundamentally the same quiddity. This would suggest a certain ontological irreducibility of quiddity as well as a mereological account of how it is present in complex or composite things, since what would change would be not the quiddity itself but its relation to external things. These points nevertheless remain to be demonstrated. The validity of this hypothesis depends on our ability to prove that quiddity in concrete existents, in mental existents, and in itself exists in these three states and, moreover, that quiddity in itself can somehow be said to exist irreducibly in all of these states. But I defer this discussion until later on.

1.1.2 *i'tibār* as neither faculty- nor object-specific

Although Avicenna employs the notion of *i'tibār* primarily in connection with rational thought or reasoning, and hence with regard to the intellectual faculty, it would appear that it can encompass sensual, imaginative, and estimative considerations as well and need not be confined strictly to intellectual concepts. In that sense, an *i'tibār* seems to be neither faculty-specific nor object-specific. Accordingly, the master sometimes refers in his works to considerations related to the senses (*i'tibārāt ḥis-siyyah*), to individual things (*i'tibār al-shakḥ*), and to nonexistent things (*i'tibār al-'adam*), none of which amounts to a universal concept in the mind.⁴⁸ When Avicenna explains in *Introduction* I.2 that we can have a consideration of quiddity as it exists in concrete individuals, and hence in association with its material concomitants and accidents, he is in this case presumably referring to an *i'tibār* that relies on the senses and the imaginative faculty and which involves a level of abstraction inferior to that

⁴⁷ See Avicenna, *Compendium on the Soul*, 364.6–7; *On the Soul of The Cure*, V.5, 236.6–7; cf. *Metaphysics of The Cure*, III.3, 105.1–7, where Avicenna argues that unity is better known to the intellect and multiplicity better known to the imagination, and where he also comments on the interactions of the two faculties. This suggests that the imagination likely plays a role in the process of conceptual multiplication described above.

⁴⁸ Avicenna, *Categories*, 246; *Discussions*, 204, section 608; 59, section 59; *Physics* I.3, 31.1–2.

of the intellectual concept.⁴⁹ Granted, there is an ambiguity in this case as to whether this *i'tibār* is tantamount to the actual sensual, imaginative, or estimative apprehension of the individual object, or whether Avicenna is merely referring to the logical realization or consideration that such an apprehension is theoretically possible (i. e., knowing that we can have such a consideration). Either way, this consideration would not correspond ontologically to a universal intellectual object. When the soul apprehends the humanness of Zayd, for instance, it apprehends it together with Zayd's individual accidents as mediated through the senses. In another passage of *Metaphysics* V.1, Avicenna refers to this kind of apprehension as a conditioned consideration (*bi-sharṭ shay'*), since it necessarily involves other things apart from pure quiddity. In this regard, the consideration of quiddity with its concrete accidents and concomitants would appear to be more appropriately located at the sensual, imaginative, and estimative levels of apprehension. It presupposes an individual and particular 'thing' that can be pointed to and prevents a kind of universal cognition of the object. This consideration seems to be closely tied also to Avicenna's theory of the vague individual.⁵⁰

Since considerations can be infinitely multiplied at will, it is likely that not all of them would correspond to an intellectual concept or a universal and that some of them would rest on other psychological faculties located below the purely intellectual one. After all, the imagination, like the intellect, enables us to multiply images at will, and it also encompasses a very wide range of objects. Hence, it would seem that the objects of an *i'tibār* may be either particular or universal, mental or extramental, concrete or abstract. According to the example provided above, the soul can envisage either a universal kind of humanness or humanness together with Zayd's accidents and individual features, and both constitute a valid *i'tibār*. In addition, its objects may have a correspondence in the exterior world (such as when the mental consideration of horseness corresponds to a particular corporeal existent, e. g., this horse); or they may be confined to the human mind itself (as in the case of artificial and fictional forms and of certain objects that are impossible of existence in the exterior world, such as the (relative) nonexistent). In this sense, it would appear that an *i'tibār* can focus on things that cannot properly or actually be said to exist in the concrete extramental world. Accordingly, we may have a consideration of prime matter

49 This point is endorsed in later commentaries as well. Qushji, *Commentary*, 400.4–9, mentions the consideration (*i'tibār*) of the "mixed quiddity" (*al-māhiyyah al-makhlūṭah*), i. e., of quiddity combined with its material accidents, which is formulated "with the condition of a thing" (*bi-sharṭ shay'*), and which therefore involves the sensual and imaginative faculties. In this case, the object of this consideration cannot be a pure intellectual concept.

50 On this notion, see Black, Avicenna's 'Vague Individual.' Black writes (267): "the vague individual differs from the true universal because it does not simply represent the nature or essence itself — 'humanity' — but includes with it the sensible accidents that accrue to the nature when individuated in a particular instance—such as baldness in 'Socrates.' It is these accidents that render the vague individual concrete rather than abstract, and they are what must be 'peeled away' in order for the intellect to grasp the universal."

(*al-hayūlā l-ūlā*) and the nonexistent (*al-ma'dūm*), without these objects ever amounting to actual, concrete things in the world. In this connection, Ṭūsī explains in his *Commentary on Pointers* that reflecting on a privation or on something that does not exist (*i'tibār al-'adam*) does not result in these things actually existing in the real world, but only perhaps in the mind *qua* considerations.⁵¹ Only the *i'tibār* one has of these things will be said to exist somehow. For Bahmanyār (d. 1066 CE) as well, who was one of Avicenna's main disciples, our mental judgments (*aḥkām*) of the nonexistent (*al-ma'dūm*) have a kind of existence in the mind; but it is the mental act itself, not the nonexistent as such, that can be said to exist in this manner.⁵² Hence, we can presumably entertain considerations of any of these things without this entailing their actual existence in the concrete world. An *i'tibār* does not automatically entail the existence of its object in the extramental world, although it is in all cases something that is considered in the mind. It is for this reason that an *i'tibār* is to be regarded primarily as a mental aspect or construct.

In view of the foregoing, it appears that the *i'tibārāt* encompass a much wider range of objects than the class constituted by the universal mental existents that have a direct counterpart in the concrete world. Consequently, an *i'tibār* is not immediately determined by the nature of the object under examination and can focus on objects that either do not exist in the real world or that may not even exist in the intellect *per se* as valid intelligibles. At any rate, Avicenna's writings do not provide a set of criteria that enable us to precisely define or delineate the scope covered by an *i'tibār*, making this notion much more elusive than that of an intellectual concept, which refers to a mental existent and which can be adequately defined in terms of universality (*kullīyyah*), abstractness (*tajarrud*, *mujarrad*, *tajrīd*), and intelligibility

51 There is also the question of whether these kinds of considerations could be said to be truly valid mental existents, since they refer to things that cannot ever actually exist in the concrete world; in this regard, they constitute a class of mental entities distinct from that of the artificial forms in the human mind (e. g., the heptagonal house), but at the same time they do not constitute absolute logical impossibles, like the square circle or a 'nonexistent existent.' The nonexistent is nothing more than the idea of the nonexistent, of which only the consideration can perhaps be said to exist mentally. On these points, see Ṭūsī, *Abstract of Correct Belief*, 117.1–5; cf. idem, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 478.15–16. The latter passage, which focuses on the relation between the mental and extramental spheres, is to be connected to another interesting passage that focuses this time on mental existence (Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 463.1–4). There Ṭūsī explains that the mind can deliberately refrain from considering certain aspects, such as existence in connection with quiddity—the implication being that quiddity can be considered purely in itself—but this is different from considering a thing's nonexistence. In the former case, a thing may exist mentally or otherwise, but be excluded from the *i'tibār*, while in the latter case, the *i'tibār* focuses on that thing's nonexistence. Prime matter and nonexistence obviously fall in the latter category. Hence, Ṭūsī believes that we can have a consideration of these nonexistent things. The difficulty that remains is to determine whether these kinds of *i'tibārāt* exist in the mind in the same way as the *i'tibārāt* of extramentally existing things.

52 Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 489.4–7.

or intellectuality (*'aqliyyah*).⁵³ As a corollary, and because it does not overlap neatly with the universal existent, an *i'tibār* inevitably assumes a certain subjective status in the mind, as Izutsu remarked some time ago.⁵⁴ An experienced philosopher may have more facility envisaging the same object under a variety of *i'tibārāt* than, say, a neophyte, or he may even entertain considerations about this object that are inaccessible to others. A consideration therefore need not, unlike a universal concept, be universally and scientifically demonstrable and cognizable. It can be proper to the thought process of a particular person.⁵⁵ This being said, Avicenna's comments on the consideration of quiddity in itself suggest that it is a cognitive state accessible to human beings in general. Since it is discussed in the context of logic, it presumably is not subjective to the point of not being understandable and communicable to a majority. It is therefore an object of shared or shareable knowledge and can be accessed by any sound rational mind.

In view of the difficulty involved in pinpointing the kind of object to which an *i'tibār* refers, another approach would be to regard it as a deliberative *process*, i.e., a way or method of conducting a rational examination. Construed in this sense, the term would be equivalent to the cognate word *naẓar*, which Avicenna also uses in a similar context, and which possesses a similar ambiguity in its dual meaning as 'view' or 'aspect' on the one hand, and 'approach,' 'inquiry,' or 'investigation' on the other.⁵⁶ When describing quiddity or essence, Avicenna relies heavily on these two terms, and in each case there is some uncertainty as to whether he is talking about a process, a 'logical inquiry' into quiddity, or about its consideration as an object or entity in the mind. Regardless of the ambiguity involved in regarding *i'tibār* in terms of an object or a process, it is clear that both senses are related insofar as the deliberative process requires an object and that the object may be reached or is actualized in the mind as a result of the process itself. Hence, whether one prefers to stress the 'status' or 'object' sense of *i'tibār* or its 'process' or 'deliberative' sense, both are grounded in Avicenna's writings, and they are discussed in a logical context and hence in connection with the philosophical method. This being said, putting the accent on an *i'tibār qua* object of rational thought exacerbates a key question this

53 As mentioned previously, this hypothesis seems borne out by Avicenna's application of the term *i'tibār* to the three ways in which quiddity can be examined: only one of those three aspects corresponds to an object that qualifies as a mental existent proper *qua* universal (i.e., quiddity combined with universality), while the other two are just ways of conceiving or considering quiddity in abstraction from mental existence: one focuses on the concrete extramental existence of quiddity with its accidents and concomitants, and the other on quiddity regarded in itself. One could argue that the former is sub-intellectual, the latter merely epistemological, and that neither fulfills the criteria to be an intellectual concept.

54 Izutsu, *The Fundamental Structure*, 65.

55 This is very much in keeping with the modern sense of the term, where *i'tibārī* in Modern Standard Arabic can mean "relative" or "subjective."

56 The notion of *i'tibār* as process and its close relation to *naẓar* are expressed clearly in Jurjāni's definition of the term *i'tibār* as "*huwa l-naẓar fī l-ḥukm al-thābit...*") (*Definitions*, 53.1–2).

study seeks to answer, namely, the ontological status of an *i'tibār* when it is conceived in the mind. In effect, if one describes the various aspects under which quiddities can be known as considerations, and if these considerations are distinct one from the other or distinguishable through rational thought, then the relation of each one to the notion of existence needs to be clarified. What is more, since these considerations are mental phenomena, their relationship to mental existence specifically needs to be elucidated. Obviously, emphasizing the 'object,' 'status,' or 'state' meaning of *i'tibār* will underline this issue in a way that stressing its meaning as 'process' or 'method' will not, for the simple reason that Avicenna does not explicitly ascribe an ontological status to mental processes as such, but he does ascribe one to mental objects.⁵⁷

At any rate, one sometimes encounters in the post-Avicennian tradition the formula "intellectual considerations" (*i'tibārāt 'aqliyyah*), which suggests that some authors deemed it important to specify that they were referring to rational or intellectual considerations specifically as opposed to imaginative or estimative ones.⁵⁸ What is more, some post-Avicennian thinkers appear to have distinguished between considerations "on account of the estimation and imagination" (*bi-ḥasab al-wahm wa-l-khayāl*) and considerations "on account of the intellect" (*bi-ḥasab al-'aql*).⁵⁹ Although these are later developments, they suggest that, already in Avicenna, the term *i'tibār* is not semantically fixed, but is used somewhat flexibly in connection with the various faculties of the soul. This means that *i'tibār* is not faculty- or object-specific. With that being said, Avicenna appears to use this term chiefly in connection with the rational operations of the mind and its ability to unite and divide

57 It may be argued that Avicenna does ascribe an ontological status to mental processes and to thought itself when he refers to mental existence (*wujūd dhihni* and *wujūd 'aqlī*). But given that, on his view, thought is always thinking of *something*, i.e., that there is always an object grounding our thought processes, it is unclear whether *wujūd 'aqlī* would mean something beyond and above the *wujūd* of the various objects constituting it and, hence, the *wujūd* of the *mawjūdāt dhihniyyah* or *'aqliyyah*. Perhaps the only exception in the context of Avicennian psychology would be self-awareness, whose reflexivity unifies ontologically subject and object; on this topic, see Kaukua, *Self-Awareness*. In any case, the point here is that Avicenna does not explicitly ascribe a specific ontological status to *i'tibār*, a fact which has generated much grief in the secondary literature.

58 See, for instance, Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, xxv; idem, *Paths and Havens*, 340ff.; Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 511.6 and 14–15; idem, *Abstract of Correct Belief*, 119.12–17; see also Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, 45; and idem, *On the Emergence*, 306.8, where a hitherto unpublished excerpt from the work of 'Alī b. Sulaymān has "true intellectual considerations" (*al-i'tibāriyyāt al-ḥaqiqiyyah al-'aqliyyah*).

59 I am quoting the translation of Fazlōğlu, *Between Reality*, 4. This author provides valuable insight in his article into the meaning of *i'tibār*, especially as it came to be used in discussions of mathematical objects and their relation to mental existence. He argues that prior to the fifteenth century, mathematical objects and the 'mental constructs' or *i'tibārāt* proper to mathematics and astronomy belong to the conjunctural and imaginary spheres, not to intellection proper. See also Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, 39, who, in the context of Shahrastānī's refutation of some theological positions, mentions "mental and estimative considerations" (*i'tibārāt dhihniyyah wa-taqdiriyah*).

intellectual concepts as well as to create and multiply relations and distinctions between them. Perhaps for this reason, he applies it quite consistently to quiddity, which enables him to distinguish between quiddity ‘in itself’ and quiddity in relation to other things.

1.1.3 *i'tibār*, conceivability, and mental existence

The foregoing remarks have exacerbated an ambiguity found in Avicenna's writings concerning how the term *i'tibār* relates to mental existence. Unlike in the case of an intelligible (*ma'qūl*) or a universal (*kullī*), the master nowhere specifies or defines in his works the exact relationship of an *i'tibār* to mental existence, nor does he even provide a definition of this important term. The problem is that the object of a consideration can focus directly on a mental existent (as in the case of the *i'tibār* of universal quiddity), but it may also be connected with objects that do not as such possess existence in the intellect (as is the case of ‘mixed quiddity’ in concrete beings, and of quiddity in itself, according to one possible interpretation of this notion). It is important to reiterate in this connection that although the three *i'tibārāt* Avicenna outlines in this passage are all mental objects or operations and, hence, participate in cognitive states, only one of them, namely, the consideration of quiddity as a universal in the mind, refers expressly to an object that is at the same time an intellectual or mental existent proper (*mawjūd 'aqlī* or *dhihni*), which Avicenna also defines as a universal intelligible (*ma'qūl kullī* or simply *kullī*). As for the other two objects, they may have nothing to do with intellectual existence proper, even though, again, they are distinctions that occur *in* the human mind thinking about the world. Since Avicenna uses the same term to describe our considerations of these different aspects of essence, no clear picture of the ontological status of an *i'tibār* emerges from his account in *Introduction* I.2. Moreover, while quiddity in itself would seem to fall in the category of a purely mental object, the nature and status of this object remain to be clarified.⁶⁰

In light of these remarks, Avicenna's treatment of *i'tibār* strongly suggests that there could be a discrepancy between the mental status of a consideration and the mental status of the object being considered. This problem intersects with the well-known issue of how the thinking mind relates to the object of thought in the case of human intellection. For our purposes the pressing question that needs to be addressed is whether a consideration of pure quiddity that deliberately excludes existence necessarily entails the nonexistence of this pure quiddity as a mental object. This points requires elucidation. Moreover, there is the issue of how the *i'tibārāt*

⁶⁰ One thing, however, is clear, namely, that Avicenna does not regard all *i'tibārāt* as constituting a merely suppositional class of objects that would be devoid of the criteria for mental existence. This point is important, because some postclassical thinkers appear to have regarded *i'tibārāt* precisely in this way and in opposition to the ‘true’ mental and concrete existents (*mawjūdāt ḥaqīqiyah*); see Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424; Fazlōğlu, *Between Reality*, 28ff.

relate to the notion of conceivability, whether an *i'tibār* must by necessity be of *something conceivable*, and how conceivability is defined in this context. This is all the more important, given that there appears to be a strong correlation between conceivability and mental existence in Avicenna's psychology. I emitted previously the hypothesis that an *i'tibār* can have a whole range of dissimilar objects, which cannot be said to exist in the same way. In effect, it would seem that on Avicenna's view we can have considerations of various kinds of entities that each possess a different ontological status. Some of these entities, such as the quiddities of the natural species, have a counterpart in the concrete world, so that our consideration of horse-ness, for example, finds a correspondence in extramental reality in the individual horses. In addition, we can have a consideration of purely mental entities, such as fictional and artificial forms, which have no, and may never have any, actual concrete instantiations, although their conception and concrete realization is not logically impossible. Finally, it appears that we can have an *i'tibār* of negative things that, properly speaking, exist neither in concrete reality nor in the mind. This is the case, for instance, with the consideration of the nonexistent (*al-ma'dūm*) and presumably of prime matter (*al-hayūlā l-ūlā*), which can never exist actually in the concrete world, nor even, it would seem, as universals in the mind. Hence, whereas the intellectual consideration of 'universal horse' can be said to exist in the mind both in the sense that the intellectual consideration exists and the quiddity 'universal horse' exists (these being one thing in the mind), the consideration of the nonexistent or prime matter can be said to exist in the mind *only inasmuch* as the consideration itself exists, not in the sense that the nonexistent or prime matter exists in the concrete or as intellectual universal forms.⁶¹ In view of this, an *i'tibār* would always somehow exist in the mind as a conceptual act, operation, or construct, but the object of that *i'tibār* would entertain a varying relationship to mental existence depending on the nature of its object. Put differently, we may conceive of and consider a whole range of

⁶¹ Shahrastānī, *Struggling*, 28, faults Avicenna for not recognizing that prime matter has a quiddity that can be said to exist independently, at the very least in the mind: "matter has a quiddity and reality by itself without form being its constituent part. Were form a constituent part of it, it would be impossible for the idea of it to be inscribed in the mind without its constituent part." In fact, Avicenna recognizes the quiddity and reality of prime matter; see section IV.2.6 of this book. Nevertheless, it is not entirely clear whether, on Avicenna's mind, we can have a valid consideration of things that cannot ever exist actually in the concrete world. In *Notes*, 57, section 43, a distinction is made between 'the relative' nonexistent or *ma'dūm*, which pertains to things that come into being after having not existed, and which appears to be conceivable and is described as a mode of existence (*naḥw min al-wujūd*), and 'the absolute' nonexistent or *ma'dūm*, which has no form whatsoever (*lā šūrata lahu al-battata*), and which is the contrary of the First. The implication seems to be that the former should be connected with possibility and the latter with impossibility. This would make the consideration of the relative nonexistent—but not that of the absolute nonexistent—possible of consideration in the mind. As for prime matter, it is conceivable inasmuch as it has a quiddity, but one would be hard-pressed to explain what that consideration or conception amounts to in the mind, and whether it would be an intellectual consideration or an estimative one.

things that may or may not exist in actuality at any point in time and that bear a varying relation to mental existence, and we may even have a mental consideration of things incompatible with, or opposed to, actual existence, such as the nonexistent or prime matter. Accordingly, one could argue that investigating the ontological status of a consideration is one thing, and investigating the ontological status of that on which a mental consideration focuses—its content or the object to which it refers—is something else altogether.

This point seems compounded by the fact that Avicenna in some of his mature works (*The Cure* and *Pointers*) maintains a distinction between thought and object of thought in the context of human noetics.⁶² He argues that, when it comes to human intellection, the intellect, the act of intellection, and the object of intellection constitute three distinct aspects or entities and do not form a perfect unity in the mind. He accordingly criticizes those who hold a thesis of intellectual identity, unity, or identification (*ittihād*) and accuses Porphyry in particular of being responsible for spreading this erroneous view.⁶³ Human intellection, for Avicenna, implies a certain relation (*iḍāfah*) between the intellectual form and the thinker.⁶⁴ Among the many arguments Avicenna deploys to rebut the identification thesis, one focuses on the impossibility for the existence of object A to be identical with the existence of the intellect, for if this were the case, then the intellect would not be able to apprehend object B, whose existence is distinct from that of object A. There are always *relata* involved in human intellection that preclude a complete identity between the mind and its object, the only potential exception being the case of self-awareness. In other words, when the object of thought coincides with the essence of the thinker (as in the act of human self-awareness), then the *‘āqil* and the *ma‘qūl* may be regarded as one, but if the object is external to the *‘āqil* (such as the universal form ‘horse’), then a relation and duality ensue. For Avicenna, human thought is generally distinguished from divine intellection on the grounds of an epistemic and ontological multiplicity and sequentiality, which translates into a discursive cognitive mode that is characteristic of human beings. The upshot of this view is that the mode of existence of the intellect cannot be collapsed entirely with the mode of existence of its object. The two need to be separated, lest one end up endorsing the unification thesis.⁶⁵ In fact, it would

62 As Black, *Mental Existence*, 19, aptly notes, “On the basis of this understanding of cognition as a new instantiation of the quiddity in a mental mode of being, Avicenna is also led to reject the classical Aristotelian conception of knowledge as the identity of knower and known, to which I will refer as the principle of cognitive identification.”

63 Avicenna, *On the Soul of The Cure*, V.6, 239–240.

64 Avicenna, *Notes*, 265, section 450, where it is said that the forms that are acquired in the mind have two relations: one to the mind, the other to the exterior world through potential or actual predication.

65 This Avicennian doctrine caused some perplexity and much disagreement from the twelfth century onward. Not only was it incompatible with some famous statements Aristotle had made in *On the Soul of The Cure* III.5 that appear to support the identification thesis; Avicenna also seems to contradict himself in *Provenance*, where he subscribes to the unification thesis. One of the most vocal but

seem that when it comes to human intellection, the thinker (*‘āqil*), the intellect (*‘aql*), and the object of thought (*ma‘qūl*) remain distinct to some extent.⁶⁶ Returning to the issue at hand, on the assumption that we are dealing here with intellectual apprehension, the two investigations (that of the ontological status of the consideration, and that of the ontological status of the content or object of the consideration) appear to be distinct, for these reflect to some extent the distinction between the *‘aql* and the *ma‘qūl*. Consequently, clarifying the mental status of the *i‘tibār* of quiddity in itself mentioned in *Introduction* I.2 will tell us nothing about the ontological status of quiddity in itself. One may surmise—be it only for the sake of argument—that while the *consideration* of quiddity in itself somehow exists in the mind and has a positive ontological status *qua* cognitive act, quiddity in itself remains devoid of any kind of true and valid existence in the mind.⁶⁷ In that case, one would be forced to conclude, as some scholars have, that the reality or existence of the object of that consideration is reducible to that of the universal concept merely envisaged

informative critics of Avicenna regarding this point was Mullā Ṣadrā, whose works delve into this issue in detail and provide a useful overview of the argumentative history surrounding it; see Bonmariage, *L’intellection comme identification*; and Kaukua, *Self-Awareness*.

66 Avicenna clearly believes that the thinker (*‘āqil*) and the object of thought (*ma‘qūl*) remain distinct in the act of thought; what is less clear is whether the intellect (*‘aql*) can be to some extent identified with either the *ma‘qūl* or the *‘āqil*. It would also be interesting to investigate how this trinity relates to the threefold semantic distinction of the term *‘aql* Avicenna provides in his *Commentary on Book Lambda*, 73.284–290, which glosses ‘intellect’ as “substance” (or more precisely as “substance of the essence,” *jawhar al-dhāt*); as “relation” (*nisbah*) between this essence and its object; and as a “power” and “disposition” (*quwwah* and *isti‘dād*). In this commentary, as in his other works, Avicenna’s primary aim appears to be to stress the distinction between *‘āqil* and *ma‘qūl* in all beings other than God.

67 Bäck, *Avicenna’s Conception*, 239, maintains a similar distinction: “We may talk about impossible objects, and our talk about them exists in intellectu. But it does not follow that impossible objects have an existence in intellectu. Hence Avicenna says that the concept of S, in ‘S does not exist,’ exists in intellectu. But it does not follow thereby that this S exists in intellectu.” The comments above and the *Introduction* passage raise the thorny question of the relationship between a consideration (*i‘tibār*) and existence (*wujūd*). More specifically, it prompts one to ponder on the conundrum of whether all considerations must correspond to existing things or existents and be *about* things that actually exist, either in the mind or extramentally, or whether human beings can have considerations of non-existent and impossible things as well. In the absence of any detailed studies on the Avicennian notion of consideration, it is difficult to answer this question definitively, especially given its overlap with the equally vexed issue of the conceivability and universality of fictional entities in Avicenna. The remarks provided above are merely tentative. Suffice to say that the distinction between a consideration and a mental existent plays a role in understanding how Avicenna envisaged quiddity in itself. One of the main challenges is to clarify the boundaries between mental existents, on the one hand, and considerations (*i‘tibārāt*), meanings and ideas (*ma‘ānī*), and forms (*ṣuwar*), on the other. Avicenna himself remains vague when it comes to these distinctions, and they introduce considerable complexity in the task of elucidating the status of pure essence.

under a different aspect.⁶⁸ Or, alternatively, the consideration of pure quiddity could be similar to that of an impossible object devoid of any intrinsic existence (such as the void or the absolute nonexistent) with even more dire epistemological consequences. But is this really the case?

Two lines of inquiry can help to alleviate this difficulty in connection with quiddity in itself: first, exploring the conceivability of an *i'tibār* and, more generally, how the notion of conceivability relates to mental existence; and second, conducting a comparative analysis of the term *i'tibār* and the other technical terms Avicenna uses in connection with quiddity in itself with the aim of elucidating what these terms denote with regard to conceivability and mental existence. I address the first point here and shall address the second point later on. If, according to Avicenna, it is true that we can have mental considerations of objects that possess a different ontological status, our consideration of them and the nature of that consideration nevertheless depend in each case on the intrinsic conceivability of these objects. This would seem to hold true even when we consider things that do not exist in actuality in the concrete world (e.g., artificial and fictional forms, and the temporary or relative nonexistent, such as future contingents) or things that cannot ever actually exist as such in the concrete (e.g., prime matter), since there is nothing intrinsically impossible about conceiving these things. The main factor at play here in generating such considerations seems to be the inherent conceivability of these objects, regardless of how and in what mode they may otherwise be said to exist. Horseness, prime matter, and artificial forms such as heptagonal house are all somehow conceivable (even though they may be conceivable in different ways). Likewise, a consideration may focus on a purely logical object or meaning, such as the modes of the necessary and the possible, which do not exist in a reified state and independently in the concrete world, but only as abstract logical notions in the intellect. Thus, Avicenna often speaks of our consideration of things that are in themselves only possible.⁶⁹ Because there is nothing intrinsically impossible about conceiving these things, Avicenna concludes that their consideration is “possible” or “allowed” (*jā'iz*).⁷⁰ And it is pre-

68 This is in line with what Pini, *Absoluta*, calls the “gnoseological interpretation,” where the consideration of pure quiddity is merely an epistemic aspect derived from the universal, which is the only mental entity to possess an ontological status properly speaking.

69 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.6, where the term *i'tibār* recurs frequently. Tūsi, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 511.6, also regards the consideration of possibility in itself as an “intellectual consideration” (*i'tibār 'aqli*).

70 It is worth recalling that the term *jā'iz* conveys strong legal connotations and occurs frequently in texts on Islamic law and legal theory. In her overview of Avicenna’s metaphysics, Lizzini comments that any mental act or object entails mental existence and that only absolute nonexistence and pure impossibles are inconceivable according to Avicenna, while the relative nonexistent is partially conceivable (Lizzini, *Ibn Sinā’s Metaphysics*). She therefore seems to correlate mental existence and conceivability. Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī*, 168–169, also strongly correlates the two notions, although his focus is a discussion of the modalities, not the universals. This being said, there is some disagreement about what exactly is conceivable and a potential object of intellection according to Avicenna, especially in

cisely this intrinsic conceivability that allows the formation of a consideration in the mind. On the basis of what Avicenna holds, this notion of a possible (*jā'iz*) consideration would seem to extend to virtually all objects that do not possess a logically impossible nature. As such, the notion of *i'tibār* would seem to be closely related not only to the intellect, but also to the activities of the imaginative and estimative faculties, which can conjecture and emit hypotheses, potentially of a scientific nature.⁷¹

A short entry in *Notes* seems to be closely related to the previous comments.⁷² There Avicenna distinguishes between “the necessary and primary [principles or notions]” (*al-wājibīyyāt wa-l-awwalīyyāt*), on the one hand, and “considerations” or “presumed [notions]” (*i'tibāriyyāt*), on the other. Unlike the former, the latter are not in themselves necessary and become necessary only “on account of our awareness of them [or reflection about them] and the mind bringing attention to them” (*bi-ḥasab al-shu'ūr bi-hā wa-l-tanabbuh lahā*). This implies, first, that these *i'tibāriyyāt* are conceivable, but in themselves merely possible, and, second, that a certain discrepancy between the act of thought and these objects exists, inasmuch as awareness or reflection serves to mediate between the mind and these objects. Conversely, a completely necessary, irreducible, and primary principle, such as the law of non-contradiction or God's thinking of Himself, does not imply any degree of possibility. In contrast to these *wājibīyyāt* and *i'tibāriyyāt*, something that cannot be conceived of in any meaningful way or that is fundamentally or logically impossible (e.g., a square circle or absolute nonexistence) obviously does not represent an adequate object of consideration and thought.⁷³ A square circle or a thing that would be simultaneously existent and nonexistent (and thereby contravene the law of non-contradiction) are strict impossibles, with the implication that they cannot even be considered and investigated by reason, let alone be regarded as existents in the mind and/or the concrete world. Hence, from a logical perspective, it appears that an *i'tibār* must be something, or focus on something, that is intrinsically conceivable and conceptualizable and—when construed in light of the Avicennian modalities—something that is in itself either necessary (*wājib*, *ḍarūrī*) or possible (*mumkin*, *jā'iz*), but not impossible (*mumtani*). Or, according to a more minimalist interpretation formulated on the basis of the passage of *Notes* mentioned above, an *i'tibār*

connection with the issue of what constitutes a proper universal. The problem revolves partly around the issue of determining whether the fictional beings are intellectual or imaginative in nature, with potential repercussions on the criteria required for mental existence. Scholars who have dealt with the issue of the universals in *Metaphysics* V.1 of *The Cure* are well aware of this; see notably the recent studies on fictional beings in Avicenna's metaphysics by Black, Avicenna on the Ontological, and Druart, Avicennan Troubles. The notion of conceivability raises other issues, such as its relation to mental awareness; on this point, see the interesting study in Kaukua, *Self-Awareness*.

71 See the comments by McGinnis in Avicenna, *Physics*, Introduction, xxiii. As McGinnis notes, Avicenna in this work sometimes uses words from the root *w-h-m* to discuss thought experiments and what seems possible from a physical point of view.

72 Avicenna, *Notes*, 486, section 893.

73 On this issue and its connection to Rāzī's epistemology, see Benevich, *The Reality*, especially 55 ff.

could be limited to something possible. Either way, an *i'tibār* would seem to require that a mental operation be *feasible* or *possible* and its object intrinsically *conceivable*.⁷⁴ This leads me to distinguish between (a) 'false' or 'relative impossibles,' which do not actually exist or cannot ever actually exist in the concrete world, but which nonetheless remain conceivable in the mind, in the sense that their consideration does not entail something logically impossible, absurd, and devoid of meaning (e.g., prime matter, pure potentiality, the fictional forms, a future contingent or the relative or temporary nonexistent); and (b) 'intrinsic' or 'absolute impossibles,' such as square circle, absolute nonexistence, or something contravening the law of non-contradiction, which exist neither in the concrete world nor in the mind on account of the fact that they cannot even be said to be conceivable, since there is nothing to consider and since no coherent or essential meaning can be associated with them.⁷⁵ The latter, unlike the former, simply cannot be the object of an *i'tibār*.

How do these observations apply to quiddity in itself? Avicenna is explicit about the fact that pure quiddity is *conceivable* and that it represents a *valid object of mental consideration*. Not only does he frequently refer to our ability to consider (*i'tabara*,

74 Distinguishing between these various aspects of impossibility, i.e., impossible of existence in the concrete world, and impossible of existence in the concrete world *and* in the mind—or between what I have called here 'relative' and 'absolute impossibles'—is, I believe, crucial, but has been rarely implemented in the secondary literature; for some insight into this issue, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*, 128–130; and Lizzini, *Ibn Sīnā's Metaphysics*. As a result, some confusion has arisen in the modern analyses on the topic. For instance, Druart, *Avicennan Trouble*, and Black, *Avicenna*, 3–5, speak of fictional forms as being impossible (*muḥāl*) *simpliciter*, without specifying that they are impossible merely of concrete existence, while being in some sense possible of existence in the mind. If they were absolutely impossible, like 'square circle,' they would be utterly inconceivable. But Avicenna apparently does not place the fictional forms in the same category as the square circle, since there is nothing intrinsically impossible about conceiving—or at least, having a consideration (*i'tibār*)—of a phoenix or a unicorn. Whether this legitimates their status as full-fledged universals on a par with the universals corresponding to the natural species remains to be established. At any rate, my proposal would help to alleviate what Black (*Avicenna*, 8) describes as "the tension between Avicenna's characterization of unreal forms as both impossible and intelligible."

75 This distinction would make 'square circle'—but not 'prime matter' or 'the void'—a mere verbal utterance devoid of any meaning and epistemic traction in the mind. In fact, at *Physics* II.8, 180.12, Avicenna describes "the absolute void" (*bu'd muṭlaqan*) as "a vain intelligible" (*ma'qūlan ma-frūghan*) (all references to Avicenna's *Physics* rely on the edition and translation of that work by McGinnis). This suggests that the consideration of the void remains fundamentally an intelligible, even though it may not actually produce true scientific knowledge in the mind. The reason for this is that one can still entertain some kind of conception of the void, even though it does not exist in reality. But this is also the case of matter and nonexistence, which, on this reasoning, would appear to be vain intelligibles as well. Whether these vain intelligibles belong to the same or to another class as the fictional forms, such as phoenix, remains a moot point, given the paucity of evidence on the topic. Nevertheless, there might be one crucial difference between them: it is feasible to predicate phoenix of several (imaginary) instances of phoenix, which is why, incidentally, Avicenna regards the fictional forms as kinds of universals in *Metaphysics* V.1; but it is hardly possible to predicate absolute void, pure or prime matter, and nonexistence of anything.

nazara) and examine it. He also states plainly in *Metaphysics* that “the consideration of the [quiddity] animal in itself is possible” (*i’tibār al-ḥayawān bi-dhātihi jā’izān*).⁷⁶ Quiddity in itself, therefore, is something that is by nature conceivable and susceptible of being mentally considered without this entailing a logical or conceptual impossibility or absurdity. One thing therefore is certain: pure quiddity is not to be compared to and assimilated with the ‘intrinsic impossible,’ such as the square circle or pure nonexistence, which is utterly inconceivable and, hence, cannot be said to exist in any other way than as a mere utterance. At this juncture, the following question arises: with what kind of conceivable object can pure quiddity be identified? Does its consideration fall on the side of (a) the natural universal forms in the mind (i.e., of objects that can possibly exist in the mind and in the concrete world), of (b) the universal artificial and fictional forms (i.e., of objects that do not exist in the concrete world, but only in the mind) or (c) of relative impossibles such as prime matter and the nonexistent (i.e., objects that are impossible of actual existence in the concrete world, but somehow conceivable in the mind, and which nevertheless remain distinct from ‘intrinsic’ or ‘absolute impossibles’)? For there are possible considerations (*i’tibārāt*) of all of these things, and all of these things are conceivable in the mind. Some tentative remarks can be made. Overall, it has become clear that the notion of conceivability, i.e., the possibility for an object to be conceived, represents a *sine qua non* for the postulation of the existence of that object in the mind. Thus, if the pure quiddities are fully conceivable and are consequently not intrinsic impossibles, then there is a strong likelihood that they do exist in the mind. As Olga Lizzini has put it in a recent article on Avicenna’s metaphysics: “The primacy of being (everything that is conceived of “is”) leads to an often unseen consequence: everything that is conceived of or simply mentally represented *exists* and hence has *at least* a mental existence.”⁷⁷ What is more, the conceivability of pure quiddity is ensured by its purely abstract (*mujarrad*) and immaterial nature in the mind. Hence, conceivability and abstractness are two important features that seem to characterize pure essence as a mental object, and they also happen to be two conditions that Avicenna posits for mental existence.⁷⁸ Naturally, these two conditions and criteria also apply to the universal concepts, but in their case, the additional presence of mental concomitants such as universality represents yet a further condition for their existence to take place.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.8.

⁷⁷ Lizzini, *Ibn Sinā’s Metaphysics*.

⁷⁸ I will show later on that epistemic and ontological simplicity and irreducibility at the level of conception is another essential feature of pure quiddity, and one that sets it apart from the universal.

⁷⁹ Thus, (a) conceivability or the possibility of being conceived, (b) abstractness or immateriality, and (c) universality and the other mental concomitants (such as oneness), would be the various criteria needed for *universal mental existence* to obtain in Avicenna’s philosophy. Black, *Avicenna*, 2–3, mentions only universality and abstractness. In fact, the case may be made that what is inherently abstract and universal is by necessity also conceivable, so that conceivability is really the outcome

Yet, providing additional insight into this issue is difficult at this point. Other aspects of the problem must be tackled before it can be addressed in detail, including a survey of the other terms Avicenna employs to describe quiddity, a task conducted in the remainder of this chapter. Suffice to say here that Avicenna's statement in *Metaphysics of The Cure* to the effect that quiddity in itself exists neither in the concrete world nor in the mind would seem to suggest that it is a nonexistent on a par with prime matter, pure potentiality, and the nonexistent thing itself, and that only *its consideration* can somehow be said to possess a mental status or existence *qua* conceptual act or operation. Defending such a conclusion, however, would be hasty and is fraught with conceptual problems. To begin with, and as was shown above, quiddity in itself is utterly conceivable and corresponds to a distinct mental object. Insofar as it represents the very essence of a thing, it is not only definable, it is the definition of a thing, or rather what the definition designates and means. It is the immediate and prior object of intellectual apprehension that lies at the foundation of certain knowledge. As such, it lies at the core of Avicenna's epistemology and of his theory of conceptualization (*taṣawwur*). As the master explains at the beginning of the logical part of *Salvation*:

All primary cognition [*ma'rifah*] and scientific knowledge [*ilm*] is either conceptualization [*taṣawwur*] or assenting [*taṣḍīq*]. Conceptualization is knowledge that comes first and is acquired by means of definition [*ḥadd*] and whatever is like it. [An example is] our conceptualization of the quiddity of human being [*māhiyyat al-insān*].⁸⁰

In this manner, *taṣawwur*, *ḥadd* and *māhiyyah* are interconnected notions. Conception is *of* a quiddity, and a definition points *to* a quiddity.⁸¹ This passage, and Avicenna's general outlook on conceptualization, is to be connected with his discussion of prior notions in the mind in *Metaphysics* I.5, one of which is 'the thing' (*al-shay'*), which refers to the quiddity of an existing being. More specifically, it is to be read in light of Avicenna's statements in *Metaphysics* V.1 concerning the intellectual and es-

of these other conditions, rather than a condition in itself. Yet, if we regard the universal concepts as complex and caused mental entities or existents, as I think we should, then the modalities of the possible and the necessary would apply to them as well, albeit perhaps in a qualified sense; in other words, there would be such a thing as an object that is 'possible of existence in the mind,' which would be close to saying that it is 'possible of being conceived.' Since we are dealing here with a purely intelligible mode of being, the possibility of existence for a concept in the mind would be synonymous with the possibility of its being intelligible or conceivable. Thus, logical impossibles do not exist in the mind, not because they are not immaterial or universal *per se*, but rather because their true conception is impossible.

⁸⁰ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 73–4, transl. Asad Ahmed, *Avicenna's Deliverance*, 3, slightly revised.

⁸¹ Avicenna, *Notes*, 24.9–25.1, section 5, explains that while conception relates to the definition, and thus also to quiddity, assent (*taṣḍīq*) relates to the causes of concrete existence. Thus, the former enjoys a certain priority over the latter, since we may conceive of something without seeking to know its extramental existence. This priority is absolute in the case of God, Who is "primary in conception" (*awwalī l-taṣawwur*) (25.3).

sential priority of quiddity vis-à-vis its various accidents and concomitants and even vis-à-vis realized existence. Conceptualization is therefore oriented in a primary and fundamental way toward pure quiddity, which lies at the root of all knowledge.

Furthermore, the consideration of quiddity in itself is not comparable to the consideration of prime matter, pure potentiality, and the nonexistent: for these notions convey a lack and privation, a pure negativity, whereas pure quiddity carries the definitional and essential core of a thing, or what I shall later call the “quidditative meaning” (*ma'nā*) of a thing. Hence, whereas prime matter, privation, and the nonexistent convey a lack or absence, and are hence not philosophically informative, quiddity in itself is a conveyor of definition and information. Unlike other mental objects, pure quiddity is conceivable and knowable. It is also epistemically irreducible. These qualities present it as a valid object of mental consideration and one that exists in the mind.⁸² In fact, I will argue shortly that the consideration of quiddity in itself also corresponds, according to Avicenna, to a mental form, and more precisely to an intelligible form (*ṣūrah ma'qūlah*) in the human mind, terms that unambiguously stress its substantial and intellectual nature.

Thus, by a process of elimination, the foregoing analysis has boiled down to a single line of inquiry regarding the ontological status of quiddity in itself: it should be connected with the intelligible forms of natural things and possibly also with artificial forms in the mind, that is, with things that are intrinsically conceivable and possess mental existence. This would seem to grant mental existence and a distinct mental status to the pure quiddities. Conversely, the consideration of pure essence is not to be connected with the intrinsic impossibles (square circle), for which there is no consideration and conception at all.

So far, the terminological investigation of *i'tibār* has generated some interesting but inconclusive results. Three points in particular need to be stressed. First, the term *i'tibār* seems to be applied to different levels of apprehension in Avicenna's psychology. It can be connected with intellection and conceptualization—and thus also with intellectual existence—quite straightforwardly in some cases (e.g., the consideration of universal quiddity), but also with estimation and the lower sensual and imaginative faculties in other cases (e.g., the consideration of quiddity together with its material attachments in concrete existents). In still other cases, it is unclear at first

⁸² I am even tempted to say that quiddity in itself is *eminently* conceivable and knowable, since it is what encapsulates the essential definition and meaning of a thing; more on this later on. It is interesting that many later Arabic and Persian authors dwell on the conceivability of pure quiddity, adducing it at times as an argument to establish its mental existence. Since we can conceive of the nonexistent, they say, it is in comparison easy for the mind to apprehend pure quiddity in abstraction from all other things, a fact that suggests its intellectual existence; see, e.g., the discussion in Rāzī, and Ṭūsī's response, in *Collection*, 41, 45, 47 and notes; Shahrastānī, *The Book of Religions and Sects*, 16.18–20, states that intellect (*'aql*) is sometimes said “of the conceptualization of quiddity in itself [*taṣawwur al-māhiyyah bi-dhātihā*] without its definition”; Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Aims*, vol. 1, 404.10–13; and Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424, who outline the argument that quiddity must exist in the mind because it is conceivable; and, finally, Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 9.

whether it is to be connected with the intellect or with the lower faculties of the soul, such as imagination and estimation (as in the case, potentially, of pure quiddity).⁸³ Second, an *i'tibār* can apply to a variety of objects whose ontological status differs greatly (real existents, artificial and fictional forms, nonexistent things, etc.) and whose range lies between the actually existent and the nonexistent, but which excludes the intrinsic or absolute impossibles. Third, the mind can elaborate a plurality of considerations and relations pertaining to the same object. In other words, we can have several different considerations of the same entity. In brief, then, the term *i'tibār* appears to be neither object-specific nor faculty-specific and possesses a wide and flexible range of applications. With that being said, it also emerged from the foregoing that the consideration of quiddity in itself is intellectual in nature. As an object of knowledge, and as the referent of the essential definition, it is eminently conceivable. It is the constitutive core of a thing that can be grasped directly by the mind in abstraction from all other considerations.⁸⁴ And since intellectual concepts and objects for Avicenna possess existence, the concept of pure quiddity is unlikely to amount ontologically to a mere 'nothing' in the mind.⁸⁵ Rather, it would appear that it pos-

83 This problem is compounded by the fact that, according to Avicenna, forms in the estimation can perhaps also be regarded as psychological *existents*, albeit not of an intellectual kind. In *Salvation*, 179, Avicenna refers to 'the thing' as "an existent form in the estimation *or* in the intellect" (*ṣūrah mawjūdah fī l-wahm aw-al-'aql*). As will be argued below, pure quiddity should be regarded chiefly as an intelligible form in the intellect. In fact, it is what is eminently intelligible in the intellect.

84 It seems to me that the validity and distinctness of the consideration of pure quiddity—especially its distinctness from that of the universal—as well as its very conceivability, can all be corroborated by a simple thought experiment. If I close my eyes and imagine the essence of triangle, 'the quiddity in itself' trianguleness, without any reference to the exterior world and without introducing what Avicenna calls "conditions" (*shurūṭ*), such as particularity or universality, then what I apprehend in my mind is the pure quiddity trianguleness, *not* the universal triangle. In order for me to apprehend the latter, I would need to conceptually relate this universal mental form of triangle to an actual or potential plurality of concrete individual triangles or predicate it of a plurality. This act consists in cognizing the quiddity of triangle *in its relation to* extramental triangles. At the very least, then, I would have to cognize the quiddity in itself trianguleness *together with* the added considerations of predicability, shareability, and commonality and, hence, of a relation to what is other than it. But it is easy to perceive that these things are *superadded to* the consideration of pure trianguleness. In this manner, Avicenna's thesis seems provable by a simple thought experiment. If anything, the quiddity in itself trianguleness is more directly and easily grasped than the universal triangle, which requires that other conditions, considerations, and relations be introduced together with it. The question still remains, of course, as to whether this possible and eminently conceivable consideration of pure trianguleness constitutes a distinct existent in the intellect.

85 Let us revert briefly to the crucial passage in *Introduction* I.2 and dwell on one feature of its phrasing. Avicenna begins by stating that the quiddities can exist either in conception or in the concrete world (*wa-māhiyyāt al-ashyā' qad takūn fī a'yān al-ashyā' wa-qad takūn fī l-taṣawwur*), and he adds immediately after that there are three considerations of quiddity (*fa-yakūn lahā i'tibārāt thalāthah*). This would seem to allow for the possibility that more than one of these considerations can exist in the mind or that quiddity could exist in the mind *qua* different aspects, states, or modes. It is odd in this connection that scholars have sought to establish a symmetry in Avicenna's account between the two *contexts* of existence—the concrete and the intellectual—and the three *aspects* of quid-

sesses its own intelligible reality. Furthermore, this irreducible intelligible reality means that, for Avicenna, the conception of pure quiddity precedes the knowledge of whether it actually exists as a realized entity and as a composite existent, i.e., combined with attributes and accidents in the concrete world or in the mind. Unlike other philosophers, such as Aristotle, Fārābī, and Averroes, who make knowledge of *what* a thing is follow upon, and depend on, knowledge *that* it is, Avicenna has no qualms inverting this epistemological sequence and prioritizing essence over existence in the order of knowledge.⁸⁶ Witness the following passage from *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*:

Text 2: Whenever we understand the meaning and definition of a thing, we do not thereby gain an understanding of whether it is existent or non-existent. For if we know what the right triangle is, we know which genus or essential differentia it has—and hence it is impossible for us not to know things like *the triangle as such* [*al-muthallath al-muṭṭlaq*], the figure, and the quality. The existence [of a right triangle], however, needs to be proven. Therefore, existence is [only] attached to the quiddity and does not constitute it [*lāzim lā muqawwim li-l-māhiyyah*].⁸⁷

As we observe from this text, knowledge of the quiddity ‘triangle’—and even of the absolute quiddity or quiddity in itself ‘triangle’ (*al-muthallath al-muṭṭlaq*)—does not depend on any consideration of existence and amounts to a pure epistemic object in the mind. For Avicenna, this is possible because existence is an external and non-essential concomitant of the essence. By the same token, one can infer that pure quiddity has an intelligible reality that is cognitively graspable in itself and prior to the consideration of existence. Yet, although the term *i’tibār* refers in this case to a mental operation that is feasible and to a mental object that is by nature conceivable, it says virtually nothing about the *ontological status* of this object *in connection with mental and extramental existence*. In this regard, the various *i’tibārāt* one can have of quiddity are not commensurate with a clear ontological scheme. Although the consideration of quiddity *qua* universal existent does imply the intellectual existence of this object, the consideration of quiddity in the exterior world together with material accidents does not, since it also involves the senses and the imagination. Since Avicenna is referring here to the quiddities in individual, concrete existents, and since these can be known only through the process of abstraction per-

dity he outlines, when none, I believe, was originally intended. This is why differentiating between contexts, aspects and modes of existence is useful methodologically. On my view, there are reasons to believe that the intellectual context can accommodate two different aspects and modes of existence of quiddity.

86 Thus, according to Aristotle in *Posterior Analytics* II.10, we can know the scientific definition of a thing only after we know that it exists. Many Arabic philosophers, such as Fārābī and Averroes, adhere to and build on this methodological tenet; see Menn, Fārābī’s *Kitāb*, 85–89; idem, Fārābī, 64–67. But Avicenna’s theory of pure quiddity and the possibility of its immediate apprehension leads him to reject this view.

87 Avicenna, *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*, 331.11–14; translated in Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 190–191, revised and my emphasis.

formed by the external and internal senses, no intellectual existence proper seems to be implied by this kind *i'tibār*, although it may imply a kind of sensual or imaginative psychological existence. We would be dealing in this case with psychological processes distinct from, and unconnected with, mental universal existence. For, from the moment the mind completes the process of abstraction and apprehends quiddity in its universal mode, the consideration switches from that of concrete quiddity to that of universal quiddity.

Now that it has been established that the consideration of quiddity in itself likely refers to something substantial in the mind—insofar as the object of this consideration is conceivable and is not an ‘intrinsic impossible’—the next step is to determine whether this *i'tibār* falls on the side of intellectual existence or of sensual and imaginative existence and whether pure quiddity as a mental object can be said to possess any kind of existence. These issues will be tackled in the next section.

1.1.4 *i'tibār* after Avicenna: some preliminary remarks

If no source composed before Avicenna is truly helpful in shedding light on the problem at hand, this is definitely not the case with the post-Avicennian period, where the term *i'tibār* appears profusely. Yet, even though much evidence can be gathered from this later tradition, the question of its relevance to Avicenna is delicate, insofar as this term underwent considerable semantic transformation and came to be invested with new meanings or connotations it did not have in his philosophy. Indeed, examining the post-Avicennian tradition with the express aim of complementing the previous analysis may appear promising at first sight, but turns out to be a rather risky enterprise after due consideration. The main reason is that exegetes of Avicenna were eager to elaborate on the technical term *i'tibār* and endow it with philosophical nuances that likely were not intended by Avicenna himself. Moreover, and crucially, their stance vis-à-vis mental existence often departs considerably from that of the *shaykh al-ra'īs*. In spite of this, the reception of the term *i'tibār* in post-Avicennian philosophy has a rich and multifaceted history that bears on the issue at hand. It should therefore be briefly discussed.

Shortly after the master's death, the term *i'tibār* became a salient terminological feature of the commentary tradition that developed around his works. It also became characteristic of independent philosophical treatises that delve into the question of the relationship of essence and existence. More precisely, starting with Suhrawardī (d. 1191 CE) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE), the term *i'tibār* becomes a key notion in the debates concerning the conceptual vs. real distinction of essence and existence.⁸⁸ Many post-Avicennian thinkers strove to determine whether Avicenna in-

⁸⁸ Suhrawardī, for example, devotes an entire section of his work *The Paths and Havens (Kitāb al-Mashāri' wa-l-muṭārahāt)* (340 ff.) to the subject of the “intellectual considerations” (*al-i'tibārāt al-aqliyyah*). On this topic, see also Domingues da Silva, *La métaphysique*, 163, n. 33.

tended this distinction to be merely mental or to possess an ontological foundation in the concrete extramental world. Accordingly, the term *i'tibār* became ubiquitous in the postclassical literature dealing with the question of the primacy, fundamentality, or priority (*aṣālah*) of essence or existence.⁸⁹ While some thinkers regard essence as primary and prior to existence in the external world, and existence as an external accident accruing to essence, others maintain the absolute priority and reality of existence and view essence as a mere notional or conceptual object. Among proponents of *aṣālat al-wujūd*, quiddity is frequently defined as an *i'tibār* or as being *i'tibārī*, that is, merely mental or conceptual with no independent existence in external reality. Accordingly, only existence (*wujūd*) is grounded in reality, while quiddity or essence represents merely the “intrinsic limitations or determinations of existence” as projected by the mind.⁹⁰ In the systems of these scholars, the meaning of the term *i'tibār* gradually crystallized to mean a ‘conceptual’ or ‘mental’ aspect or consideration, in contrast to the concrete and foundational reality of existence in the extramental world. According to this framework, ‘the conceptual’ (*al-i'tibārī*) is often contrasted to ‘the real’ or ‘the truly existing’ (*al-ḥaqīqī*, *al-ṭabīʿī*, and *al-aṣli*).⁹¹ In contrast, for someone like Suhrawardī and some of his Illuminationist followers, it is existence that is a construct of the mind, while essence, or rather light, constitutes what is metaphysically foundational. In brief, these thinkers make either existence or essence the true principle and ontic foundation (*aṣl*, *aṣīlah*) of reality, labelling the other a conceptual or *i'tibārī* notion produced by human ratiocination.⁹² Regardless of which concept is regarded as being foundational, the distinction and duality between essence and existence only apply to the thinking mind and are thought not to exist as such in the concrete world. Accordingly, this duality arises solely out of the ratiocinative and analytical processes of the intellect, which is capable of distinguishing conceptually between a thing’s essence and existence. In the real, extramental world, however, these two principles are reduced to one or form a unity. As Mullā Ṣadrā, an influential exponent of the fundamentality of existence, explains: “each one of them [quiddity and existence] is different from the other in meaning when they are analyzed by the mind, but they are essentially and fundamentally united in reality.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Izutsu, *The Fundamental Structure*; Rizvi, *Roots of an Aporia*; Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*.

⁹⁰ Izutsu, in Sabzavārī, *The Metaphysics*, 9, 42–44; idem, *The Fundamental Structure*, 72ff.

⁹¹ Omar Khayyam, for instance, distinguishes between ‘existential’ and ‘conceptual’ attributes (*waṣf i'tibārī*); see Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, 37–38. One clear instance of the deflationary potential of the term *i'tibārī* is Shahrastānī’s use of it to refer to the Bahshamite states, which are neither existent nor nonexistent; the implication is that they are ‘merely’ conceptual. Shahrastānī’s conceptualist approach implies that they do not qualify as real or actual states in the concrete world; see *The Ultimate Steps*, 139, 147–148. Suhrawardī sometimes employs this term in a similar way (Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, 45).

⁹² For an outline of these two positions, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*, 110–113.

⁹³ Mullā Ṣadrā, *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, 32.2–3.

Another notable development unfolds with regard to mental existence specifically, which marks a particular take on the Avicennian sources. When compared with Avicenna's metaphysics, this trend was often deflationary, insofar as it included thinkers who either straightforwardly rejected mental existents or downplayed the importance of such entities in their ontology. In their systems, mental existence either does not assume such a prominent role or is subjected to restrictions that drastically limit the number of entities that can be regarded as mental existents proper. In what amounts to a departure from Avicenna's metaphysics, mental existence either is no longer perceived as constituting another sphere of existence on a par with concrete existence or sees its scope drastically reduced by means of a new set of criteria that is introduced. It is against this background that the terms *i'tibār* and *i'tibārī* come to denote things that are *merely* 'conceptual' or 'suppositional' and that, moreover, may not possess any correspondence (*muṭābaqah*) with true reality. These conjectural or suppositional quiddities (*māhiyyāt i'tibārīyyah*) and objects are contrasted to 'the true existents' (*mawjūdāt ḥaqīqīyyah* or *thābitah*) that make up the realm of 'the thing in itself' or 'the fact of the matter' (*nafs al-amr*).⁹⁴ While this tendency is perceivable already to some degree in the works of Rāzī, it reached its pitch in the works of later authors such as Maḥmūd al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1348 CE), Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390 CE), 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Qushjī (d. 1474 CE), and others. In contrast, some authors such as Ṭūsī appear to have remained more faithful to Avicenna's original use of the term *i'tibār* and his conception of what constitutes mental existence. In this regard, the chronological aspect of the problem should not be neglected, and attempts should be made to pinpoint the major terminological and doctrinal shifts that were brought about on the basis of the Avicennian texts.

As interesting as they are, these later developments in a sense complicate matters more than they illuminate them when they are projected backward on Avicenna's philosophical system. Relying on them to interpret Avicenna's doctrines poses numerous methodological and philosophical problems. In Avicenna, the mental or intelligible is a full-blown order of existence whose objects belong to the metaphysical inquiry no less than extramentally existing things. But later commentators are often obscure when it comes to the status of mental objects or depart considerably from Avicenna on this point.⁹⁵ Even those post-Avicennian scholars who embrace

⁹⁴ See Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424; Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 8 ff.; and Fazlhoğlu, *Between Reality*, 24 ff. The notion of *nafs al-amr* seems to refer to a realm of unchanging objects or uncreated quiddities, which is often identified with God's intellection in the postclassical tradition. It also serves as the foundation of what can truly be said to exist in the world.

⁹⁵ Note that this ambiguity extends to many of the modern studies on the postclassical tradition; for instance, Rizvi, *Roots of an Aporia*, omits to specify in his discussion of essence and existence whether the term *i'tibārī* mentioned by those later thinkers refers to a kind of mental existence or something else altogether that does not qualify as mental existence. To say that the *i'tibārī* is merely mental or conceptual—as opposed to real, concrete, or foundational—does not resolve the issue of how this term relates to mental existence. Given this crucial ambiguity and the (as yet) lack of scholarship on this key issue, it is difficult to draw any broad conclusions concerning the post-Avicennian tradi-

the theory of mental existence often remain tantalizingly ambiguous about the ontological status of an *i'tibār*.⁹⁶ In addition, and unlike the master, they usually adopt a clear-cut position with regard to the issue of the foundationality of essence or existence. Finally, while they often define the terms *i'tibār* and *i'tibārī* as expressing a mere mental aspect devoid of existence and contrast it to the 'real existents,' the 'fact of the matter,' or 'the true nature or foundation,' Avicenna himself makes no such attempts. What he does intimate about these terms suggests a much closer participation in mental existence. Various kinds of misunderstandings lurk behind any attempt to use the postclassical tradition to illuminate Avicenna's position.

Overall, then, the reception of the term *i'tibār* in the works of Avicenna's main commentators in the centuries following his death represents an intricate and highly understudied topic. Although some references have been provided in the previous pages, additional remarks are in order. Let us begin with the brief observation that Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. 1165 CE) uses this term routinely in his works, but provides little insight into its relevance with regard to quiddity. This can be explained *inter alia* by the fact that he departed considerably from Avicenna's philosophical framework.⁹⁷ In contrast, Ṭūsī, Rāzī, and Suhrawardī make ample use of it in their logical, psychological, and metaphysical writings to describe quiddity or mental existents. Ṭūsī and Rāzī in particular frequently employ this term in their glosses on those very passages in which Avicenna himself had used it, as in *Introduction* I.2 and *Metaphysics* V.1–2. By and large, their use of *i'tibār* is relatively close to Avicenna's and serves to designate a purely mental consideration or operation applied to a wide range of objects. Rāzī, who inherited and adopted much of Avicenna's technical vocabulary, pins his discussions of quiddity partly on this term, especially when he is commenting on seminal passages of the Avicennian corpus dealing with quiddity. Nevertheless, in his philosophy this term is used in a deflationary way to minimize, if not to directly undermine, the ontological status of a mental object. Whereas for Avicenna and Ṭūsī an *i'tibār* often corresponds to a mental existent—such as when they speak of the consideration of universal horseness, of universal triangle, or even of the nonexistent—for Rāzī describing these mental objects as 'considerations'

tion on this topic. As a result of this terminological obscurity, Rizvi's analysis understates the differences between Avicenna and later thinkers and ends up shaping a narrative of continuity whose culmination is the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā. To some extent, the same may be said of Izutsu, *Basic Problems*.

96 One example is Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *The Elements*, which endorses mental existents and also describes abstract quiddity or quiddity in itself as an *i'tibār* in the mind, but fails to specify the exact ontological mode of this *i'tibār*. The author identifies mental *i'tibārāt* with universals or the universal aspect of quiddity, which according to him are mental existents, in line with Avicennian doctrine. Yet, Ṭabāṭabā'ī in one passage (41) defines the notions of contingency and mental quiddity as a conceptual construct (*i'tibār 'aqlī*) that is indifferent to existence and nonexistence, a usage which recalls the purely logical or suppositional meaning of consideration as found in earlier texts. This statement raises the question of the ontological status of an *i'tibār* in his works.

97 For some insight, see Pavlov, *Abū' l-Barakāt*, 136, 212–213.

serves the primary purpose of demarcating them from real and actual existents and, hence, of deflating their ontological status in the mind. This is in line with Rāzī's general tendency to demote mental objects, a trend that has been noted by other scholars.⁹⁸

When compared to Rāzī, Ṭūsī more faithfully follows Avicenna's notion of *i'tibār*, perhaps because he is also engaging with Rāzī's comments on the issue and seeks to operate a return to what he regards as the master's original doctrines. While broadly endorsing the many facets of *i'tibār* outlined by Avicenna, Ṭūsī also provides the further interesting distinction between 'intellectual considerations' (*i'tibārāt 'aqliyyah*) and—one surmises—'non-intellectual considerations.' This implicit distinction, which to my knowledge is not found as such in Avicenna, suggests that not all *i'tibārāt* are intellectual in nature. Yet, Naṣīr al-Dīn, like Avicenna, connects *i'tibārāt* chiefly with the mind's ability to multiply and unify concepts, and he often uses this term expressly in connection with our apprehension of quiddity (*māhiyyah*). Whether in his *Commentary on Pointers* or in his *Abstract*, the term *i'tibār* denotes the various aspects of quiddity that can be conceived of in the mind. In this regard Ṭūsī seems to believe, like Avicenna, that there is such a thing as a distinct and fully autonomous conception of pure quiddity in the mind, although the question of whether it also amounts to a mental existent remains unclear.

In Suhrawardī's (d. 1191 CE) philosophy, the term *i'tibār* becomes closely associated with the distinction between the purely conceptual and mental, on the one hand, and the true principles of reality, on the other. This distinction intersects with the dichotomy between existence and essence in his philosophy or, more precisely, between what truly and actually exists in the concrete world (the hierarchy of divine lights) and what merely subsists in the mind as a mental notion, and which is purely the result of mental operations and conceptions (e.g., the concept of existence, or the modalities of the possible and necessary). It is with Suhrawardī, it seems, that the term *i'tibār* decidedly begins to assume a central place in the long debate that pitted the proponents of the foundationality of essence against the proponents of the foundationality of existence. At any rate, the later authors working within the Illuminationist tradition inherited this contextual use of the term from him. Suhrawardī describes a consideration as something that is devoid of true or real existence in the extramental world and that occurs only in the mind. It therefore possesses mental existence, but this existence finds no counterpart in the concrete world. In this connection, Suhrawardī famously describes existence or *wujūd* as an "intellectual consideration" (*i'tibār 'aqlī*) and as something that is "purely intellectual" (*'aqliyyah ṣirfah*).⁹⁹ As Walbridge and Ziai explain, *i'tibārāt 'aqliyyah* or *dhih-niyyah* for Suhrawardī are "conceptions, such as existence and necessity, abstracted from conceptions rather than concrete things, and thus not necessarily correspond-

⁹⁸ Eichner, 'Knowledge by Presence,' 119–121.

⁹⁹ Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 45.1–4, and more generally 45 ff.

ing to external realities.”¹⁰⁰ The purely conjectural nature of mental considerations is aptly conveyed in Walbridge’s alternative translation of *i’tibārāt ‘aqliyyah* as “intellectual fictions.”¹⁰¹ These intellectual considerations, with their purely mental kind of existence, stand in sharp contrast to the truly existing principles of the extramental world, which, in Suhrawardī’s system, are the various hierarchies of divine light.¹⁰² Suhrawardī’s usage of this term therefore emphasizes the gap between mental and extramental existence. Moreover, through its negative connotations, it plays a role in his critique of Avicennism, which, on his view, is based on these “intellectual fictions” that do not correspond to the exterior world and do not tally with our experience of it. For his part, Suhrawardī prefers to ground his method in our direct experience of the world and what he calls ‘knowledge by presence.’ Hence, Suhrawardī’s use of this term is nuanced. Although he lays the ground for the postclassical trend of reserving the term *i’tibār* for merely suppositional or conjectural entities in the mind (in opposition to what ‘truly’ exists in the world), and so is deflationary in that sense, he nevertheless adopts a ‘strong’ interpretation of *i’tibār* as indicating mental existence. In that regard, his usage of the term is not deflationary, as it is with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, for example.

One feature of particular interest for our purposes is that Suhrawardī includes quiddity (*māhiyyah*) in the category of intellectual considerations and purely intellectual beings. Although he has sometimes been described as an advocate of the foundationality of essence, it is the divine lights, rather than the quiddities, which have concrete and real existence in his philosophy. Quiddity as such, like existence, is a purely mental or intellectual notion, with no direct correspondence in the extramental world. Suhrawardī states: “It [existence] is an intelligible meaning [*ma’nā ma’qūl*] ... as are the concepts of quiddity, thingness, and reality taken absolutely.”¹⁰³ Suhrawardī’s mention of ‘quiddity taken in an absolute manner’ of course brings to mind Avicenna’s descriptions of ‘quiddity in itself’ and ‘absolute quiddity,’ which are also mental considerations. I would contend additionally that Suhrawardī followed Avicenna in regarding this absolute conception of quiddity as being endowed with intellectual existence; it is among what Walbridge and Ziai have called “the beings of reason.”

100 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 176, 195. The question of whether Suhrawardī also attributes some kind of mental existence to these notions is worth raising, but it transcends the scope of this book. By translating *i’tibār* as “being of reason,” Walbridge and Ziai hint at their belief that Suhrawardī indeed regarded these mental notions as existing in the human intellect, but this problem calls for a detailed treatment of this thinker’s theory of mental existence.

101 Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 45–46. According to Walbridge they may be identified with what would otherwise be called ‘secondary intentions.’

102 There can be no doubt that Suhrawardī recognizes the validity of mental existence; see *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 50. On this point, he is a faithful follower of Avicenna.

103 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 45.2–3.

Shahrastānī's works provide another convenient lens through which to assess the later reception of the Avicennian notion of *i'tibār*. This author resorts frequently to this term in order to expose the elements of Avicenna's philosophy as well as to describe the views of Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite thinkers, a move which is surprising at first glance. The latter phenomenon can be explained by Shahrastānī's intention to systematically compare, assess, and synthesize the philosophical and theological trends that reached him. In doing so, he frequently implements Avicennian notions in his *kalām* accounts, a practice which, from our perspective, results in the cross-contamination of ideas and terms. Shahrastānī's approach betrays his belief that the philosophical discourse on the universals (i.e., of the status of essence in the mind and in the concrete world) bears a direct connection, or even overlaps, with the *kalām* discourse on the states. Both raise the same problematics regarding the relationship between mental considerations and the concrete entities to which they refer. Notable in this connection is Shahrastānī's use of *i'tibār* to describe the Bahshamite theory of states (*aḥwāl*). For Shahrastānī appears to have perceived a genuine connection between Avicenna's discussion of quiddity and its various considerations as outlined in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* and the Bahshamite theory of the states, mostly in the form in which it had crystallized in the Ash'arite tradition. In *The Ultimate Steps in the Science of Theology* (*Nihāyat al-aqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām*), Shahrastānī makes a *rapprochement* between Avicenna's notions of *i'tibār* and *wajh* and the Ash'arite notions of *ṣifah* and *ḥāl*, to the point that he proposes to replace these *kalām* terms with this Avicennian nomenclature.¹⁰⁴ His terminology and comments emphasize the fundamentally intentional and mental nature of these various notions, which he locates exclusively in the human mind. For example, universality, commonness, species, and genera are things that exist only in the mind, as are, according to him, all the states that the theologians discuss in their works. But the latter have reified many of these concepts and granted them a real status in the concrete world.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, for the Bahshamites, the attributes possess a reality or actuality (*thubūt*) outside the mind, even if they cannot be said to exist in a strong or straightforward sense. Thus, Shahrastānī's purely mental or conceptualist interpretation of the states as kinds of Avicennian *i'tibārāt* is a development that appears in the wake of the diffusion of Avicenna's philosophical legacy and of efforts by scholars to synthesize it with other *kalām* influences.¹⁰⁶

ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 1413 CE) in his *Definitions* is apparently concerned about the proper use of the term *i'tibār*, since he devotes no less than four independent entries to it (*al-i'tibār*, *al-amr al-i'tibārī*, *al-māhiyyah al-i'tibāriyyah*, and *al-muṭlaqah al-i'tibāriyyah*). It should be noted, however, that the sources he consulted for these entries were not primarily philosophical and likely included ju-

¹⁰⁴ Shahrastānī, *The Ultimate Steps*, 133.9; 139.7–8; 147.16; 148.12–149.4.

¹⁰⁵ Shahrastānī, *The Ultimate Steps*, 147–148.

¹⁰⁶ For Shahrastānī's reception of Avicennism and his critical discussion of it in light of *kalām* sources, see Benevich, *The Classical*; idem, *The Essence-Existence Distinction*.

risprudential and even Sufi texts.¹⁰⁷ In spite of this, what Jurjānī says confirms the primary sense of the term *i'tibār* as “a mental consideration” (if used as a noun) or simply “conceptual” or “suppositional” (if used as an adjective). On the specific issue of quiddity in itself and mental existence, Jurjānī follows—but probably did not faithfully reproduce—Avicenna’s position, as his various comments introduce expressions not found in Avicenna and are also difficult to reconcile with one another. On the one hand, he seems to regard an *i'tibār* as a mental existent, since he defines “the conceptual thing” (*al-amr al-i'tibārī*) as “what has no existence except in the deliberating intellect as long as it is deliberating” and the “conceptual quiddity” (*al-māhiyyah al-i'tibāriyyah*) as “[this aspect of essence which] does not have existence except in the intellect of the examiner as long as he is deliberating [*hiya allatī lā wujūda la-hā illā fī 'aql al-mu'tabir mā dāma mu'tabiran*].”¹⁰⁸ In this connection, he seems to use *i'tibārī* interchangeably with *'aqlī* and *dhihnī*, as many other post-Avicennian authors do, in an effort to contrast it to real or concrete existence outside the mind. On the other hand, Jurjānī also distinguishes between universal mental existence (and hence universal quiddity in the mind) and quiddity in itself. He seems to correlate the conceptual quiddity, *al-māhiyyah al-i'tibāriyyah*, with the mental universal existent.¹⁰⁹ As for quiddity in itself, whose definition is conveyed in the entry titled “the quiddity of the thing” (*māhiyyat al-shay'*), it is “what makes the thing that which it is [*mā bi-hi l-shay' huwa huwa*]. Insofar as it is itself [*wa-hiya min haythu hiya hiya*], it is not existent, nor nonexistent, nor universal, nor particular, nor specific, nor general.”¹¹⁰ In other words, Jurjānī seems to correlate the conceptual (*al-i'tibārī*) with the mental universal and the intellectual existent. But unlike Avicenna he does not use the term *i'tibār/i'tibārī* to describe quiddity in itself (recall that for Avicenna there is an *i'tibār* of pure quiddity that is distinct from the *i'tibār* of mental universal quiddity). Furthermore, Jurjānī’s statement to the effect that quiddity in itself is “neither existent nor nonexistent” is anti-Avicennian, given that the latter does not recognize an intermediary level of existence between existence and nonexistence. Avicenna often specifies that quiddity in itself can be considered in abstraction from existence, but he never to my knowledge describes it explicitly as being neither existent nor nonexistent. This feature of Jurjānī’s description was probably influenced by *kalām* considerations and more specifically by the theory of the neutral ontological status of the modes upheld by some Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. Overall, then, Jurjānī’s work provides valuable insight into the matter as well as interesting departures from Avicenna. His definitions provide a typical case study of how later scholars subtly transformed Avicenna’s theories in the process of interpreting them.

¹⁰⁷ I am grateful to Jules Janssens for bringing this point to my attention. In contrast, Jurjānī’s definition of *māhiyyat al-shay'* (discussed later on) seems to be properly Avicennian.

¹⁰⁸ Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 59.14–15 and 248.10–11 respectively.

¹⁰⁹ Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 237.11ff.

¹¹⁰ Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 247.8–9. As Jules Janssens kindly pointed out to me, parts of this definition seem to be taken directly from Avicenna’s *Introduction*, I.7, 37.13 and some sections of *Metaphysics*, V.1.

It is interesting that in *Introduction to Philosophy (Bidāyat al-ḥikmah)*, also translated as *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*, the modern Persian scholar and philosopher Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981 CE) dwells on the various meanings of the term *i'tibār*, thereby offering additional insight into its usage in a more modern context. *The Elements* is an introductory treatise that was conceived for philosophical education in Iranian madrasas, and the fact that the author deemed it appropriate to clarify this term in order to avoid confusion is in itself telling. Accordingly, he proceeds to outline its various meanings and tease out its epistemological and ontological implications.¹¹¹ He begins by broadly distinguishing between what he calls “real” (*ḥaqīqī*) and “suppositional” (*i'tibārī*) concepts. The former refer to quiddities that actually exist in the extramental world and that find a conceptual counterpart in the mind, for instance the quiddity of human or horse. These real concepts are grasped by the mind as a result of abstraction. The latter in contrast refer to abstract universal concepts that exist only in the mind, such as existence, oneness, genus, and species. These concepts have not been abstracted from reality, since they do not exist as such in the concrete world. Rather, they are produced by the mind through reflection and analysis.¹¹² This account appears to demarcate *i'tibārāt* or *i'tibārī* concepts from other mental concepts quite sharply. On this model, the quiddities of existing things do not fall in the category of *i'tibārāt*. This point is stressed again later on:

The so-called *i'tibārī* concepts are formulated by the mind through a kind of contemplative effort and applied to their referents, though not in the way quiddity is applied to and predicated of its individuals and taken within their confines.¹¹³

One complicated point is how both types of concepts relate to mental existence on Ṭabāṭabā'ī's view. It can be ascertained from other passages of *The Elements* that the author upheld mental existence as a valid ontological category. Furthermore, he specifically identifies mental existents with the quiddities of things and hence also with the ‘real’ concepts in the mind. He writes: “Quiddities occur either as external existence, in which they possess certain [material] properties, or as mental existence, in which case they do not possess these properties.”¹¹⁴ Accordingly, it would appear that these mental quiddities and true concepts enjoy complete mental existence, whereas the *i'tibārāt* in contrast do not. However, at this point Ṭabāṭabā'ī introduces another notion that complicates this picture: all of these concepts have a kind of mental subsistence (*thubūt*). This means that even the suppositional concepts have an autonomous subsistence or actuality (*thubūt*) in the mind on the ground of their general correspondence with external objects, even though they do not com-

¹¹¹ See in particular Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Elements*, 128–129.

¹¹² Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Elements*, 14.

¹¹³ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Elements*, 129.

¹¹⁴ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Elements*, 14; see also 21 on mental existence.

prise within their scope the quiddities of actually existing things, such as horse or human, but rather primary notions such as existence, necessity, and oneness. Taken together, all of these concepts—whether the true concepts or the suppositional concepts—possess mental subsistence and constitute the fact of the matter (*nafs al-amr*).¹¹⁵ As such, they represent the ultimate epistemic reference against which the truthfulness of statements are gauged.

Thus far Ṭabāṭabā'ī has distinguished between 'real' concepts, among which are the mental quiddities corresponding to concrete existents, and abstract, universal considerations *qua* purely suppositional notions, such as existence and genus. While all of these mental entities possess subsistence and together constitute the fact of the matter, only true concepts would appear to amount to full-blown mental existents on the grounds of their direct correspondence to external existents.¹¹⁶ Although clearly influenced by Aristotelian and Avicennian ideas, especially the distinction between first and second intentions, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's account in other respects departs from Avicenna, for whom not only universal quiddity, but also quiddity 'in itself,' amounts to a distinct *i'tibār*. Ṭabāṭabā'ī in contrast seems intent on separating the quiddities (or at least some of them) from the *i'tibārāt* produced by the mind. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Ṭabāṭabā'ī subsequently enunciates other meanings of *i'tibār*, at least one of which seems to overlap with quiddity taken in a general sense:

It is important to note that there are other meanings of the term *i'tibārī*, which are not relevant to our discussion [in this passage]: (a) one of these is the sense of *i'tibārī* as opposed to foundationally real (*aṣīl*), such as quiddity in opposition to existence; (b) another sense is when *i'tibārī* is used for something which does not have an independent existence of its own, as opposed to something that exists independently, as in the case of a relation, which exists through the relation of its two sides, as opposed to substance, which exists by itself; (c) [finally,] another meaning of *i'tibārī* is that which is applied to and predicated of subjects in a figurative and metaphorical sense with a practical end in view, such as the application of the word 'head' to Zayd as someone whose relation to his people is like the relation of the head to the body because he manages their affairs, solves their problems, and assigns to everyone his particular duties and tasks.¹¹⁷

Sense (a) outlined above can be applied generally to quiddity in the context of the debate regarding the ontological foundationality of existence and quiddity. Those, like Ṭabāṭabā'ī himself, who regard existence (*wujūd*) as foundational and ontologi-

¹¹⁵ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Elements*, 14–15

¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, it is not clear whether mental subsistence and mental existence are two distinct notions according to Ṭabāṭabā'ī, or whether they can be used interchangeably. The fact that two terms are used suggests that they convey different meanings, which seems also supported by some passages of his work. However, other passages appear to use the term 'subsistence' in the sense of 'existence'; see for instance 15, when the author refers to "external or mental subsistence." This problem harks all the way back to Avicenna himself; see section IV.3.

¹¹⁷ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *The Elements*, 129.

cally real (*aṣīl*), would regard quiddity as merely mental or suppositional (*i'tibārī*), that is, as subsisting in the mind without actually existing in the external world as such. By implication, this means that the essence/existence duality can be posited only in the mind and is a mental distinction. In exterior reality, quiddity and existence are fully unified in each individual existent, and existence is what is truly real and actual. Apart from the general application of this term to quiddity that has just been discussed, the most striking feature of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's philosophy remains the attempt to separate quiddity as a real (*ḥaqīqī*) concept in the mind from other merely suppositional (*i'tibārī*) concepts, which strictly speaking do not encompass mental quiddities. When the term *i'tibār* is applied to quiddity, as in (a) above, it is done so only in a general or abstract way, which overlaps with the suppositional concepts Ṭabāṭabā'ī describes, and which refers to universal, abstract concepts that do not exist as such in the extramental world, such as existence, unity, actuality, etc.

This point notwithstanding, in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's framework the term *i'tibār* appears to maintain a certain fundamental meaning that holds across the various comments the author makes. It conveys a sense of something that does not exist as such in the extramental world, but which nevertheless bears a certain correspondence to it. This is the case of existence, actuality, quiddity (taken in a general or abstract sense), and of relations, none of which exists as such in this general or universal state in concrete reality, but all of which have a correspondence with the external world, thereby making them part of 'the fact of the matter' (*nafs al-amr*). In contrast, specific quiddities (e.g., human or horse) are not suppositional concepts, but real concepts, because they exist in the concrete world and reach the mind through a process of abstraction. Here one perceives clearly the degree of doctrinal transformation to which the Avicennian texts were subjected in the interval between these two thinkers. Overall, Ṭabāṭabā'ī helpfully disentangles various senses of the term *i'tibār*/*i'tibārī* and how they apply to quiddity. But as it is found in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's philosophical system, the notion of *i'tibār* has little to do with the original theories articulated by the *shaykh al-ra'īs* and reflects centuries of independent doctrinal reflection and elaboration.

1.1.5 Conclusion

In spite of the ambiguity of the textual evidence and the inconclusiveness of certain points in the analysis, some substantial progress has been achieved regarding the various philosophical implications of the term *i'tibār*. With regard to its relation to mental existence, one promising hypothesis was that the ontological status of an *i'tibār* depends on its contents and on the manner and mode in which they are thought or apprehended by the mind. If the consideration involves a full-fledged act of intellectual apprehension, whose object is a universal concept, then it is clear that this consideration will coincide with an intellectual existent and consist fundamentally of an 'intellectual consideration' (*i'tibār 'aqlī*). Conversely, if it is something lesser than an act of intellectual apprehension, such as a mere imagina-

tive, estimative, or suppositional act, then it would fall short of corresponding to an intellectual existent, and we would be dealing in this case with an instance of imaginative or estimative consideration.¹¹⁸ With regard to the consideration of quiddity in itself, the evidence discussed thus far seems to designate it as an intellectual consideration, which would imply a direct connection with mental existence. But in order to answer this question in more detail, we need to examine the other terms Avicenna relies on to describe pure quiddity.

1.2 Quiddity in itself as an intelligible form (*ṣūrah ma'qūlah*)

In addition to the term *i'tibār*, and closely related to it in the context of Avicenna's disquisitions on essence, are two other important terms: *ṣūrah* (form) and *ma'qūl* (intelligible or concept).¹¹⁹ Although both of these terms can refer to the universal forms (*ṣuwar*, *ma'qūlāt*) in the intellect, Avicenna occasionally relies on them to describe quiddity in itself specifically in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*. These terms, which also bear a strong connection with the notions of rationality and intellectuality (*'aql*, *'aqliyyah*) as well as with intellectual existence (*wujūd 'aqlī*), open a fresh perspective for our interpretation of quiddity in itself. *Ma'qūl* and *ṣūrah* are commonly used in the Arabic philosophical tradition to express the Greek term *noema*, which harks back ultimately to Aristotle's exposition of intellectual knowledge in *On the Soul* and *Posterior Analytics*. The term *ma'qūl* in particular was used for the Arabic translation of these Aristotelian works and became part and parcel of Arabic philosophical terminology as early as Kindī and the group of translators he directed. According to Aristotle and most Arabic philosophers who follow his teaching, the intelligibles are universal forms or concepts that encapsulate the es-

118 Whether Avicenna posits, or would acknowledge, a class of imaginative and estimative existents is unclear. For remarks on this potential class of psychological beings, scantily discussed by Avicenna and modern scholars, see Black, *Intentionality*, 8, 16, 25; eadem, *Avicenna*, 14–19; and Lizzini, *Ibn Sīnā's Metaphysics*. Lizzini writes: “The primacy of being (everything that is conceived of “is”) leads to an often unseen consequence: everything that is conceived of or simply mentally represented *exists* and hence has *at least* a mental existence (which means either intellectual or imaginary or estimative).” Likewise, Black, *Mental Existence*, 7, states: “On Avicenna's construal, then, to say that some thing is in the soul is to say that an essence or quiddity *exists* in some way in that soul. Avicenna is emphatic that this is truly a mode of existence or being, and that as such it is completely on a par with concrete existence in the external world.” If one takes Lizzini's “everything that is conceived of” and Black's “some thing ... in the soul” literally, then it would seem that the objects of the imagination and estimation exist in the mind. Incidentally, it would also imply that the pure quiddities exist mentally, because they are intelligible and eminently conceivable.

119 Avicenna often employs the key term *ma'nā* with the similar sense of ‘intelligible’ or ‘concept,’ but due to its complexity and its intricate relation to quiddity, it is the object of a separate section in the present study.

sence of things and whose various combinations and relations in the mind constitute the foundation of science and syllogistic knowledge.

It should be noted that the term *ṣūrah* has a wide semantic scope in Avicenna's philosophy. As mentioned above, it may apply to the intelligibles in the mind, in which case it is essentially synonymous with *ma'qūl*, or, alternatively, it may designate other psychological and cognitive entities apprehended by the human soul, which do not qualify as intellectual or universal forms proper. Accordingly, there are various kinds of forms (*ṣuwar*) in Avicennian psychology, such as the sensual and perceptible forms and the forms dwelling in the internal senses, such as the imaginative and estimative forms, which do not amount to intellectual concepts, and which should also not be identified with the universal notions used in logical reasoning. Furthermore, the term *ṣuwar* can refer to the substantial forms of concrete things, as well as to the species-forms transmitted by the Agent Intellect to the sublunary realm of nature. These substantial forms inhere in matter, and the combination of the two produces a hylomorphic being or *sunolon*. Because of this semantic flexibility, calling quiddity in itself a *ṣūrah* in the human soul lands one in the same quandary as calling it a consideration or a meaning or idea, since this designation says nothing about its ontological status in the mind, nor does it specify the kind of form with which quiddity should be identified, intellectual, imaginative, sensual, or other.

With these preliminary remarks out of the way, let us now turn to the Avicennian texts. The master explicitly describes pure quiddity as an intelligible object in various passages of *Introduction* and *Metaphysics*: it is, he writes, “an intelligible” (*ma'qūl*), “an intelligible form” (*ṣūrah 'aqliyyah, ṣūrah ma'qūlah*), and an “intellectual meaning” (*ma'nā ma'qūlah*). He mentions also the “intelligible form of animal” (*al-ṣūrah al-ḥayawāniyyah al-ma'qūlah*).¹²⁰ What is more, in *Introduction*, Avicenna describes quiddity in itself as something “intellectual” (*'aqlī*), which strongly points to its rationality and its location in the intellect (as opposed to the lower mental faculties).¹²¹ He repeatedly asserts in these texts that it can be “conceived of” (*yutaṣawwur*), a term that is frequently employed to refer to a concept in the intellect.¹²² One important passage appears in *Metaphysics* V.1, where Avicenna explicitly describes universal quiddity and quiddity in itself as *two distinct* intelligible forms in the human mind:

Text 3: There is in the intellect the form of abstract animal [*ṣūrat al-ḥayawān al-mujarrad*] according to the mode of abstraction we mentioned [viz., quiddity in itself], which is in this regard

¹²⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 205.5–8; cf. *Introduction*, I.12, 65.16–18; 66.4–5.

¹²¹ On the use of the terms *'aqlī*, *ṭabī'ī*, and *manṭiqī* in connection with the various aspects of essence, see Marmura, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*.

¹²² Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.16–18. The emphasis here is on *ṣūrah* as ‘intelligible form’ in connection with quiddity in the human mind. I will show in chapter III that Avicenna applies this term also to quiddity in the concrete world, with a different aim.

called intelligible form [*ṣūrah 'aqliyyah*]. There is also [*ayḍan*] in the intellect the form of animal with respect to what corresponds in the intellect [*yuṭābiqū fī l-'aql*] to many concrete beings by means of a single definition [viz., universal quiddity]. So the intellect relates this [numerically] one form [*al-ṣūrah al-wāḥidah*] to a multiplicity. It is, on this consideration, a universal [*wa huwa bi-hādhā l-i'tibār kullī*] and a single meaning [*ma'nā wāḥid*] in the intellect whose relation to whichever [concrete particular] animal you posit does not vary.¹²³

In this passage, Avicenna argues that quiddity in itself and universal quiddity amount not only to two different considerations (*i'tibārāt*) in the human mind, but also to two different “intelligible forms” (sing., *ṣūrah 'aqliyyah*). The first form of animal Avicenna mentions in this passage is abstract (*mujarrad*), a term that is consistently applied to quiddity in itself in his logical and metaphysical writings. Note, however, that this abstract form is said to exist in the mind in this purely abstract and distinctive state. The second form mentioned by Avicenna is the universal quiddity animal, which consists of the quiddity in itself animalness combined with its mental concomitants, such as universality. This second, universal form expresses the predicability of the concept animal to many concrete instances. As such, it differs from the first form, which is quiddity considered solely in itself. Hence, not only is the latter a distinct “consideration” and “meaning,” but it is also a distinct “intelligible form.”

Avicenna's other logical and metaphysical writings are consistent on this point. In *Introduction*, he alternates between calling quiddity in the mind a genus (*jins*) and a form (*ṣūrah*), the former emphasizing the logical dimension of quiddity, the latter its ontological status as something intelligible and conceivable.¹²⁴ And in two passages of *Notes*, Avicenna refers to pure quiddity again as something abstract (*mujarrad*) and as an intelligible (*ma'qūl*). What is more, in one of these passages he also explicitly ascribes this intellectual knowledge of pure quiddity to God Himself:

Text 4: The intelligible concept [*al-ma'qūl*] of each thing is its abstract quiddity [*mujarrad māhiyyatihi*], which is relatable to it [i.e., the thing] together with its various [essential] concomitants [*lawāzimahu*] ... The intelligible that is intellectuated by the First with regard to this individual [existent] is this very intelligible form, which is absolute humanness [*naḥs al-ṣūrah al-ma'qūlah wa-huwa l-insāniyyah al-muṭlaqah*], that is, not a certain individualized humanness [combined] with accidents and concomitants that can be sensed and pointed to.¹²⁵

I will return to the theological implications of this passage—and other related passages—in chapter V. Suffice to say here that Avicenna explicitly defines pure essence—in this case “absolute humanness”—as an intelligible (*ma'qūl*) and intelli-

¹²³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 205.5–9.

¹²⁴ Avicenna, *Introduction*, 68.15–69.19. He also in this text refers to quiddity as a “natural form” (*ṣūrah ṭabi'iyah*), an expression that will be explained in chapter III.

¹²⁵ Avicenna, *Notes*, 43, section 25. The other passage is *Notes*, 44.2, section 26: “The intelligible of each thing is the abstract quiddity [*mujarrad māhiyyatihi*] that belongs to it and on account of which it [the thing] possesses existence.”

ble form (*ṣūrah ma'qūlah*), which can be apprehended by the intellect and, to boot, by the divine intellect itself. The status of pure quiddity as a concept in the intellect is further emphasized in another passage of *Notes*, where one reads that animal “inasmuch as it is animal is an intelligible concept [or meaning, *ma'nā 'aqlī*], which, in itself [*fī dhātihī*], is neither universal nor particular.”¹²⁶

Overall, then, in the context of human (and divine) thought, Avicenna makes it a point to describe pure quiddity as an intelligible form and concept and to distinguish it from the universal aspect of quiddity. This suggests that quiddity in itself amounts to its own distinct intelligible form and concept in the intellect, a hypothesis that will be further borne out by the forthcoming analysis. His argumentation rests *inter alia* on key terms that point to the intellectuality and substantiality of pure quiddity in the mind. Unlike the term *ṣūrah*, which can be deemed ambiguous, since it could refer (arguably) to psychological forms (as opposed to intelligible forms strictly speaking), the terms '*aqlī*, *ma'qūl*, *ṣūrah ma'qūlah* and *ṣūrah 'aqliyyah* are unequivocal with regard to intellectuality and, by extension, to mental existence. For, according to Avicenna, a true mental existent is an intelligible concept (*ma'qūl*), and vice versa. It is the sum of these concepts and their interrelationships that make human intellectual knowledge possible. Hence, describing pure quiddity along those lines will, by the same token, appear to imply its very existence in the human intellect, while at the same time precluding its potential existence in other faculties of the soul. This point immediately raises the issues of the distinction between universal quiddity and quiddity in itself and of their respective ontological status in the intellect, which are explored in another section.¹²⁷

126 Avicenna, *Notes*, 61.6–7, section 49.

127 For this terminological overview to be complete, one needs to mention Avicenna's habit in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* of referring to quiddity in itself as a nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and even sometimes as “the natural” (*al-ṭabī'ī*) (i.e., ‘the natural universal’). This is a reference to the intrinsic and irreducible quidditative nature of the concrete existent, such as humanness and animalness in Zayd, and, as such, it is used synonymously with essence. The implication is that *ṭabī'ah* and *māhiyyah* are virtually interchangeable with regard to concrete beings. When apprehended by the mind, this nature can also be said to be logical, insofar as it is combined with one of the five logical predicates: genus, species, differentia, property, and accident. In a narrow sense, Avicenna uses the term ‘logical’ to refer to these five predicates, so that, as Marmura has shown, the logical aspect of quiddity (e.g., the species) is distinct from the quiddity as such (the nature horseness), and it is the combination of the two that yield the universal and intellectual concept of universal ‘horse’ in the mind. It is this composite, universal, intellectual concept consisting of the nature and logical genus that can be predicated of many things in the external world. It should be pointed out that Avicenna is keener to distinguish between nature and essence in a physical context, where these notions also bear an ambiguous relation to form (*ṣūrah*); for a detailed discussion of these various relations, see *Physics*, 1.5–6. Yet, even in this context, nature, essence, and form can be virtually synonymous, as in the case of simple things (*al-basā'it*) (45–47).

1.3 Quiddity in itself as a meaning or idea (*ma'nā*)

Avicenna repeatedly describes quiddity in itself as a *ma'nā* in his logical, psychological, and metaphysical writings. Like the term *i'tibār*, the term *ma'nā* is intrinsically ambiguous, since it can refer to an object of the intellect as well as to an object of the lower mental faculties, such as the imaginative faculty or the estimation. Although a *ma'nā*, like the terms *i'tibār* and *ma'qūl*, refers primarily to a mental or intentional object, it has arguably a broader scope and application in Avicenna's philosophy, since it can also be used to describe quiddity in the extramental world (this point is discussed further in chapter III). Furthermore, it is also a notion that appears frequently in the context of Avicenna's discussion of God's knowledge. Given its rich semantic scope, *ma'nā* calls for detailed commentary. It is my contention that a successful investigation into quiddity in itself depends partly on the elucidation of this term, especially of its epistemological and ontological implications. In this regard, it is desirable to fully acknowledge the dual philosophical and *kalām* background that underscores Avicenna's understanding of this crucial notion.

The word *ma'nā* is remarkable in that it appears in a wide variety of settings and possesses different connotations and nuances, making it extremely arduous for scholars to come up with a single and all-encompassing translation. Depending on the nature of the discussion, it may designate an idea, concept, attribute, meaning, intelligible, intention, thing, or entity.¹²⁸ In general, however, the term implies

128 For the connection between this term and the Greek philosophical background, see Versteegh, *Greek Elements*, 184–190. For insight into its use in Arabic theology, see Horten, *Was bedeutet*; and Wolfson, *The Philosophy*. In the context of Avicenna's philosophy, Goichon, *Lexique*, vol. 1, 253–255, translates *ma'nā* as “idée, idée particulière, intention, sens, concept” (surprisingly, Goichon has very little to say about *ma'nā* in *La distinction*); Black, *Psychology*, 311–312; Hasse, *Avicenna*, 127ff., focuses mostly on the *ma'ānī* related to the internal sense of estimation, but also provides valuable insight into this notion in general; and Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, who chooses to translate *ma'nā* as “an intentional object.” A detailed case for the systematic interpretation of *ma'nā* as an intention or “intentional object” in Avicenna's epistemology has recently been made by Tahiri, *Mathematics*, 41ff. According to this author, a *ma'nā* is necessarily intentional and is quasi-synonymous with the term *qaṣd*. In support of his claim, Tahiri cites various medieval Arabic sources (43, note 2). Yet, it should be pointed out that these mention the term *qaṣd*, not the term *ma'nā*, and his quotations, moreover, are gleaned from non-philosophical sources. With regard to quiddity, I think it is problematic to restrict the translation of *ma'nā* to ‘intention.’ Tahiri's claim that “intentionality acts as an interaction between the mind and the world” (44) is certainly correct in many cases, and it can be, for example, quite constructively applied to Avicenna's theory of the universals in the mind. For a universal is a notion or *ma'nā* that is predicated of many, so that it is necessarily accompanied by an act of intentionality and a relational state between the concept and its (potential or actual) instantiations. But one should recall that in Avicenna's epistemology *ma'nā* often refers to pure quiddity and the quidditative meaning specifically (as opposed to the universal), and this in a prior and immediate way. In that case, it bears no relation to the *ma'nā* of universality or to any other intentions that are ‘external’ to quiddity, i.e., not constitutive (*ghayr muqawwim*) of it. Accordingly, the *ma'nā* of pure quiddity is conceived of in itself and in abstraction from everything else, i.e., from any intention (such as universality) that can be added to it. In that partic-

mentality or intentionality and, hence, appears mostly in the context of human psychology and discussions of language and meaning.¹²⁹ In this context it is often used to explain the relation between speech and thought, or between an enunciation (*lafz*) and a concept (*mafhum*), and thus assumes a dual linguistic and conceptual role. This is important for our purposes, because Avicenna's comments on pure quiddity have a direct link to human speech (in connection with the definition, *ḥadd*) and thought (in connection with conceptualization, *taṣawwur*). In Avicenna's philosophy, a *ma'nā* refers primarily to a psychological notion or idea abstracted by the senses and apprehended by one of the faculties of the mind, such as the estimation or the intellect. In the latter case, when intellectual apprehension is involved, *ma'nā* is used interchangeably with *ma'qūl* to refer to a universal intelligible in the rational soul. The same term also appears with a related meaning in Avicenna's theological disquisitions to refer to the divine intelligibles and the objects of God's knowledge.¹³⁰ Hence, in the case of intellectual *ma'ānī*, this term may be applied equally to the human and divine intellects. In contrast, when estimation (*wahm*) is involved, *ma'nā* designates the abstracted intention that is derived from sensory perception and that corresponds to an external reality, such as when the ewe acquires a *ma'nā* of the wolf's aggressiveness. In that case, the *ma'nā* also refers to something that exists in the concrete world, such as the attribute or intention of aggressiveness that exists in the wolf.¹³¹ In brief, *ma'nā* may constitute an object of an estimative or

ular case, it is hard to see 'of what' this *ma'nā* of pure quiddity is an intention, if not an intention for pure conceivability and cognition. At any rate, it is not considered with a relation and intention to external reality, as in the case of the universal. Thus, Avicenna's point seems to be precisely that the conception of pure quiddity is completely abstracted of parasitical intentions. This makes *ma'nā* a term whose relation to intentionality is complex, not unilateral, as Tahiri claims. For my part, I deem the construal of *ma'nā* as *qaṣd* too restrictive, since it impedes a full account of the various epistemological and ontological nuances that are associated with this term. I will show shortly also that *ma'nā* carries ontological connotations that have little to do with intentionality *per se*.
129 Thus, Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 274, defines the *ma'ānī* as "mental forms" (*al-ṣuwar al-dihniyyah*). But he seems to connect them primarily to our ability to enunciate or designate things through language. Thus, *ma'nā* is what connects language or predication (*lafz*) with a concept proper (*mafhum*), and it is literally "what is intended by a [designated] thing." For Ghazālī, a *ma'nā* assumes a similar semantic and conceptual role: it can refer to a meaning, a mental image, or an intelligible and intentional reality (see Jabre, *Essai*, 212–214).

130 When used interchangeably with *ma'qūl* in the context of human intellection, *ma'nā* can be made to correspond to the Greek term *noema*. What is important in this case is the emphasis on the abstractness or intelligibility of *ma'nā*, a trend which harks back also to other Greek philosophical terms such as *pragma* and *lekton*, with which *ma'nā* is closely associated; see Versteegh, *Greek Elements*, 185–187. The abstractness and intelligibility of *ma'nā* is of course a crucial feature of Avicenna's theory of quiddity.

131 Hasse, *Avicenna*, 131–132; Hall, *Intellect*, 65. For Hasse, a *ma'nā* in connection with the estimative faculty is not primarily a psychological state or object, but a "connotational attribute," that is, something existing in the exterior object and retrieved by or transmitted to the human soul. For another interpretation, see Black, *Intentionality*.

intellectual kind of apprehension. There are, accordingly, imaginative, estimative, and intellectual *ma'ānī*, corresponding to the various faculties of the soul.

Avicenna is of course not the first thinker in the Arabic tradition to use the term *ma'nā* in connection with human and divine thought. In this regard, two precedents should be stressed. The first is Avicenna's illustrious predecessor Fārābī, who uses the term mostly in an epistemological context to refer to linguistic and logical notions in the mind. Fārābī appears generally to distinguish between *ma'nā*, 'logical notion' or 'logical meaning,' and *ma'qūl*, 'intelligible' or 'intellectual existent.'¹³² Even though there is a connection between a 'meaning' and an 'intelligible' in Fārābī's philosophy, his use of the term *ma'nā* does not on the whole suggest entitative and ontological content, but rather serves to express linguistic or logical meaning, and so it is closely tied to his theory of language. Moreover, he uses this term much more sparingly than Avicenna. Finally, Fārābī does not provide much information about mental existents in general and gives virtually no indication as to how this term relates to mental existence.¹³³ As a result, his writings yield only limited insight into the present inquiry. The second precedent is equally significant and concerns the various uses that Christian and Muslim theologians make of *ma'nā*. As Wolfson lucidly showed several decades ago, Christian theologians writing in Arabic sometimes refer to each of the hypostases of the Trinity respectively as a *ma'nā*, which they use synonymously with other terms, such as *uqnūm*, *shay'*, and *shakhṣ*.¹³⁴ In this context, the term *ma'nā* designates real entities or beings, Christ and the Holy Spirit, which are at the same time subsumed under the Godhead. In this particular case, then, a *ma'nā* transcends the sphere of language and logic and designates a real metaphysical entity in the concrete world. Likewise, in Muslim *kalām*, the term is frequently used to refer to the divine attributes, which, according to one mainstream interpretation, namely, that of the Ash'arites, are regarded as real and entitative, although their reality does not lead to a multiplicity of eternal beings. The divine attributes *qua ma'ānī* are co-eternal and co-existing entities that are distinct from the divine essence itself, but they do not undermine God's unity or unicity. In this usage, the term also assumes a theological dimension and designates a metaphysical reality that transcends the realm of human thought. Additionally, in *kalām* ontology, and particularly in the Mu'tazilite tradition starting with the works of Mu'ammār b. 'Abbād al-Sulamī (d. 830), the notion of *ma'nā* is often employed to designate something real or entitative in a being, such as a determinant cause ('*illah*'), the two terms being used interchangeably.¹³⁵ It can also bear a narrow relation to the notion of accident ('*araḍ*'), particularly after Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī, when it also becomes fre-

¹³² Walzer, *On the Perfect State*, 66.9; Zimmermann, *Al-Farabi's Commentary*, xlii and n. 1., 11 n.2.

¹³³ For insight into Fārābī's view on mental existence, see Black, *Knowledge*; Janos, *Al-Fārābī's On the One*.

¹³⁴ Wolfson, *The Philosophy*, 112ff.

¹³⁵ See Frank, *Al-ma'nā*; Daiber, *Das theologisch-philosophische System*; van Ess, *Theology and Society*, vol. 3, 80–90; and Leaman, *Ma'nā*.

quently discussed in connection with the theory of states (*aḥwāl*).¹³⁶ But whereas the states are neither existent nor nonexistent, the *ma'ānī* of the Mu'tazilites are entities or entitative causes that exist in reality, and which can thus also be the object of mental descriptions and attributions. Finally, it is noteworthy that the term *ma'nā* occasionally appears in *kalām* discussions of human psychology and epistemology, a topic which has hitherto received little attention on the part of scholars.¹³⁷ Given these observations, it is likely that the notion of *ma'nā* witnessed various borrowings between *kalām* and *falsafah*. More pointedly, I will argue that the entitative interpretation of *ma'nā* that was articulated in the *kalām* sources probably influenced Avicenna. When it comes to human thought, most theologians would not have attributed an ontological reality to *ma'nā qua* concept—as many, if not most, of them appear to have rejected the theory of mental existence in the period prior to Avicenna. On the other hand, the *kalām* understanding of this term in a theological context remains relevant. For when the term is employed to designate something immaterial (a divine attribute) and also possibly something mental or cognitive (as in the case of, say, the attributes of divine knowledge and divine will), it appears to be endowed with some mode of existence. In these particular cases, the term *ma'nā* refers to a real, existing, and entitative attribute or quality of the divine being, which is distinct from God's essence, and which pertains to God's mental or intentional activity.¹³⁸

Given this rich and flexible semantic background, it is not surprising that the relation of *ma'nā* to mental existence represents an ambiguous facet of Avicenna's psychology. The master uses this term to refer to a wide array of psychological and intentional objects, making it difficult to delineate with precision the relationship between a psychological *ma'nā* and a mental existent (*mawjūd dhīhni* or *'aqlī*). There are *ma'ānī* associated with human psychological activity, such as the *ma'ānī* of the internal senses or the perceptual *ma'ānī*, which could be hypothesized to exist in the lower faculties of the soul. Although they do not fulfill the Avicennian criteria for intellectual existence proper, namely, immateriality and universality, these *ma'ānī* are presumably not altogether devoid of existence in the soul and may amount to kinds of psychological forms. Yet, since Avicenna says virtually nothing about psychological existents other than the universal intelligibles, it is ultimately unclear whether these sub-intellectual *ma'ānī* may be called existents in any meaningful way and whether they constitute a legitimate class of substantive psychological objects below the intellectual ones.¹³⁹ At any rate, the present concern

136 See Frank, *Al-ma'nā*; and idem, Meanings. The interesting history of this term has been partly traced by Wolfson, *The Philosophy*.

137 I am grateful to David Bennett for his valuable comments on the use of this term in early *kalām*.

138 There can be no doubt that Avicenna was aware of these various *kalām* uses of *ma'nā*. In fact, there are intriguing parallels between the *kalām* and Avicennian perceptions of *ma'nā* when it comes to its application to the concrete beings; this is discussed further in chapter III.

139 For a discussion of the estimative *ma'nā*, see Black, Psychology; and Hasse, *Avicenna*, 127 ff. This question is in many ways comparable to the question of the ontological status of an intention (*inten-*

is to better understand Avicenna's description of quiddity as *ma'nā* in light of this multifaceted background. The immediate issue can be put as follows. The master frequently calls quiddity in itself a *ma'nā* and locates it in the soul. But since in *Metaphysics* V.1 he distinguishes it from the *ma'ānī qua* universal intelligibles, it remains to be determined what kind of *ma'nā* pure quiddity amounts to. If it is something lower or lesser than a full-fledged intellectual universal existent and is reducible to a psychological intention or an estimative notion, then quiddity in itself would not exist as an intelligible, but would constitute a sub-intellectual *ma'nā*. The term *ma'nā* as a general psychological notion thus raises the same kinds of problems with regard to mental existence that the term *i'tibār*, and to a lesser extent the term *ṣūrah*, had raised. Given its semantic malleability, and given the fact that Avicenna employs this term to refer to a diversity of mental phenomena and entities, there remains the challenge of delineating with precision the relationship between a mental or psychological *ma'nā* and mental existence.

In the narrower context of Avicenna's logic, *ma'nā* usually designates a meaning or notion in abstraction from any ontological considerations. As Avicenna explains in *On Interpretation*, the *ma'ānī* are the notions and the impressions (*āthār*) produced by enunciations (*alfāz*). This brings to mind other descriptions of *ma'nā*, such as those of Fārābī and, later, Jurjānī.¹⁴⁰ In this regard, the *ma'ānī* mediate between language and conceptual thought and can be regarded as the foundation of logic and reflection. But this mediate status endows this term with an intrinsic ambiguity, since it can refer either to the purely phonetic and semantic plane of enunciations, or it can be used interchangeably with the Arabic terms that express a concept (*mafḥūm*, *ma'qūl*) to evoke a full-fledged intellectual entity. Additionally, in the case of Avicennian psychology, it can designate a mental accident, concomitant, or intention (e.g., universality or oneness) that is added to a quiddity in the mind. For example, universality is a *ma'nā* that is added to the *ma'nā* of horseness. Hence, the extensional scope of the term *ma'nā* bridges the grammatical, linguistic, and semantic, on the one hand, and the conceptual, intellectual, and ontological, on the other. In this connection, it bears an intricate relationship to quiddity, both as essential definition and meaning (the linguistic aspect) and as intelligible and mental existent (the ontological and intellectual aspect).¹⁴¹

tio) in the medieval Latin tradition. It should be noted also that the Latin term *intentio* was often used to translate the Arabic word *ma'nā* in the Avicennian texts.

140 Avicenna, *On Interpretation*, 3.1–2. This sense may be connected with al-Ḥasan b. Ṣuwār's notes on Aristotle's *Categories*, which also describe *ma'nā* as arising from the *athar* produced in the soul; see Leaman, *Ma'nā*; cf. Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 274.

141 Construed generally in the context of Avicennian epistemology, *ma'nā/ma'ānī* refer to any logical object examined by the mind. But the logical dimension of *ma'nā* and its potential to illuminate Avicenna's discussion of quiddity in itself should not be underestimated, in particular with regard to Avicenna's major philosophical summae. For instance, *Metaphysics of The Cure* is in numerous ways a work on the relationship between logic and metaphysics; in many places, Avicenna either enjoins the reader to consult his logical works or he embarks on protracted logical reflections in the very

In this connection, it is notable that at the beginning of *Metaphysics* I.4 Avicenna—perhaps anticipating the potential confusion that could arise from a reading of the later sections of this work—seeks to clarify the respective subject matter of logic and metaphysics and to dispel any ambiguity regarding this point. He explicates that the subject matter of logic are the notions and meanings (*ma'āni*), albeit not considered *qua* existents (*mawjūdāt*), since the study of existents and of absolute existence—or being *qua* being—is the prerogative of metaphysics.¹⁴² This point had already been made in *Introduction*, when Avicenna explained that logic does not investigate existents proper.¹⁴³ Hence, while logic studies the *ma'āni qua* logical notions or considerations, metaphysics studies them *qua* existents or, at the very least, *qua* meanings and concepts related to existents. What renders these methodological observations blurry, however, is the fact that Avicenna sometimes discusses logical issues in a metaphysical context and in close connection with his metaphysical theories (and vice versa), so that the precise logical vs. metaphysical scope of the term *ma'nā/ma'āni* cannot be established on the basis of context, discipline, or literary genre alone. Yet, one important observation that arises from the interface of Avicenna's logic and metaphysics is the direct correlation between intellectual meanings and existents. The 'universal forms' and 'mental existents' are often described as 'meanings,' which themselves correspond to 'ideas,' 'conceptions,' or 'intelligibles.' In fact, all of these English terms are possible translations of the term *ma'āni*, depending on the context, so that there is a high degree of correspondence between them.¹⁴⁴ Since all mental existents are also mental meanings and notions (*ma'āni*), the key

midst of his metaphysical disquisitions. More often than not, he articulates theories that rely on metaphysical and logical considerations weaved together into a distinctive Avicennian discourse. This suggests that both aspects of *ma'nā* go hand in hand, especially in a metaphysical context, where it can mean 'meaning' as well as 'mental existent.'

142 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.2, 10.17 ff.

143 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.2, 15.17–16.5; one key passage is I.5, 27.10–14: “And inasmuch as you are a logician [*mantīqī*], it does not befall upon you [to clarify] how these relations [between the universal and its concrete exemplifications] obtain, and whether a single meaning [*ma'nā*] possessing commonality has existence among concrete individual things that share a commonality [of meaning] with it, and, in brief, [to examine] the separate and exterior existence [*wujūd mufāriq wa-khārij*] [of this meaning], which would be other than the existence [it has] in your mind, or even how it comes to be in the mind. For the investigation of these issues lies in another discipline, or even in two other disciplines.” Avicenna is probably implicitly referring to psychology and metaphysics in the last segment of this passage.

144 See the beginning of V.2 of *Metaphysics of The Cure*, 207.5–9, where Avicenna alternately refers to the same mental object as a *kullī*, a *mawjūd*, and a *ma'nā*, thereby showing the intertwinement of these terms. The fact that *ma'āni* lie at the boundary of “logical notions” and “intellectual existents” highlights the difficulty of disentangling these two fundamental senses of the word in Avicenna's writings. This point is all the more problematic when it pertains to quiddity in itself, which Avicenna frequently describes as a *ma'nā*.

implication is one of co-extensionality. In most cases, the terms *mawjūdāt fi-l-dhihn*, *ma'qūlāt*, *ṣuwar* and *ma'ānī* can all be used interchangeably.¹⁴⁵

Hence, the universals, while being *ma'ānī* in the sense of notions or meanings as construed in logic, are also mental existents proper, and as such fall within the subject matter of metaphysics. In their case, *ma'nā* can designate the epistemological aspect (the meaning) and the entitative aspect (the intellectual existent or intelligible object). Following the path opened by Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, Avicenna's discussion of the universals frequently oscillates between these two planes and implicitly encompasses both. For example, the master explains that metaphysics investigates the "manner of existence of the universal natures" (*kayfa wujūd al-ṭabā'i' al-kullīyyah*) and addresses the questions whether universals have existence "in the particular concrete beings" and "how they exist in the soul."¹⁴⁶ He also raises the question of whether they can exist as Platonic forms.¹⁴⁷ Yet, the universals in the human mind are also the foundation of scientific knowledge and, *qua* meanings and intentions, the main contents of logic. So, the study of universals occupies an important place in the metaphysical project, and this for two main reasons: (a) as mental *existents*, the universals have to be studied in their own right and as part of ontology; and (b) as the building blocks of certain knowledge and the aim of syllogistic reasoning, they play a key role in human cognition and scientific theory. Their investigation accordingly represents one of the main tasks of the epistemological and metaphysical inquiry. These various goals and aspects converge in the term *ma'nā*.¹⁴⁸ The foregoing remarks apply chiefly to the *universal* meanings, notions, and intelli-

145 According to Goichon, *Lexique*, 15 and 22, the translators opted to render the Greek *νόημα* chiefly by means of *taṣawwur* and *ma'nā*. This places the emphasis squarely on the logical and conceptual aspects of the term and not on the ontological ones. But it should be noted that the topic of mental existence greatly preoccupied Arabic thinkers like Avicenna, who explores it in a way that his Greek predecessors did not. This explains why the term *ma'nā* in his system is invested with an ontological status.

146 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.4, 26.3–5.

147 This passage from *Metaphysics* should be read in light of Avicenna's *Introduction* and *Categories*, which similarly combine ontological and purely logical considerations; see, for example, Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.2, 15.17–16.5. At I.5, 27.10–14 Avicenna raises a set of almost similar ontological questions, which, he cautions, should be treated in the science of metaphysics. In spite of this injunction, Avicenna addresses these issues in his logical works, and he even brings theological ideas to bear on the topic; see chapters IV and V for more insight into the last point.

148 Recall that even God is said to contemplate *ma'ānī*. Moreover, God Himself possesses, or rather is, a special *ma'nā*, which is impenetrable to all but Him; see *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.7, 47.6–8; VIII.5, 350.8. It should be noted that the term *ma'ānī* is also the one Avicenna uses to describe the various aspects that are constitutive of the First Effect's multiplicity—and by extension of that of all the separate intellects: "[Intelligible] plurality proceeds from the intellects' multiple meanings [literally, meanings of multiplicity, *al-ma'ānī allatī fihā min al-kathrah*]," *Metaphysics of The Cure*, IX.4, 407.5–6; cf. the interesting question Avicenna raises at V.2, 211.8–9. The term *ma'nā* therefore appears frequently in Avicenna's ontology and theology in addition to his epistemology; in all cases, it bears a close relation to the conception of essence and its concomitants.

gibles in the mind, the universal *ma'ānī*. But they are also relevant for our purposes inasmuch as Avicenna frequently describes quiddity 'in itself' specifically as a *ma'nā*. From the outset, this invests quiddity with a logico-metaphysical dimension of its own. It also immediately raises the question of the relationship between these two aspects—the logical and the metaphysical. Is quiddity in itself a *ma'nā* only in the logical sense or also in the metaphysical sense used for the universal intelligibles, which would imply mental existence?

The difficulty involved in clarifying this question is compounded by the fact that the textual evidence is scattered in Avicenna's logical, psychological, and metaphysical accounts. Nevertheless, an attempt should be made to collate Avicenna's remarks on this topic. In what follows, I begin with the description of pure quiddity as a *ma'nā* and move on to address the question of its mental vs. entitative nature. In *Metaphysics* I.7, Avicenna refers to the essence as a meaning, which is the "true nature" of a thing (*al-ma'nā alladhī huwa ḥaqīqatuhu*).¹⁴⁹ In *Philosophical Compendium*, he talks about the "essential meaning" (*ma'nā-yi dhātī*) of a thing, and in this same work he also distinguishes between quiddity in itself and universal quiddity.¹⁵⁰ In *Salvation*, he explains that the universal as a quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) is one thing, and that its being one or multiple, common or specific, is "something else" (*shay' ākhar*). Universality is another *ma'nā* and a condition (*shart*) added to it (*zā'id 'alā*) that is distinct from the core quidditative *ma'nā*.¹⁵¹ A similar account can be found in *Introduction* I.12, where Avicenna argues that the five predicates (genus, species, difference, property, and accident) are each one thing when taken in themselves and another thing when considered in a general or universal manner (*'āmm*) as applying to a thing. As in *Metaphysics*, he subsequently provides an illustration of this point that centers on the genus 'animal,' but with the crucial difference that this time Avicenna explicitly describes quiddity in itself as a *ma'nā* and uses this central notion to articulate his argument. When considered in itself, this *ma'nā* is unrelated to either mental or extramental existence:

Text 5: We say: indeed, animal in itself is a [quidditative] meaning [*al-ḥayawān fī nafsihi ma'nā*], regardless of whether it exists in concrete beings or is conceived of [as a universal] in the soul; for, in itself, it is neither general nor specific ... But animal in itself is a thing that is conceived of by the mind *qua* animal [*shay' yutaṣawwaru fī l-dhihn ḥayawānan*]. And on account of the fact that it is conceived *qua* animal, it is nothing other than animal alone [*lā yakūn illā ḥayawān faqa*]. If one conceives it as being either general or specific or something else, then one conceives it together with another meaning that would be superadded to it [*ma'nā zā'id 'alā*] and that would accidentally occur to animalness [*ya'riḍu li-l-ḥayawāniyyah*].¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.7, 43.6.

¹⁵⁰ See Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 35 and 33 respectively.

¹⁵¹ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 536–537, especially 536.11.

¹⁵² Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.11–19.

In this passage, Avicenna describes quiddity in itself—here animal in itself—as a “quidditative meaning,” a *ma'nā*, thereby further enriching the list of technical words he uses to describe quiddity. The term *ma'nā* puts an emphasis on the mental and intentional aspect of quiddity, since one of its primary senses is the ‘meaning’ or ‘concept’ of a thing, in this case, the meaning and concept of the quiddity ‘horseness’ in the rational mind. In that sense it is also closely associated with the definition (*ḥadd*) of a thing, since the definition causes this meaning and concept to arise in the mind. The term *ma'nā* serves to connect quiddity with its meaning and definition. The *ma'nā* of animal is, in a sense, the essential definition of animal and also corresponds to the concept of quiddity in itself (animal inasmuch as it is animal). The quidditative meaning or *ma'nā* is therefore what contains or implies the core definition of a thing, what unifies the constitutive elements (*muqawwimāt*) and inner aspects or features of a thing, which together constitute its core and essence, its whatness. The notions of ‘quiddity,’ ‘meaning,’ and ‘definition’ appear inextricably linked in Avicenna’s account of quiddity in itself, which explains why they are often used interchangeably. This undoubtedly has the effect of stressing the gnoseological and epistemic dimension of quiddity in itself as something that imparts knowledge, as a thing or entity that conveys information to the rational mind.¹⁵³ Hence, the term

153 Interestingly, in referring to the very quidditative core of something, the term *ma'nā* sometimes appears to transcend quiddity itself or at least bears an ambiguous relationship with it. In discussing God’s Necessary Existence, for example, Avicenna states that God is devoid of quiddity, but that He possesses an irreducible meaning (*ma'nā*) that belongs solely to Him and which only He can understand. This special *ma'nā* cannot be shared by anything else. As Avicenna states, “The First has nothing that shares Its meaning [*ma'nāhu*]” (*Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.5, 350.8). This meaning is inaccessible to human reason, and God is the only being that knows it: “It [the First Cause] is a meaning [*ma'nā*], the explication of whose term [*ism*] belongs only to it” (*Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.7, 47.6–8). In a similar spirit, in *Pointers*, vol. 2, 312–313, Avicenna explains that in the case of immaterial beings, human knowledge does not consist of an *apprehension of quiddity*, but rather of an *image (mithāl) of the quiddity*. In those cases, while it is possible to know the meaning (*ma'nā*) of these entities, this *ma'nā* would not correspond strictly to their essence or quiddity, but to a semblance or image of their quiddity, thereby possibly introducing a chasm between the meaning (*ma'nā*) and the quiddity (*māhiyyah*). Regardless of these statements, which seem to distinguish between *ma'nā* and *māhiyyah* in the case of the Necessary of Existence and also possibly in the case of the separate intellects, Avicenna usually uses *ma'nā* to refer to the quidditative meaning of something and, hence, often correlates it with pure quiddity. As such, it is something that can be known (*ma'lūm*) and that represents the foundation of human cognition insofar as it conveys knowledge about quiddity. In fact, at the beginning of *Metaphysics* VIII.5, 349.11–13, Avicenna states: “the One insofar as He is the Necessary of Existence, is what He is in terms of Himself, namely His essence [*yakūn mā huwa bi-hi huwa wa-huwa dhātuhu*]. His meaning [*ma'nāhu*] is restricted to Himself either by virtue of that meaning itself or due to a cause.” Here Avicenna explicitly ascribes an essence or quiddity to God, which is said to correspond to the *ma'nā*. Hence, whether quiddity and meaning coincide fully in God depends on whether Avicenna is amenable to the view that God has a quiddity or not. Moreover, in these various passages, the irreducible meaning is in any case closely related to quiddity, insofar as it refers to the inner and special nature or reality of that thing. God, like all other things, possesses a special reality (*ḥaqīqah*); see VIII.5, 349.11. Hence, quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*), quiddity (*māhiyyah*), and reality

ma'nā, when used in relation to quiddity in itself, amounts primarily to a logical and epistemic claim.¹⁵⁴ In this regard, it is comparable to the term *i'tibār*. Both convey the notional, conceptual, or logical aspect of quiddity as something conceivable and enunciable. However, the term *ma'nā* more squarely puts an emphasis on the intrinsic *intelligibility* of pure quiddity. Thus, in *Notes*, Avicenna explains that the essence 'animal' is "an intelligible concept" [or an intelligible meaning, *ma'nā 'aqīlī*].¹⁵⁵ It is in this intellectual sense that the term *ma'nā* also appears in some sections of *Metaphysics*, where it seems to be used almost interchangeably with quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and true nature or reality (*ḥaqīqah*).¹⁵⁶ As Text 5 above illustrates, animal in itself can be described either as a pure quiddity (*ḥayawāniyyah*) or as an irreducible quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*), the two terms being virtually interchangeable.

We are now in a better position to determine what kind of *ma'nā* pure quiddity amounts to. Since it is fully intelligible in itself and unconnected to anything else, it amounts to a kind of abstract, intellectual, and general or universal object in the human intellect. It differs from the imaginative and estimative *ma'ānī*, which are, in contrast, tied to a specific and individual thing. Thus, the ewe apprehends the *ma'nā* of 'this' individual wolf; not of wolves in general. But the *ma'nā* of 'wolf' in general in the human intellect is an intelligible and universal notion. The upshot is that Avicenna makes identical claims for *ma'nā* (used in this sense) and *māhiyyah*: both can be envisaged in themselves, in abstraction and in isolation of external concomitants and of concrete or mental existence.¹⁵⁷ But while the universals may be regarded as *ma'ānī* in terms of their logical and epistemic consideration *and* their on-

(*ḥaqīqah*) are intimately connected in Avicenna's discussion of God, a feature that overlaps with his general metaphysics, where these terms can all refer to pure quiddity. For the interrelationship and semantic overlap of these terms, see Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 202–205; *Introduction*, I.5, 28.13.

154 The term *ma'nā* in Avicenna's philosophy also carries ontological connotations; those connected with mental existence are discussed here, while those connected with concrete existence are discussed in chapter III.

155 Avicenna, *Notes*, 61.7, section 49.

156 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.7, 43.4–12.

157 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.7, 43.15–44.3. Avicenna's move to refer to quiddity in itself as a meaning—or more precisely a 'quidditative meaning,' which is the translation I opted for here—has the effect of shifting the emphasis away from quiddity as an entitative or substantial thing and toward its status as a conceptual object or logical notion. In both *kalām* and *falsafah*, one of the core senses of *ma'nā* is 'meaning' (as in the meaning of a word or sentence) as well as 'intention' (the intent underlying a statement or sentence). R.M. Frank has shown convincingly that in the *kalām* context, *ma'nā* fulfills an important role in the nominal dimension of theological discussions about language, grammar, and ontology. It may refer to the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, to intentions, as well as to the referents conveyed by human language. These are relevant to the discussion here, insofar as they enlighten an important aspect of quiddity or essence, which is to be informative and a conveyor of meaning in the mind (it encapsulates the 'whatness' and definition of a thing) and of intent (insofar as a quiddity is related to conception and cognition). But, as I argue, this logical and conceptual plane of *ma'nā* is not incompatible with its having an ontological dimension as well.

tological status, that is, as objects of logic and ontology/metaphysics respectively, the use of the term *ma'nā* in connection with quiddity in itself emphasizes its logical and epistemic dimension and would appear to say nothing definitive concerning its ontological status. There is no implication that we are dealing in this case with a mental existent proper. As a corollary, the problem of extensionality between the notions of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* can be applied in a similar way to the relation of *wujūd* and *ma'nā*. With that being said, Avicenna's emphasis on the essential and intrinsic intelligibility of pure quiddity *qua ma'nā*, or rather *qua ma'nā 'aqlī*, would suggest that it has a certain positive ontological status in the intellect. In that sense, *ma'nā* goes much further than *i'tibār* in conveying a sense of intellectual entitiveness or even of intellectual existence. In that regard it is to be connected with other terms Avicenna ascribes to pure quiddity, such as *ma'qūl*. This is suggested by a passage in *Notes* that refers to pure essence as a *ma'nā* that is actualized or realized in the mind:

It is not possible for [pure] animal's being [pure] animal [*kawn al-ḥayawān ḥayawānan*] to become varied [or multiple]. Animalness does not become varied inasmuch as it is animalness, because this quidditative meaning is realized in itself [*li-anna ḥādḥā l-ma'nā yaḥṣulu bi-dhātihī*].¹⁵⁸

In this passage Avicenna is presumably referring to the realization or existence of pure quiddity in the mind. What is significant is not only the statement regarding the constancy and irreducibility of pure quiddity, which cannot become variegated or multiple (*lā yaṣṣihu an yakhtalifa*), but also the master's observation that it is realized in the mind *in itself or through its very essence (bi-dhātihī)*.

Furthermore, one observes that in Text 5 Avicenna extends the term *ma'nā* to encompass the extrinsic concomitants that attach to quiddity in itself. Not only is pure quiddity a *ma'nā*, in abstraction from actual existence, but the various concomitants (*lawāzīm*) of quiddity are also described as *ma'ānī*.¹⁵⁹ In other words, there are secondary *ma'ānī* that can be added to the foundational *ma'nā qua* quidditative meaning.¹⁶⁰ These *ma'ānī*, unlike the core quidditative meaning, are extrinsic and non-constitutive. In the passage above, Avicenna mentions “the general” and “the specific” as meanings liable to be added to (*ma'nā zā'id 'alā*) quiddity in itself, but we

¹⁵⁸ Avicenna, *Notes*, 394, section 699. Notice the expression *kawn al-ḥayawān ḥayawānan*, which seems modelled directly on the Mu'tazilite manner of referring to the Attribute of the Essence (e.g., *kawn al-jawhar jawharan*).

¹⁵⁹ This holds true of the constitutive, inner concomitants that make up quiddity as well as of the external concomitants that are added to it or connected with it. Avicenna sometimes confusedly describes both the internal, constitutive elements of quiddity and its external, non-constitutive aspects by means of the term ‘concomitants’ (*lawāzīm*), so that care should be taken in clarifying its sense in each case. The former shall be examined later, and I will focus here on the latter, since the present aim is to clarify how *ma'nā* relates to mental existence.

¹⁶⁰ Avicenna, *Introduction*, 65.18–19; 66.7–11, where the term *ma'nā* is used repeatedly.

know from other passages that these also include all the external concomitants of quiddity, including oneness, multiplicity, universality, particularity, and even existence. As Avicenna pointedly remarks in *Categories*, existence (*wujūd*) is not a genus and is not univocal. It does not indicate “a meaning [*ma'nā*] intrinsic to the quiddities of things,” but rather something extrinsic or external (*khārij*) that “follows” and is “concomitant to them” (*yalḥaqu, yalzamu, amr lāzim, amr lāḥiq*).¹⁶¹ Although it is not explicitly spelled out, the inference is that the intrinsic or irreducible meaning, the *ma'nā*, is quiddity in itself and whatever is constitutive of it. As for existence, it attaches to this quidditative meaning or *ma'nā* as an external concomitant. The intrinsic or irreducible quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) of things is therefore pure quiddity or essence unconnected with existence, while existence is a concomitant that qualifies quiddity or essence from the outside. The implication therefore seems to be that existence is not a *ma'nā* in the sense in which quiddity is: it is a *ma'nā* that is added to quiddity in itself from the outside, together with the other external concomitants that attach to essence.

To recap, the term *ma'nā*, when applied to quiddity in itself, conveys the meaning or idea of an essence (e.g., horse) in abstraction from mental existence, or at least of the kind of mental existence associated with the universal concept. For existence of this kind consists of mental concomitants (*lawāzim*) and additional meanings (*ma'ānī*) that are external and additional to the quidditative meaning and, hence, subsequent to it. Pure quiddity *qua ma'nā* is thus disentangled from any considerations of existence, as well as from any connection with concrete and mental attributes. It puts the emphasis on the irreducible meaning and conceptuality of a thing. When the term *ma'nā* is used in connection with quiddity in itself, it refers solely to the irreducible meaning made up of the internal, constitutive parts of quiddity, and hence, to its definition. But when it is used to describe the universals, it refers to the quidditative meaning together with its external concomitants. These other meanings that attach to it can also be regarded as extraneous *ma'ānī* combined with the core quidditative *ma'nā* (with the sum of these *ma'ānī* resulting in a single, synthetic *ma'nā*). This means that the *ma'nā* of pure quiddity is logically and essentially simple and prior when compared to the universal considered as an aggregate of *ma'ānī*. The universal amounts to a synthesis of the various *ma'ānī* and *lawāzim* that constitute it. Avicenna describes the various external and non-constitutive concomitants of quiddity as *ma'ānī* that are superadded to (*zā'id 'alā*) the quidditative mean-

161 Avicenna, *Categories*, II.1, 61–62; cf. Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, III.3, 106.12–13, where the same expression *amr lāzim* is applied to oneness and used to describe its necessary concomitance from essence. For the terms *lāzim* and *lāḥiq*, see also Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 615–616. I intentionally leave out the issue of whether these comments apply solely to things in the mind or can be extended to include extramental existents as well; this issue is tackled in chapter III.

ing.¹⁶² As a consequence of Avicenna's theory of concept formation, a synthesis of various *ma'ānī* needs to occur in order for a new *ma'nā* to develop. There are therefore important gradations underlying Avicenna's use of the term *ma'nā* in the context of his epistemology.¹⁶³

In a critical passage of *Introduction* I.12, Avicenna proceeds to break down these various components and stages for the purpose of didactic clarity. He explains in detail how the universal is formed or fashioned in the mind, and how it is to be distinguished from the meaning or nature of pure quiddity. In order to do so, he introduces another set of distinctions that have a direct bearing on these points, but which he claims is commonly used by philosophers in order to treat the five universal predicates (genus, species, differentia, property, and accident) and differentiate between them. These distinctions are between 'the natural' (*al-ṭabī'ī*), 'the logical' (*al-manṭiqī*), and 'the intellectual' (*al-'aqlī*). What is particularly striking is that Avicenna implements this framework in order to discuss not the difference between these five universals *qua* universals, but rather between universal genus and species, on the one hand, and pure quiddity *qua* nature, on the other. Again, the implication is that a nature is extensionally broader than a universal. In that chapter, Avicenna goes to quite some length to explain the process by which the universal *ma'nā* is elaborated in the human mind: quiddity in itself, *qua* nature (*ṭabī'ah*) or 'the natural,' combines with 'the logical' or with universality as expressed by logical genus or spe-

162 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.18–19; 66.7–11. In the latter passage, the master provides an analogy between how form inheres in the bed and how whiteness inheres in cloth, on the one hand, to how commonality or universality and genusness combine with the pure quiddity animalness in the mind, on the other. The master habitually speaks of universality, oneness, and plurality as the main concomitants to be added to quiddity in itself in the mind, but he sometimes includes existence as well. This would make existence itself one of the necessary concomitants of quiddity. Hence, although one might not embrace the idea that Avicenna regarded existence as being added to essence in the concrete world, there is no doubt that this holds with regard to mental existence. Moreover, one may wonder whether existence is really a distinct concomitant added to quiddity or, rather, a state that arises when the other concomitants—chief among which are universality, oneness, multiplicity—arise in the mind alongside quiddity. In other words, is mental existence the result of a synthetic process of these concomitants attaching to pure quiddity or is it itself a distinct concomitant? Avicenna seems to hold the latter view.

163 These points should be connected to the previous discussion regarding the human mind's ability to unify and divide concepts at will; in this case, various *ma'ānī* can be combined to create new concepts. Avicenna's use of the term *ma'nā* in Text 5 in connection with pure quiddity and its various accidents finds an important precedent in the works of his Christian predecessor Yaḥyā b. 'Adī. Yaḥyā employs the term *ma'nā* to refer to an aspect of 'pure' or 'absolute' quiddity, as well as to other mental intentions that accrue to this pure quiddity. According to Yaḥyā, therefore, the *ma'nā* 'human being' or 'animal' is neither universal nor particular, and universality is an additional *ma'nā* added to it in the mind. What is more, Yaḥyā outlines a threefold distinction of essence or form in terms of a *ma'nā* that can be in particulars, in the mind, or taken absolutely (*muṭlaq*); see Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 153–157. In brief, what is striking is not only the doctrinal parallels between these two thinkers, but also their shared reliance on the term *ma'nā* to describe these various aspects of essence.

cies, to form ‘the intellectual,’ that is, the universal, intelligible concept. Avicenna’s reliance on this nomenclature closely mirrors his use of the term *ma’nā* in connection with concept formation, since each one of these three stages can be described as a distinct *ma’nā* or meaning in that process: the *ma’nā* of quiddity in itself combines with the *ma’nā* of the logical universal to produce the *ma’nā* of the universal intelligible. What is particularly important here is the fact that these various aspects of quiddity—the natural, the logical, and the intellectual—are themselves described as notions or meanings (*ma’ānī*), very much in line with the other texts that were examined thus far. These various *ma’ānī* combine to compose the universal quiddity, so that there is a progression from quiddity in itself or nature (*ṭabī’ah*) *qua ma’nā*, to the logical genus *qua ma’nā*, to, finally, the universal quiddity *qua ma’nā*.

This threefold scheme, which Avicenna appears to have inherited from late-antique sources, provides the conceptual framework for his discussion of quiddity in much of *Introduction* I.12.¹⁶⁴ Briefly put, these terms refer to different ways of considering quiddity and of describing it according to its relation to the concrete and mental concomitants. Nature (*al-ṭabī’ah*), and occasionally the natural (*al-ṭabī’ī*), designates in Avicennian nomenclature pure quiddity or quiddity in itself, presumably in reference to its foundational status for each existent, but without its adjoining concomitants. Nature, for Avicenna, is quiddity divested from its concrete and mental attributes, and in that sense it is used interchangeably with the expressions pure quiddity and reality (*ḥaqīqah*).¹⁶⁵ Note, however, that Avicenna uses the term *ṭabī’ah* to refer to pure quiddity *both* in the concrete world *and* in the mind. So nature is pure quiddity considered either in an extramental or mental context. This has important epistemological and ontological implications that will be discussed later on. Next is the logical (*al-manṭiqī*), which refers to the attribute of universality that attaches to the nature or pure quiddity in the mind together with the notions of genusness or speciesness. Thus, for instance, the natures ‘animalness’ and ‘humanness’ become universal logical notions when they combine with ‘genusness’ and ‘speciesness’ respectively in the mind. According to this process, ‘the logical’ attaches to nature or ‘the natural’ to constitute the universal, which is called in this case ‘the intellectual’

¹⁶⁴ This terminology is analyzed in Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, and idem, *Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals*. For the late-antique background, see Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 128 ff.; idem, *Universals Transformed*; and de Libera, *La querelle*, 230 ff.

¹⁶⁵ See Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 202–205, where these technical terms are used by the master. There is therefore a wide gap in the way Avicenna and the Ash’arite *mutakallimūn* construe the term *ḥaqīqah* and how it relates to existence. While it denotes essence or quiddity for Avicenna, for the latter, it refers to actual existence. Witness, for example, Juwaynī’s definition in his *Summa*: “The essential reality of an entity is existence; existence is not a meaning superadded to essence [*ḥaqīqat al-dhāt al-wujūd wa-laysa l-wujūd ma’nā zā’id ‘alā l-dhāt*],” in Frank, *The Ash’arite Ontology*, 175. Cf. Bahmanyār in his *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 11.16–18: existence is related to (or added to, *muḍāf ilā*) and exterior to (*khārij*) the true nature (*ḥaqīqah*) of quiddity.

(*al-‘aqlī*).¹⁶⁶ However, the term ‘intellectual,’ which is used widely by Avicenna in his discussion of quiddity in *Introduction*, is inherently ambiguous. For it can refer either specifically to the universal, *qua* concept that actually exists in the mind, or it can be applied more loosely to any of the previous three aspects of quiddity, including ‘the nature’ or ‘natural’ and ‘the logical.’ In the case of nature or the natural, the implication could be that the nature that exists in the concrete individuals can be abstracted by the mind and contemplated in abstraction from the concrete concomitants. In that sense, this nature is intellectual. As for ‘the logical,’ it is plainly intellectual in the sense that it has no correspondence in the extramental world and is a consideration of universality produced by the thinking mind. In order to avoid potential misunderstandings, I find it useful to distinguish between two uses of the term ‘*aqlī*’ by Avicenna: a general sense, or ‘*aqlī*¹’, which refers to meanings or intentions in the mind without any clear entailment of intellectual existence; and ‘*aqlī*²’, which is used to refer specifically to the universal mental existent.

Pondering a moment longer on this important term is advisable, since it is directly relevant to the present query. Notice that the universal mental existent in the strong sense, or ‘*aqlī*²’, is at root a *combination* or *synthesis* of these distinctions, namely, ‘quiddity in itself’ or ‘nature’ taken as ‘*aqlī*¹’ together with ‘the logical’ also taken as ‘*aqlī*¹’. This synthesis yields the universal quiddity taken *qua* intellectual existent (‘*aqlī*²’). For instance, universal animal is a synthesis, so to speak, of the nature ‘animalness or animal in itself’ (which can be described as ‘*aqlī*¹’, as being merely in the intellect but not *qua* universal existent) with the logical genus (*al-jīns al-mantiqī*, which is also ‘*aqlī*¹’). Together they produce ‘universal animal genus’ or ‘the intellectual genus’ (*al-jīns al-‘aqlī*), which is both the universal aspect of quiddity and a mental existent in the strong sense (and hence ‘*aqlī*²’). Hence, just as the universal is a composite of various meanings (*ma‘ānī*), it is also a composite of various intellectual (‘*aqlī*’) aspects or considerations. This process of mental synthesis and concept formation implies prior and posterior notions. Since the universal is a combination of the natural and the logical, it is posterior and follows these considerations essentially and conceptually. The precedence and autonomy of the meaning of pure quiddity (or nature) help to explain why Avicenna distinguishes sharply the intellectual, ‘*aqlī*²’, *qua* full-blown mental existent, from nature and the logical; these are different meanings, *ma‘ānī*, which also correspond to distinct entities in the mind.¹⁶⁷ The *ma‘nā* of the nature or pure quiddity is the starting point of the various conceptual stages underlying the formation of the universal consideration of quiddi-

¹⁶⁶ Avicenna, *Notes*, 61.1–2, section 49: “Genusness inasmuch as it is genusness [*al-jīnsiyyah min haythu hiya jīnsiyyah*], if it is considered not in a specific way, such as [when it is connected] with body or animal, for instance, or with something else—that is, among the notions that attach to them [viz., the quiddities]—is [called] ‘the logical genus’ [*hiya l-jīns al-mantiqī*].” Cf. *Notes*, 56, section 40; and 60, section 47, where Avicenna explains that genusness (*jīnsiyyah*) and speciesness (*na-w’iyyah*) are other than pure quiddity.

¹⁶⁷ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 67.10–11.

ty. It is abstracted by the mind and represents the core meaning to which universality attaches. As for the logical/*mantiqī* aspect of quiddity, it is an operation unfolding in the human mind, but it is not ontologically tantamount to universal quiddity. It is, in effect, located somewhere between quiddity in itself and universal quiddity, and it is a requisite attribute or concomitant for the full-fledged universal to emerge in the mind. This mental ordering and sequentiality explains Avicenna's statement to the effect that the universal intellectual existent, or 'aqli², "follows [or is a concomitant, *lāzim*] and is connected with [*muqārin*]" the logical meaning, although the two are not identical.¹⁶⁸ For the intellectual existent, or 'aqli², has a substrate/subject and a logical genusness and universality, and, hence, is composite and synthetic. It is distinct from quiddity in itself and logical genus or genusness *per se*.¹⁶⁹

Hence, inasmuch as 'the natural,' 'the logical,' and 'the intellectual' can all be described as mental notions, as being conceivable or apprehended by the mind, they all correspond to notions or meanings (*ma'ānī*) in the mind. But this point is intertwined with ontological considerations as well, since at least one of them corresponds to a mental existent: namely, the intellectual in the sense of 'aqli². Finally, if there is an existing mental concept of pure quiddity in the mind, it would correspond to 'the natural.'¹⁷⁰ What is more, these various *ma'ānī*, like the various *i'tibārāt* of quiddity, can be associated or dissociated at will. The crucial upshot is that, just as we can have an *i'tibār* of pure quiddity that does not correspond to the *i'tibār* of universal quiddity, we can know the *ma'nā* of pure quiddity as distinct from the *ma'nā* of the universal. In addition, the *ma'nā* of the universal is itself a combination of the natural and logical *ma'ānī*. Finally, while all three *ma'ānī* are loosely intellectual or mental, the natural or nature in addition has a *ma'nā* that is not restricted to the mind, given its role in establishing a relation between the mind and external objects. In a sense, this *ma'nā* of nature can be said to exist in the concrete individuals. I shall return to this feature of Avicenna's doctrine later on in chapter III.

One important implication of the foregoing is that Avicenna regards what I have called the 'quidditative meaning,' that is, the *ma'nā* of quiddity in itself, as conceptually and essentially *preceding* the full-fledged mental universal being. It is prior to the mental universal insofar as the quidditative meaning needs to combine with other meanings (*ma'ānī*) and concomitants (*lawāzim*) in order to become a universal mental existent. The quidditative meaning itself is simple and, hence, the starting

¹⁶⁸ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 67.12–13.

¹⁶⁹ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 68.17–69.1. In *Notes*, 56, section 40, Avicenna argues that genusness (*jinsiyyah*) and speciesness (*naw'iyyah*) differ from pure quiddity; like universality or oneness, they are mental external concomitants added to quiddity. At *Notes*, 60, section 47, the master distinguishes between genusness and universality on the grounds that if the two were identical, universality could not be ascribed also to speciesness.

¹⁷⁰ This last point captures the ambiguity of the concept of nature or *ṭabī'ah*, which is used by Avicenna primarily to refer to quiddity in concrete beings, but which also by extension refers to the quiddity or nature abstracted from these concrete beings in the mind.

point or foundation of the various stages required to produce a mental existent. However, this process does not prevent one also from regarding each one of the universal concepts as one and simple in a certain way. In fact, Avicenna repeatedly stresses that the intelligibles are one and simple. As in the case of the separate intellects, however, this statement requires qualification: a universal is a unitary mental entity when regarded from one angle, but complex and synthetic when regarded from another.¹⁷¹ Avicenna's reliance on the term *ma'nā* to describe these various stages and to designate pure quiddity specifically is noteworthy, because these stages correspond neither to the final mental universal state of essence, nor strictly to its state of existent in the concrete world. Rather, this term exposes the status of quiddity in itself before it assumes the status of full-fledged mental existent. Consequently, pure quiddity can be regarded as an irreducible quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*). This irreducible quidditative meaning can be conceived by the human mind in abstraction from anything else and in isolation of universality and particularity. It is therefore also distinct from concrete and mental existence. However, it was shown that it also underlies the universal aspect of quiddity. By replacing the term *māhiyyah* with the term *ma'nā*, and by explicitly dissociating both from actual composite mental existence, Avicenna is in effect stating that the consideration (*i'tibār*) of quiddity in itself that is apprehended in the human mind is a *ma'nā*, a quidditative meaning, that is present in the human intellect without it amounting to or constituting a case of actual composite mental existence on a par with the universal. In the final analysis, it would seem that there are *ma'ānī* or quidditative meanings that are present, or even possibly exist, in the mind in abstraction from the various properties traditionally associated with mental existence and that would stand in contradistinction to the universal existents.¹⁷² Yet again, these points bring us to the threshold of the problem of how these special entities relate to the sphere of mental existence.

171 It is perhaps to this pure, simple quiddity that a passage of *Notes*, 409.12, refers; there one finds the statement that “the intellectual meaning [*ma'nā*] does not divide according to a multiplicity; it has a simple essence (*ahādī l-dhāt*).” It is important to keep in mind in this regard that the simplicity of the universals will be relative, especially when compared to that of pure quiddity. For the universal can be subjected to analytical thought and broken down into pure essence, on the one hand, and the various mental concomitants that attach to it, on the other.

172 At this juncture, it is worth invoking the beginning of *Metaphysics* I.5, where Avicenna introduces ‘the thing’ (*al-shay'*)—another technical term denoting essence that is closely related to quiddity (*māhiyyah*)—as a primary notion and, hence, as one whose meaning is immediately and intuitively grasped. Note that Avicenna also describes the thing/*al-shay'* as “a meaning” (*ma'nā*), and, further, as a primary and irreducible meaning grounded in the human rational soul. As such, it can be understood intuitively in abstraction from the other meaning of ‘the existent’ (*al-mawjūd*). By virtue of being primary and indefinable, ‘the existent’ and ‘the thing’ represent irreducible epistemological notions or meanings (*ma'ānī*), and as such they are apprehended in abstraction from the various properties that may attach to them when mental existents are ultimately constituted. This suggests that ‘the thing’ *qua* primary notion discussed in *Metaphysics* could correspond to the third aspect of quiddity Avicenna mentions in *Introduction* I.5, which can be considered ‘in itself’ and in abstraction from concrete and mental existence. In brief, it is certainly not a coincidence that Avicenna in *Introduction*

Heretofore the analysis has focused on *ma'nā* as a meaning or notion in the mind, an aspect that connects smoothly with the epistemic, logical, and conceptual dimension of this term and its relation to *māhiyyah*. However, it is noteworthy that Avicenna often extends *ma'nā* to his descriptions of the exterior world and applies it to the concrete, individual existents. In this context, the quidditative *ma'nā* is predicated of concrete beings and is used interchangeably with the notions of essential nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and reality (*ḥaqīqah*), all of which are supposed to indicate *the quiddity of the concrete being*. But is Avicenna really implying in those passages that *ma'nā* has an entitative reality or existence outside the mind, or is he merely suggesting that the conceptual analysis of quiddity allows us to project logical meanings and notions onto the concrete beings? A tentative resolution of this complicated problem must be deferred until chapter III. For now suffice to say that the potential entitative aspect of *ma'nā* is most pronounced in Avicenna's discussion of the common nature in concrete beings. For the master at times seems to imply that the quidditative *ma'nā* that exists in the mind also has an entitative grounding in the concrete world.¹⁷³ Witness, for example, a passage from *Salvation* (Text 11, discussed more fully below), which describes an existent *ma'nā* in mental and concrete beings: there Avicenna claims that “a quidditative meaning [*al-ma'nā*] has an existence [*wujūd*] in concrete reality and an existence in the soul.” In fact, there are many other passages in Avicenna's metaphysical works where the term *ma'nā* seems to lend itself to an entitative interpretation, rather than to a merely logical one. In *Metaphysics*, I.2, Avicenna explains that what is investigated in the science of metaphysics is *ma'nā*, regardless of whether this *ma'nā* needs matter to exist. Some lines below, he adds that the science of metaphysics studies the mode of existence (*naḥw al-wujūd*) of things (*umūr*). These things “all have in common the fact that

I.12 refers to the quiddity of animal in itself as a *ma'nā*, which is the same word he uses to describe ‘the thing’ as a primary meaning in *Metaphysics* I.5. By extrapolation, if ‘the thing’ or quiddity is a primary and irreducible meaning (*ma'nā*) distinct from the concept of existence, and if all quiddities in themselves (e. g., animal) are such meanings (*ma'ānī*), then it is possible that these essential meanings would correspond (as a class) to the third consideration of essence Avicenna sometimes adumbrates, that is, essence taken ‘in itself.’ Here the distinction between the thing and pure quiddities, on the one hand, and the existent, on the other, would not deprive the thing and the pure quiddities of an ontological status in the mind; the distinction would be primarily intentional, insofar as we would be intentionally aware of existence when thinking ‘the existent’ and not necessarily when thinking ‘the thing’; but both objects would exist in the mind. This interpretation, which revolves around the key term *ma'nā*, brings together Avicenna's discussion in *Introduction*, *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1 in an integrated manner, and shows the degree of intertwinement between his logical and metaphysical theories.

173 There are two contexts in which this tendency materializes in the Avicennian corpus: first, with regard to the separate, immaterial beings, where the use of the term *ma'nā* is particularly ambiguous, given that, in them, thought and existence are indistinguishable or, at the very least, closely intertwined; and, second, with regard to pure quiddity, whose intelligibility for Avicenna is primordial, but which is frequently located in the concrete beings. An extensive study of this key term in the Arabic philosophical tradition is still lacking.

the mode of investigation pertaining to them is in the direction of a *ma'nā* whose existence is not in matter."¹⁷⁴ This passage is admittedly ambiguous and could refer to the meanings that are extracted from concrete beings and constructed by the analytical mind, without these meanings or notions having to exist in the concrete world. But the phrasing of this passage alternately and more likely suggests that these *ma'ānī* could be said to exist in the real, concrete world, so that they would not be completely mind-dependent after all. This coheres with a more literal and direct reading of Avicenna's statement. Construed along this line, this passage suggests that all existents, even material things, have a *ma'nā* that exists in or with them and that does not require matter for its existence. Likewise, in *Metaphysics* IV.2, when Avicenna refers to the existent and nonexistent *ma'ānī*, he does not seem to restrict them to notions in the mind, since he explains that the existent *ma'nā* exists "not in a subject," which is the master's definition of substance. In other words, the *ma'nā* that exists not in a subject presumably exists in the concrete world. Finally, in VI.4, Avicenna notes that form is said "of every *ma'nā* in actuality" and infers from this that "the separate substances are forms."¹⁷⁵ Here again, *ma'nā* can only awkwardly be translated as 'meaning' or 'notion' in the mind and would seem, rather, to refer to something substantial or entitative and actual in the concrete world. Thus, in many passages, Avicenna identifies *ma'nā* with the quiddities in concrete beings, whose exact ontological status nevertheless remains to be clarified. It is this particular—and admittedly secondary—use of the term *ma'nā* that suggests a possible link with *kalām* usages, where *ma'nā* is grounded in exterior reality and also establishes a link with mental descriptions and attribution. Hence, the way Avicenna handles this term at the very least raises the possibility of an entitative grounding of *ma'nā* in the concrete world and also broaches the question of how the *ma'nā* in the mind relates to the *ma'nā* outside the mind.¹⁷⁶

So far, the analysis has shown (a) that Avicenna frequently describes quiddity in itself as a *ma'nā*; (b) that a *ma'nā* in this context is chiefly an irreducible quidditative meaning and notion that is conceived in the mind and that has a correspondence with the nature that exists in concrete individual things; this quidditative meaning also corresponds to the essential definitions of things (i.e., their *ḥadd*) (c) that other external meanings (*ma'ānī*, which also correspond to external concomitants,

174 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.2, 16.7–8; translated by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 12.

175 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VI.4, 282.6–7.

176 Many passages in Avicenna, e.g., *Notes*, 153, sections 217 and 218 (among many others) indicate an entitative understanding of the term *ma'nā*. This tension was inherited by later thinkers. For instance, Jurjānī, who reconciled philosophical and theological elements in his works, recognizes the primarily mental sphere of *ma'nā*, but also connects it with quiddity and true reality, likely as a result of Avicenna's influence. As he explains: inasmuch as it is something designated by language it is a *ma'nā*; inasmuch as it is something cognized, it is a *mafḥūm*; inasmuch as it responds to the question 'what is it?' it is a *māhiyyah*; and inasmuch as it is something actual in the concrete, exterior world, it is a *ḥaqīqah*; see Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 274.

lawāzim) can be added to this core, quidditative *ma'nā* to constitute the complex universal mental existent. Additionally, given (c), it appears (d) that the fundamental *ma'nā* underlies, essentially precedes, and is even constitutive of, the universal aspect of quiddity. The analysis also suggests (e) that the Avicennian notion of *ma'nā* may be extensionally broader than that of the mental existent as customarily defined (i.e., the conditioned, composite universal intelligibles), since the *ma'nā* of nature or pure quiddity *underlies* the universal intelligible and is a condition for its existence, even though it is not identical with it and can be envisaged on its own. Hence, insofar as it is mental, it is an intellectual concept ('*aqli*¹'), which is nevertheless to be distinguished from the composite concept of the universal existent ('*aqli*²'). One can conclude from the foregoing that Avicenna seems to be carefully negotiating a new mental status for pure quiddity: *it is intelligible and intellectual, without being identifiable with a composite universal existent in the mind*. Finally, there are hints that Avicenna, like earlier and contemporary *mutakallimūn*, applied the term *ma'nā* both to mental and concrete entities. Since this term is applied to pure quiddity, and since Avicenna does posit the existence of quiddity in the mind and in the concrete world, this is not altogether surprising, although it will require clarification. In the meantime, it should be pointed out that Avicenna's tendency to extend *ma'nā* to the concrete world to describe real entities may not be due only to an influence coming from *kalām*. It may stem also from the homological use of the Greek term εἶδος—and the equivalent Arabic term *ṣūrah*—to describe objects in the mind (i.e., the mental forms) as well as the substantial forms immanent in concrete beings. For Avicenna, *ma'nā qua* quiddity is closely related to both aspects.

At any rate, we are now in a better position to try to answer the theoretical questions that were raised at the beginning of the terminological analysis, namely, whether quiddity in itself is a 'nothing' or a 'something,' and, if so, how this 'something' relates to mental existence. Quiddity in itself is 'something' in that it may be defined as a consideration, a form, an intelligible, an 'intellectual' ('*aqli*') object, and, most importantly, an irreducible and simple quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*). In that sense, it is clearly a mental entity, which is conceivable and conveys information, and so is productive of knowledge and science in the mind. Furthermore, while it is constitutive of universal mental existents, Avicenna does not want us to conceive of this *ma'nā* as a 'standard' mental existent on a par with the composite universal concept. In this connection, the foregoing remarks raise a tantalizing hypothesis concerning the ontological status of *ma'nā*. This is supported by the previous observations on the terms *i'tibār*, *ṣūrah*, and *ma'qūl*, which Avicenna employs to describe pure quiddity. It was suggested that quiddity in itself could possess a distinct subsistence or existence in the mind that would nevertheless be distinct from that of the full-fledged universal. If this hypothesis proved to be correct, it would to some extent entail a redefinition of the category of mental existence in Avicenna. This intricate question will be tackled in earnest later on. Here one should note a relevant and interesting case study concerning Avicenna's application of the term *ma'nā* to the divine essence. Avicenna claims that God possesses a *ma'nā*, a quidditative meaning,

which is unique and known to Him alone. Since God is pure existence, and since any quiddity that may be posited of Him is identical with His necessary existence, this divine *ma'nā* would, by the same token, be identical with God's necessary existence. So the quidditative *ma'nā* posited of God exists in God *qua* this existence, and God knows His *ma'nā* as pure existence. In other words, God's *ma'nā* necessitates the postulation of a unique and distinct mode of existence. This divine existence clearly is not comparable to the mode of existence that characterizes contingent beings. These remarks raise the possibility that this divine quidditative meaning or entity, this divine *ma'nā*, corresponds to a special kind of existence. It also raises the possibility that something similar could apply to quiddity in itself, namely, that its *ma'nā* would correspond to a special mode of existence that would not be collapsible with that of the conditioned and contingent beings Avicenna routinely talks about.

1.4 Conclusion

Several important points stand out clearly at this juncture. The previous terminological investigation showed beyond doubt that quiddity in itself is an object of consideration in the human mind and can be apprehended by the human mind in a *rational* and *intellectual* way. As a result, it is an intellectual concept and form. *Qua* perfectly abstract *i'tibār* and *ma'nā*, pure quiddity should be distinguished from the other *i'tibārāt* and *ma'ānī* that are located in the lower psychological faculties, such as the imagination and estimation, and which are tied to individual things and their accidents and do not amount to purely abstract mental objects. What is more, quiddity taken in itself is a concept that is distinct from the complex universal (made up of pure quiddity and a cluster of mental attributes), since it is conceived of in abstraction from all mental concomitants, including universality, oneness, etc. In light of these points, one can conclude that pure quiddity is, at the very least, *epistemically and intellectually irreducible and distinct*. By epistemically irreducible, I mean that pure essence requires nothing else or nothing external to itself that would be more basic than itself in order to be intelligible and convey meaning or information. Since it is considered only in itself, neither the concrete nor the mental concomitants are necessary for the mind to apprehend it and cognize its fundamental meaning (*ma'nā*). Moreover, pure quiddity is epistemically irreducible, because it is conceivable in itself *even when* it is considered as a part of the complex existents, as in the case of the universal concept. This explains why Avicenna states at *Metaphysics* V.1.201.8 that it is possible to conceive of pure quiddity, “even when it is with other things” (*wa-in kāna ma'a ghayrihi*). By epistemically distinct, I mean that it is an object whose conception occurs in the mind as a separate and autonomous conceptual act and in abstraction from all other considerations. This, after all, is why Avicenna in *Introduction* I.2 includes it as one of three distinct “mental considerations” (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity. The epistemic dimension teased out above should come as no surprise if one recalls that whenever Avicenna broaches the topic of quid-

dity in itself, it is usually in connection with human psychology and the cognitive operations of the human soul. The technical terminology he uses to describe it—*i'tibār*, *ma'nā*, *ṣūrah ma'qūlah*, and *'aqlī*—is intentional or mind-related in nature and indicative of cognitive states or processes unfolding in the soul. The terminological evidence therefore strongly points to Avicenna's intention to lay out the epistemological and psychological implications of pure quiddity and to elucidate its role in human cognition. This terminology and the triplex consideration of essence is discussed both in his logical and metaphysical works. In light of these results, the intellectual status of pure quiddity as an object of thought seems beyond questioning.¹⁷⁷

The more intricate difficulty I began to address in this chapter, however, was whether quiddity in itself could be ascribed some kind of distinct mental existence, as Marmura briefly intimated. Some preliminary thoughts on this topic can be sketched purely on the basis of the previous terminological inquiry. Part of the issue at stake in the foregoing was to determine whether Avicenna's terminology of pure quiddity designates it as a full-fledged intellectual existent or as something lesser than that. Avicenna's tendency to refer to quiddity in itself as a consideration (*i'tibār*) could initially convey the impression that it is not to be located in the human intellect proper, but rather constitutes a lesser cognitive phenomenon, to be connected, perhaps, with the lower faculties of the human soul, such as imagination and/or estimation.¹⁷⁸ As was noted above, this position is hardly tenable. Were quiddity in itself sub-intellectual and to amount to a mere estimative phenomenon, as opposed to a real mental existent and intelligible, it would not constitute a real object of knowledge, since only intellectual concepts or *ma'qūlāt* produce real, scientific knowledge in the human soul according to Avicenna. But the master seems to regard the consideration of quiddity in itself as being fundamentally knowledge producing, since it informs us about the irreducible and distinct whatness, essence, and nature of a thing. It is a unified concept that arises in our mind from the essential definition. Its universality is merely an added intentionality or meaning to the effect that this essence can be predicated of and applied to many concrete instances. Consequently, it would make more sense to regard quiddity in itself, rather than the universal, as being connected with intellectual knowledge and the intellect in a fundamental way. Moreover, the terminological evidence accords with an analysis of the conceivability

¹⁷⁷ The commensurate nature of the evidence drawn from Avicenna's logical and metaphysical works is noteworthy. As Bertolacci has shown, there is much congruence between Avicenna's logical and metaphysical works, which were meant to function in a complementary manner. In these passages, three senses of quiddity can be identified: one corresponds to universal existents, the other to concrete existents, and one to quiddity in itself. That the third distinction of quiddity (quiddity in itself) discussed in *Metaphysics* corresponds to the one broached in *Introduction* is clear, given the similarity of the doctrinal and terminological evidence that appears in both passages.

¹⁷⁸ Goichon, *La distinction*, 92, had already noticed that, according to Avicenna, the *ma'ānī* appear already at the level of estimation.

of pure quiddity, which places it squarely in the camp of conceivable and possible notions, not in that of inconceivable and impossible notions or of imaginables. To Avicenna, what is conceivable must somehow exist in the intellect, so that a certain commensurability arises between intellectual conceivability and intellectual existence.

Alternatively, the term *i'tibār* could suggest that we are dealing with a rational operation or logical object, and even with an intellectual object, which, however, would not qualify as a full-blown universal intelligible and intellectual existent, because it fails to fulfill the criteria of intellectual existence, and also because it does not possess the concomitants associated with such a mode of existence. According to this approach, the consideration of quiddity in itself would not deserve the status of a mental or intellectual existent. It would stand in sharp contrast to universal quiddity, or to the quiddity associated with the universal mental existent, which amounts to an instance of true mental existence. But this hypothesis also runs into difficulty. Some of the terms Avicenna relies on are quite indicative of an ontological content: he describes quiddity in itself as a meaning or idea (*ma'nā*), an intelligible form (*ṣūrah ma'qūlah*), and more loosely as something intellectual (*'aqlī*), all of which suggest not just its location in the intellect proper, but possibly also its status as a mental existent of some kind. Recall in this connection that the terms *ma'nā* and *ṣūrah* can be used as synonyms of *ma'qūl* and mean a 'concept' and an 'intelligible.' Accordingly, the term *ma'nā/ma'ānī* appears frequently in the Greek to Arabic translations as an equivalent of *ma'qūlāt*. Avicenna seems to use these various terms interchangeably with regard to essence in the mind. Hence, to limit the terminological analysis of pure quiddity to the term *i'tibār*, as has been customary thus far, provides a lop-sided interpretation of the lexicographic evidence.¹⁷⁹

The foregoing remarks have shed some light on the relationship between pure quiddity and mental existence, even if the results we reached have been mostly negative. In other words, they tell us what pure essence in the mind *is not*. It should *not* be regarded as a mental existent according to the *standard* definition of universal mental existence Avicenna provides in his works. Although there is a sense in which quiddity in itself can be regarded as being intellectual, since it is a rational and conceivable object, it is not, a priori, a full-fledged mental existent, or, more precisely, it does not coincide with the usual criteria of mental existence the master outlines in his works.¹⁸⁰ Because it possesses none of the concomitants associated with

179 Previous scholarly analyses of Avicenna's terminology of quiddity in the mind, such as those by Izutsu and Rahman, have focused exclusively on the term *i'tibār* and thus provide a partial account of the evidence, which, moreover, does not put the emphasis on intellectuality.

180 Or with the criteria of mental existence modern scholars have outlined on behalf of Avicenna, and which necessarily include immateriality and universality. The claim that only universals—defined here as complex, synthetic, and intention-laden mental objects—can exist in the intellect is one frequently encountered in modern studies, but it is not one that Avicenna himself explicitly makes. But

mental existence, it would appear that quiddity simply cannot be a universal mental existent in the way this notion is habitually understood. In the process of showing this, the analysis also cast some light on the causality involved in the production of complex mental existents and on the mereological relation between them and quiddity in itself.

In hindsight, it appears that the technical terms Avicenna relies on to describe pure quiddity are consistent throughout his logical and metaphysical works. They designate it as an object or entity in the human mind, a cognitive state, and even possibly a distinct intellectual existent, although the last point remains to be established. While some of these terms are ontologically neutral and could be interpreted primarily along logical or conceptual lines—this is the case of *i'tibār* and *ma'nā*—others are more indicative of mental existence and substantiality—this is the case notably of *ṣūrah* and certainly of *ṣūrah ma'qūlah*. Taken on its own, the term *i'tibār* is more puzzling than anything else, but when it is subjected to minute analysis and juxtaposed to these other terms, a consistent picture of quiddity in itself as something entitative and ontologically grounded in the intellect that transcends a mere subjective and conceptual aspect slowly emerges. These points would in turn explain why Avicenna decides to refer to it as something *'aqlī* (intelligible or intellectual) in *Introduction* I.12, a term which would be hard to account for were quiddity something lesser than an intelligible form.¹⁸¹ In brief, then, the results attained in chapter II suggest that in addition to being *epistemically irreducible* and *distinct*, pure quiddity *could* also be *ontologically irreducible* and *distinct*, at the very least *with regard to its existence in the mind*. This issue needs to be further investigated.

Nevertheless, with regard to this particular point, the previous terminological analysis appears to have led us to an impasse. If one is to locate quiddity in itself in the intellect, as opposed to the lower faculties of the soul, and, moreover, if one is to regard it as an intellectual form and intelligible, as Avicenna himself suggests, then on what grounds would this consideration differ from that of universal quiddity, which is firmly grounded in the intellect and identified with the universal mental existents that the master describes at length in *Introduction*, *Metaphysics*, and other works? Furthermore, is it not contradictory to surmise that quiddity can be considered purely *in itself* and in abstraction from all other things, while at the same time being connected to existence in the mind? To answer these questions, the analytical focus must shift from *Introduction* I.2 to *Metaphysics* V.1–2, which introduces other crucial features of the problem of pure quiddity and also represents one of Avicenna's most protracted discussions of mental existence. Among the most important

we will see later on that pure quiddity is also a universal in a certain sense and that Avicenna recognizes various senses of universality.

181 Unlike some postclassical thinkers, it is unlikely that Avicenna uses this term to refer to mental objects that could loosely be said to be intellectual (*'aqlī*), while not fulfilling the criteria of mental existence. This appears to be a development that postdates Avicenna and especially of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

features he discusses in this section are (a) the distinction between quiddity in itself and universal quiddity; (b) the fact that pure quiddity somehow underlies both mental and extramental existents; and (c) that quiddity in itself possesses existence (*wujūd*) (whose exact nature or mode remains nevertheless to be elucidated). In brief, although the foregoing analysis has illuminated one negative aspect of the problem—denying quiddity in itself the status of a full-fledged universal existent—it has not generated sufficient insight into the question of its ontological status and whether it could be said to possess its own positive mode of existence in the mind. This issue is taken up below and also reassessed later in chapter IV.

2 Pure quiddity, universality, and mental existence

Let us take stock of the analysis conducted in the previous sections. One of Avicenna's principal objectives in *Introduction* I.2 is to maintain the epistemological and conceptual specificity and autonomy of quiddity in itself relative to other aspects of quiddity and to situate it within the framework of his logical and metaphysical system. This position is reaffirmed in *Introduction* I.12 and *Metaphysics* V.1–2, but there Avicenna complements his account with a typology of the universals and some valuable comments on mental existence. Avicenna holds that the mind can contemplate quiddity in itself in abstraction from mental and extramental existence by divesting it of its various accidents and concomitants, such as universality and particularity, oneness and plurality. Moreover, Avicenna believes that this consideration of pure quiddity is one of *three* different considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity that the human mind can envisage, the others being quiddity as a universal in the mind and quiddity embedded in concrete individuals in the extramental world. These three considerations or aspects of quiddity can be described as being intellectual or mental in a loose sense (*'aqlī¹*), because they are the product of human thinking and ratiocination. However, on first thought, only one of them amounts to a full-fledged mental existent (*'aqlī²*), namely, the consideration of universal quiddity. Avicenna also attempts a *relative* correlation between these three epistemological considerations and his twofold ontological scheme of mental and extramental existents. Quiddity as a universal in the mind corresponds to the mental existents (*al-mawjūdāt fī l-dhihn*), while quiddity combined with material accidents pertains to the individual concrete existents of the extramental world (*al-mawjūdāt fī l-a'yān*). This leaves quiddity in itself without a definite ontological correlative. At any rate, Avicenna describes quiddity in itself as the object of a mental consideration on a par with the two other aspects of quiddity. Because it is considered by or in the mind, quiddity in itself possesses a mental, and even an intellectual, state, even though designating it as such does not reveal anything specific about its ontological status and about its exact relationship to mental existence. If anything, Avicenna seems intent to separate this aspect of quiddity from the mental existent proper, which corresponds to the universal. But on what grounds is this distinction achieved and justified? What

are the main differences between pure quiddity and universal quiddity? And how do they bear on the issue of mental existence? In the following section, I intend to explore the Avicennian doctrine of mental existence as it pertains to pure quiddity and challenge some of the main assumptions regarding it that have been formulated in the modern literature on Avicenna.¹⁸²

Before embarking on this analytical journey, however, it is important to realize that there is a cluster of reasons why scholars have resisted attributing a special mental ontological status to pure quiddity. Providing some background on these interpretive trends and on the main arguments articulated in the postclassical Arabic literature will help to contextualize the present issue. The first position, embodied mostly in the Arabic theological or *kalām* tradition, simply denies the category of mental existence and regards only the extramental, concrete, and mind-independent entities as true existents. This position developed quite early in Islam with the theologian Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 935 CE), and it subsequently became a hallmark of the Ash‘arite School of theology. The *mutakallimūn* establish a dichotomy between mental entities, which they correlate with nonexistent (*ma‘dūmāt*), and concrete entities, which constitute the realm of the existents (*mawjūdāt*) proper. Since the Ash‘arites regard ‘the thing’ (*al-shay’*) and ‘the existent’ (*al-mawjūd*) as co-extensional, the only things they tolerate as truly existing will be those that correspond to the concrete entities. On this view, all things will be existents, and all existents will exist in the extramental, concrete world. With regard to the particular issue of mental existence, the Ash‘arites were joined by most Mu‘tazilites, who also denied mental existence as a full-fledged ontological category. However, unlike the Ash‘arites, the Mu‘tazilites regarded mental entities as nonexistent things, since they held that ‘the thing’ was extensionally broader than ‘the existent.’ In other words, things, for the Mu‘tazilites, can be either existent or nonexistent, so that mental objects are things, but do not truly exist. Regardless of this difference, these two theological schools rejected the doctrine that mental objects could amount to a class of existents proper and that mental existence was on a par with concrete existence. Consequently, the thinkers inscribed in these theological currents and willing to uphold its central tenets would be reluctant to ascribe any kind of mental existence to the pure quiddities posited by Avicenna, let alone to mental objects in general.¹⁸³

On this point, Avicenna and many of his followers depart sharply from the Ash‘arite and Mu‘tazilite theologians. As is well known, they not only acknowledge mental existents, but make them an integral aspect of their metaphysical and epistemological system, by correlating ‘the thing’ with ‘the existent,’ and by extending

182 The issue of mental existence and especially of what objects qualify as mental existents is presently at the forefront of much research in Avicenna and especially in the post-Avicennian tradition; in addition to the studies by Marmura, Black, and Tahiri, already mentioned, see Fazlloğlu, *Between Reality*, and the forthcoming book by this same author on this subject.

183 For Avicenna’s reaction to the *kalām* views on mental existence, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*, especially 105–113.

the latter notion to include the mental entities and concepts. Yet, interestingly, this did not prevent some postclassical thinkers strongly imbued with Avicennian philosophy from rejecting the theory of the mental existence of quiddity in itself. This is because even when the co-extensionality between ‘thing’ and ‘existent’ is granted, and even when these notions are made to include mental entities, there remain at the very least two compelling reasons for refusing to ascribe existence to pure quiddity. The first is the belief that the consideration of pure quiddity does not amount to an intellectual existent, because that consideration is sub-intellectual in nature and hence divested from true mental existence. This aspect of the problem, which I previously termed the faculty or intellectuality issue—i. e., determining whether the consideration of pure essence pertains to the intellect or to another, lower, psychological faculty—was tackled in the previous chapter.¹⁸⁴ Interestingly, however, this line of argument appears to have been rarely if ever embraced by later interpreters of Avicenna, who all seem to have implicitly recognized that the debate about pure quiddity was situated at the level of the intellect and rational thought.¹⁸⁵

The second argument, in contrast, is premised on the idea of the intellectuality of the consideration of pure quiddity, but shifts the focus on how the mental concomitants and accidents relate to quiddity in the mind. According to this view, the consideration of pure quiddity can be described as intellectual, but in the sense of merely logical or suppositional, and as excluding the conditions required for true intellectual existence. For the Avicennians, to exist in the mind or in the intellect means to exist with a definite set of mental properties. These mental properties qualify and condition concepts in the intellect in a manner comparable to the way material properties and accidents qualify exterior concrete beings. For example, the intelligible or intellectual concept of horse is characterized by universality, which, according to Avicenna, is a mental attribute attached to the quiddity horse. This enables us to conceive of horses in general and to predicate horseness of all concrete individual horses. Presumably, all concepts and true intellectual existents for the Avicennians are universal. In addition, they possess other accidents, such as oneness, actuality, etc. Hence, the Avicennians, while not entirely denying mental existents like the Ash‘arites, imposed some important constrictions on its meaning and devised a specific set of criteria to define them. This, in turn, could serve as a justification for denying that pure quiddity exists in the mind, since it is, by definition,

184 This position was to my knowledge not systematically articulated by postclassical thinkers, but it may be extrapolated on the grounds of some of their statements. For example, the expression *i’ti-bārāt ‘aqliyyah*, ‘intellectual considerations,’ which appears in some of the postclassical sources, suggests that some considerations were regarded as sub-intellectual and that there was therefore an implicit hierarchy of considerations pertaining to the human soul.

185 This, of course, should not be used as evidence to the effect that for Avicenna quiddity in itself exists in the intellect, but it does tell us something important about how the Avicennian tradition approached this question and can also help orient our analysis.

not qualified by and subjected to these accidents.¹⁸⁶ This background information helps us to delineate the issue at stake addressed in this chapter, which concerns how pure quiddity relates to the mental accidents described above and, hence, to the universal aspect of quiddity. In the postclassical philosophical sources, much of the debate about quiddity and mental existence revolves around the role of these mental accidents and concomitants and how they relate to pure quiddity.¹⁸⁷ Yet, since this issue finds its origin in the Avicennian works, it is all the more important to precisely outline the way in which Avicenna himself dealt with this problem. More specifically, one needs to inquire whether, on Avicenna's view, mental existence can be posited without corollary mental properties and concomitants.

2.1 The universal (*al-kullī*) and universality (*al-kullīyyah*) as a mental concomitant

Insight into this issue can be gained from *Metaphysics* V.1, which puts forth a detailed discussion of the relationship between quiddity and universality. This implies a shift from the general context of the essence/existence relationship as exposed in *Metaphysics* I.5 to the more focused query of the relation of quiddity and existence as this problem pertains to *mental existence specifically*.¹⁸⁸ In the course of this impor-

186 It is not clear how the argument concerning the *i'tibārī* nature of pure quiddity in the mind relates to that of the relation of quiddity to its mental concomitants, especially as these issues play out in the postclassical tradition. With regard to Avicenna's works, it seems justified to separate these two points, or at least frame them in terms of two distinct questions: is the *i'tibār* of pure quiddity intellectual in nature? And how can the concept of pure quiddity exist in the mind in abstraction from any mental concomitants? It is possible, however, that these two questions overlap already in Avicenna. For if one grants—for argument's sake—that this *i'tibār* would be sub-intellectual, then as a corollary it would not exist with the mental concomitants and criteria associated with a true universal concept, namely, immateriality and universality. But the main ambiguity in Avicenna and in much of the postclassical tradition is whether mental existence necessarily entails the presence of these concomitants. Since there are obviously intellectual *i'tibārāt* for Avicenna—and for some of his followers, such as Tūsī—the question can be reformulated as to whether each and every intellectual consideration would entail mental accidents on the model of universal quiddity. In view of these complications, and for clarity's sake, it seems more productive to separate both queries for the time being.

187 I address some aspects of the postclassical discussion about quiddity and mental accidents below. See also Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, who provides much insight into this issue.

188 Marmura provided valuable insight into the question of how universality relates to quiddity. He was also one of the first to realize that the main conceptual difficulty underlying quiddity in itself resides in understanding how it differs from the universal concept and, hence, what its relation to mental existence could be. As Marmura writes (*Quiddity and Universality*, 82): “A main ambiguity in his [Avicenna's] writings is the relation of the quiddity in itself to mental existence.” On those issues, I depart from Bertolacci, who regards *Metaphysics* I.5 as representing the foundational text on essence and existence. While this might be true on general terms, from the moment we identify the main problem as being that of the relation of quiddity in itself to mental existence, then we need to share our attention between *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1. The latter text explores this relationship in depth

tant chapter, Avicenna sheds additional light on the status of quiddity in itself and on its relationship to universal quiddity. There he makes a series of important points: (a) he suggests, as in *Introduction*, that pure quiddity can be considered and conceived of (*i'tabara, nazara, taṣawwara*) by the human mind in a manner distinct from universality and, hence, from universal concepts; (b) he outlines specific criteria to define the mental existence of universals; (c) he argues that, even though quiddity in itself can be distinguished from particular and universal things in the mind, it is also somehow present in, and underlies, universals and particular existents; and, finally, (d) he articulates a subtle ontological theory concerning the distinctness of pure quiddity, which is a pendant to—and is intended to complement—its epistemic distinctness.¹⁸⁹ In *Metaphysics V.1*, Avicenna's aim is primarily to discuss the relationship between quiddity and universality, and more specifically between 'quiddity in itself' (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) and 'universal quiddity,' i. e., quiddity associated with the mental concomitants that together constitute the universal concepts. This implies a fundamental distinction between quiddity in itself and the mental concomitants that attach to it, such as oneness, multiplicity, actuality, potentiality, and existence, or in this case, universality.¹⁹⁰ Taken together, these features point to the intellectual existents, but they may also be examined separately, which is precisely what Avicenna intends to do in this section of his masterwork. Naturally, this raises the question of why he would be intent on doing so, and how this distinction fits in his broader metaphysical project. One may legitimately assume that there are important ontological implications flowing from this distinction that have a role to play in Avicenna's metaphysics.

The master opens this seminal and difficult text by distinguishing three types of universals: those which have *several actual instantiations* in reality (e. g., the natural forms), those which have only *one actual instantiation* in reality (the superlunary forms, e. g., the sun, which are the only individual instances of their species), and those which *do not have any actual instantiations in reality*, but which can be conceived of in the mind and have a nature that can be potentially predicated of

and contains crucial comments regarding how quiddity in itself may be said to exist in the mind. In this respect, both chapters are closely related and must be examined side by side.

189 Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, and idem, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*, provides a clear and compelling study of Avicenna's views about how quiddity relates to the universals. He was the first scholar to explain that Avicenna separates pure quiddity from universality, which he regards merely as an accident or concomitant of quiddity, one that is nonetheless necessary for the quiddity to become a mental existent. Moreover, Marmura rightly pointed out—*pace* earlier scholars such as Fazlur Rahman—that Avicenna holds quiddity in itself to underlie both mental and extramental existents, without nevertheless being reducible to them. This doctrine, which may appear surprising at first glance, represents one of the subtleties of the Avicennian position and needs to be fleshed out accordingly.

190 See for instance Text 5; cf. *Physics*, I.4, 34.5–6: "existence is something outside of the definition of [humanness], while concomitant with its essence that it happens to have [*khārij 'an ḥaddihā lāḥiq li-māhiyyatihā*], as we have explained in other places."

many (i.e., artificial and fictional forms broadly speaking).¹⁹¹ According to Avicenna, a universal intelligible therefore need not have *any actual instances* in concrete reality, as long as it is *theoretically* or *potentially* predicable of many, and as long as it has a nature that tolerates, allows, or makes possible its attribution to many different individuals. Thus, it is possible that artificial and fictional forms, for instance, such as a heptagonal house and the phoenix respectively, exist in the mind, but not in reality, as they have no concrete instances actualized outside the mind. In spite of this, they remain universal forms in the mind, since no absurdity results from imagining or positing a plurality of phoenixes and heptagonal houses.¹⁹² It is typically in his logical works that Avicenna defines ‘the universal’ (*al-kullī*). The universal is broadly contrasted to ‘the particular’ (*al-juz’ī*) and refers to a mental object, notion, meaning, or intention (*ma’nā*) that can be predicated of a subject to express a common or shared feature or nature it possesses together with other actual or potential subjects. In *Logic of Salvation*, Avicenna defines the universal as “that which points to a plurality ... a plurality that either exists [in the concrete world], like ‘human,’ or a plurality that is permitted by the estimation [*fī jawāz al-tawahhum*], like ‘sun’ ... It is a word ... whose meaning [*ma’nā*] is shared by many.”¹⁹³ Hence, the species ‘human’

191 This threefold classification of the universals should be compared to the one that is articulated in *Demonstration* II.4, 144–145, in the context of a discussion of the foundations of scientific knowledge. The interpretation of the latter text, however, is more difficult, and it remains to be ascertained whether the various aspects of ‘the universal’ it outlines match those discussed in *Metaphysics*. I will not delve here into the thorny question of what objects constitute suitable universals for Avicenna and whether fictional forms are also to be regarded as full-fledged universal existents or lower, imaginative entities. One interesting realization is that quiddity in itself bears some similarities with the fictional forms: the crux of the issue concerning their ontological status revolves around what constitutes the minimum criteria for regarding these things as intellectual existents proper, rather than as something lesser than intellectual existents. With regard to quiddity in itself, the issue is whether it is merely an epistemological aspect of universal quiddity or a distinct and autonomous mental existent; with regard to the fictional forms, the issue is whether they qualify as full-fledged intelligibles (*ma’qūlāt*), in which case they would also be universals in the real sense, or whether they are ‘merely’ imaginative forms or even ‘pathological’ forms produced by the internal senses.

192 For a treatment of the problematic class of the fictional forms in Avicenna’s epistemology, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*, 128–130; Black, *Avicenna*; and Druart, *Avicennan Troubles*. Avicenna’s typology of the universals is indeed noteworthy for including artificial and fictional forms, a move which is made possible by his definition of universality as something that is theoretically common to many. However, other scholars in Islam adopted an even broader and more inclusive typology. This is the case, for example, of Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī’s logical work entitled *The Epistle for Shams al-Dīn (al-Risālah al-Shamsiyyah)*. At the beginning of the treatise (208.14–17), al-Kātibī divides the universals into five categories: (a) those whose comprehension in the soul is possible, but whose concrete existence is impossible (*mumtani’ al-wujūd fī l-khārij*) (such as positing a partner or equal to God); (b) fictional universals, which are possible of existence (*mumkin al-wujūd*); (c) universals that have many instantiations, and which are either (c1) finite (*mutanāhiyyan*), such as the seven wandering planets; or (c2) infinite, such as the rational souls.

193 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 10.9–12.

or the genus ‘animal’ are universals and can be predicated of many concrete instances, because individual humans share a common nature and individual animals also share a common nature. What is more, since no logical absurdity results from the act of conceiving multiple suns and moons, ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ are also universal notions in the mind, despite the fact that they are uniquely instantiated in the concrete world. Following Porphyry and many Greek philosophers, Avicenna regards ‘the five universals’ (the *al-ma‘ānī l-khamsah* of *Introduction* I.12) consisting of genus, species, differentia, property, and accident as forming the backbone of the logical analysis and of our understanding of the world. These universal predicates are the main logical tools by which reality can be described and thanks to which the quiddity of a thing can be formulated scientifically through a definition. Thus, for instance, genus is defined in *Logic of the Easterners* as “a universal that points to a quiddity common [*māhiyyah mushtarakah*] to many real [individual] existents.”¹⁹⁴

For Avicenna, the main criterion for being a universal is therefore that a notion or essence be theoretically shared or predicated of many in the mind. In other words, universals are *predicable* and *shareable*, as opposed to being *actually* predicated or shared.¹⁹⁵ In *Introduction*, Avicenna emphasizes this point when he states that “the term ‘universal’ becomes universal only thanks to a certain relation [*nisbah mā*—which either actually exists or is permitted by the estimation [*immā bi-l-wujūd wa-immā bi-ṣiḥḥat al-tawahhum*]—to the particulars of which it is predicated.”¹⁹⁶ This places Avicenna squarely on one side of a debate that had unfolded in late antiquity regarding the relationship of the various common features (*koina*) or universals to their concrete exemplifications. While some thinkers made *actual* predicability or shareability a condition of the universal, others deemed it sufficient to

194 Avicenna, *Logic of the Easterners*, 18.6.

195 Cf. Avicenna, *Notes*, 67–68, section 58, where universality and ‘being predicated of many’ are discussed together. Cf. also Aristotle, *On Interpretation* 17a39–40, for whom a universal is “that which is of such a nature as to be predicated of many subjects” (transl. E.M. Edghill); and *Posterior Analytics* 2.19. Avicenna departs markedly from his predecessor Fārābī on this issue. According to the definition Fārābī provides in his logical treatise on Porphyry’s *Eisagoge* (see Dunlop, *Al-Fārābī’s Eisagoge*, 119.3–5, and 128), the universal is “such that two or more [things] resemble it” and is “such that it can be predicated of more than one.” This vital feature of Avicenna’s theory of universality seems to have completely eluded Tahiri, who ascribes to Avicenna a Fārābīan position according to which a universal essence is one that is predicated of at least two entities in the concrete world; as a result, Tahiri’s entire interpretation of essence in Avicenna is problematic. For instance, he claims that Avicenna “ignores abstraction because the mind cannot apprehend the concept cat from just the perception of a (single) concrete object” (Tahiri, *Mathematics*, 63); that “essences cannot really be defined”; and that “the apprehension of essences requires at least two objects” (66). But Avicenna, in fact, says the opposite: essences and universals are knowable, regardless of the number of external instantiations they have. Thus, the Sun, which is a unique instantiation of its essence, and the artificial form ‘heptagonal house,’ which, let us presume, has no instantiation at all, can be known and conceived of in the mind.

196 Avicenna, *Introduction*, 28.3–4.

hold that it could be shared by many instances potentially or hypothetically.¹⁹⁷ What is more, notice that the universal and universality are intimately tied to the logical inquiry and constitute primarily intentional notions and meanings. Universality is a mental judgment (*ḥukm*) that the thinking, rational mind or the estimation (*tawah-hum*) applies to an object of thought in complete abstraction from exterior circumstances and of whether this object refers to an actual concrete existent or not. What determines whether universality applies in any particular case has to do more with the quiddity and nature of the object, and whether this quiddity and nature tolerate sharedness, common predicability, and universality, than with hard, objective, ontological facts. This explains why Avicenna believes that universality can apply to things that are not actually many in concrete existence.

Avicenna's reception of the ancient Greek theories on the universals is an intricate matter. This is due largely to the shifting terminology in the Greek sources and to the process of translation from Greek and Syriac to Arabic, which introduces an additional gap between the Greek philosophical material and Avicenna's works. On the one hand, Avicenna's conception of the universal is directly indebted to these Greek sources and especially to the Aristotelian tradition. Avicenna follows Aristotle and some of his commentators, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, in regarding the universal primarily as a mental concept and hence as something that is the product of logical or rational thought. He adheres to Aristotle's logical definition at *On Interpretation* 17a39–40 to the effect that a universal is “that which is of such a nature as to be predicated of many subjects,” and he also pays heed to *Posterior Analytics* II.19, which describes the formation of the universal as a concept in the human mind. Moreover, Avicenna follows Aristotle's view that a universal refers to a nature that need only be *shareable* or *theoretically common* to many, not *actually* so.¹⁹⁸ Finally, he seems to have been deeply influenced by Alexander's mentalist approach to the universal as something that is mind-dependent and a mental construct. Like Alexander, Avicenna treats genus as a logical notion, which he separates from the true nature of a thing. This effectively makes universality a mental accident or concomitant that can exist only in the human mind.¹⁹⁹ In emphasizing the connection between the universals and the human mind or human thought, Avicenna accentuated a mentalist or intellectualist interpretation of the universals that already had a

197 For this background and for the distinction between shareability and being actually shared, see Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 128 ff.

198 On this specific point, Avicenna is closer to the Stagirite than to Alexander of Aphrodisias, for whom the universal nature needs to have at least two concrete instantiations. See Sorabji, *Universals Transformed*, 108–110.

199 This important point of doctrine is conveyed also in the Arabic renditions of Alexander's works. In the treatise entitled simply *Discourse of Alexander of Aphrodisias* translated by Sa'īd b. Ya'qūb al-Dimashqī (Badawī, *Aristū*, 279.20–22) one reads that the universal is an accidental meaning (*al-shay' al-kullī ma'nā mā 'araḍa lahu an yakīna kullī*), and one that cannot subsist on its own but attaches to something else (*al-kullī nafsuḥu min ṭariq mā huwa kullī fa-laysa bi-ma'nā qā'im 'alā l-ḥaqīqah lākin 'arīḍ ya'riḍu l-shay' ākhar*).

long and rich development in antiquity and late-antiquity, from Aristotle and the Stoics to Alexander and many of the Neoplatonists.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, it should be noted that the Jacobite theologian and philosopher Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, who was Avicenna’s predecessor, also sharply distinguishes between the mental aspect or intention of universality and the thing to which it refers. Anticipating Avicenna’s views on this issue, he explains that the *ma’nā* of universality is distinct from the *ma’nā* of, say, animal in the mind, thereby making universality something external and additional that attaches to a quidditative meaning. Yaḥyā appears to have been an important link in the tradition that connects Alexander to Avicenna.²⁰¹ On the other hand, there are important differences and departures between Avicenna and the Greek sources. To begin with, Avicenna goes further than Aristotle and Alexander in upholding the notion of *universal shareability*, for he extends it explicitly to artificial and fictional beings and thus to mental conceptions that never need to exist in concrete reality. Thus, Avicenna interpreted Aristotle’s statement “what is of a nature to be predicated of several things” in a maximalist way, as encompassing not only the natures of real things, such as trees, giraffes, and human beings, but also the natures of unique beings, such as the Sun, as well as of artificial and fictional beings, such as the heptagonal house and phoenix. This move, I suspect, is to be construed in connection with the new and all-important emphasis Avicenna lays on mental existence and its various criteria, which is in turn to be related to the *kalām* debate about ‘the thing’ and ‘the existent’ as it applies to the mental context.²⁰² Thus, Avicenna’s position is in many ways an intensification of the late-antique trend of interpreting universals in a mentalist or intellectualist way, to the extent that he makes universality a condition of mental existence specifically (*wujūd dhihni* or *‘aqli*).²⁰³ In some respects, and especially in the way he connects universality with mental existence, Avicenna’s position can be regarded as a culmination of this ancient intellectualist trend.

Secondly, Avicenna follows, but again builds upon, Alexander’s initiative to separate universality from the nature to which it attaches. This represents a crucial feature of the ancient legacy bequeathed to Avicenna, and one that can partly explain his theory of pure quiddity. In spite of some ambiguity, it appears that Alexander argued for a distinction between the universal, *qua* mental concept, and the shared nature to which the universal refers. This nature, for Alexander, could in turn be identified with the forms of concrete beings. As a result, and as Sorabji explains,

200 Sorabji, *Universals Transformed*, canvasses the main stages of what he regards as a history of deflation of the universals *qua* beings and causes from Plato onwards.

201 On this point, see Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 150–159.

202 For this last point, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*.

203 There is therefore a sharp distinction in this regard between Avicenna and some of the Greek philosophers, such as the Stoics, who regarded the universals merely as concepts or mental notions, but as ones devoid of existence. The Stoics alternately described these universal notions as ‘not-somethings,’ ‘nothings,’ or as ‘somethings’ located midway between existence and nonexistence; see Sorabji, *Universals Transformed*, 106–107.

Alexander oscillates between regarding universals as thoughts and as forms or natures in the concrete world.²⁰⁴ This tendency is reflected in Alexander's Greek works and in the Arabic translations based on his writings that were achieved in early Islam. Now, it is noteworthy that one finds a similar ambiguity in Avicenna's works. In effect, the Persian master sometimes (as in *Salvation*, see Text 7) refers to the natures existing in the beings of the extramental world as 'universals,' even though he usually distinguishes between these two concepts. The problem in this connection is that Aristotle's definition of universality in *On Interpretation* ("that which is of such a nature as to be predicated of many subjects") could also be deemed to apply to the common natures in concrete reality, which could be said to exist independently of human reasoning. As I will show later on, Avicenna's hefty reliance on notions and theories culled from the late-antique discourse on the universals (which included the question of how they could be said to exist in the concrete world) eventually compelled him to address this question in earnest. More specifically, his view that the natures of beings are, in a certain sense, universal things should be traced directly to this ancient context. For the *shaykh*, these natures are the universals that can be said to exist 'in multiplicity' (*fi l-kathrah*), whereas the universals *qua* mental concepts are those that Avicenna would identify with the universals 'after multiplicity' (*ba'd al-kathrah*).²⁰⁵ Nevertheless, he is in general quite consistent in reserving the term *kullī* to the sphere of logic and human intentionality, thereby betraying the same approach as many of his Greek forebears who had confined the universals proper to the sphere of concepts in the human mind. At any rate, there is a constant oscillation in Avicenna's analyses of the subject between treating the universal as an ontological principle or entity of reality and as a logical predicate in the mind. But it is precisely in this regard that one perceives one of Avicenna's key elaborations on the ancient legacy. Whereas Aristotle and Alexander speak of the nature that is shared, and whereas Alexander seeks to establish a distinction between the universal as a mental concept and the nature as a principle of concrete beings that is not in itself universal, Avicenna in a key metaphysical move identifies this nature (*ṭabī'ah*), which is *sensu stricto* distinct from universality, with the notion of essence or quiddity (*māhiyyah*). More specifically, this nature for Avicenna is 'quiddity in itself,' which is distinct from universality both in the mind and in the concrete

204 Sorabji, *Universals Transformed*, 106–107. For insight into Alexander's doctrines and its connection to Avicenna, see Tweedale, Alexander, and especially, idem, *Duns Scotus's Doctrine*; Faruque, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, 271; and Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 155–159.

205 This distinction appears in connection with the universals at *Introduction*, I.12, 65.1–6. This aspect of the problem is treated in much more depth in chapter III of this book, which concerns the existence of nature and quiddity in the extramental world, and which is not my present focus in this chapter. But one should stress from the outset that the tension one perceives in much of the ancient Greek literature between conceiving of the universal as a purely mental notion and as an ontic principle of concrete reality reappears in Avicenna's works and represents one of the most challenging facets of the problem of essence in his works.

world. Avicenna, therefore, shifts the focus away from the form (*eidōs*), the universal (*katholou*), the common thing (*koinon*), and the concept (*noēma*)—technical terms that had prevailed in the ancient Greek discussions—to the central notion of quiddity, thereby tying them primarily to the Aristotelian discourse on essence.

What is more, Alexander's initiative to separate universality from nature seems to be a starting-point for Avicenna's own endeavor to arrive at a pristine conception of pure quiddity, which is abstracted not only from universality, but, Avicenna insists, *from all mental accidents and concomitants*. In this case as well, Avicenna's approach strikes us as a restructuring and intensification of ideas that had circulated in late antiquity, but which were not exposed in exactly the same way. The master's unique approach can best be elucidated if we consider the convergence of the ancient discourse on the universals and of the debate regarding the existence or non-existence of 'the thing' (*al-shay'*) in early Islam. This would account not only for the ontologization of Avicenna's treatment of the discussion universals (especially in the mental context), but also for the emphasis one finds in his works on the concept of quiddity, which he equates *grosso modo* with 'the thing' (or rather 'thingness'), and which takes precedence over the universal in his works. Perhaps partly for these reasons, the logical and linguistic scope of the universal is connected, in the master's philosophy of mind, with entitative and ontological considerations. For one thing, this fact illustrates yet again the semantic and ontological interplay conveyed by the term *ma'nā*, which is here applied to the universal. For all of these universals, including those of fictional and artificial forms, if they are being *actually* apprehended by the human mind, constitute mental existents (*mawjūdāt fī l-dhihn*), regardless of whether they have a correspondence in extramental reality. Thus, 'universal horse' and 'universal human' exist in the mind. More specifically, according to Avicenna, universality will exist mentally as a concomitant (*lāzim*), attribute (*ṣifah*), and accident (*'araḍ*) of the quiddity horse or human, making this quiddity a universal form in the intellect.

Given Avicenna's definition of universality, it would seem that a fictional or artificial form is no less a mental existent than the form of something that exists in the exterior world—as long as it is being actually apprehended by an intellect.²⁰⁶ Thus, phoenix exists in the mind, and even 'universal phoenix,' since I can conceive of various phoenixes hypothetically existing with no logical fallacy ensuing. The relationship between these various mental existents and concrete reality will, admittedly, differ depending on these various cases. In the case of the natural forms, the universal in the mind will have a correspondence with the concrete, particular instantiations existing in the exterior world, and hence there will be a relation (*nisbah*) between the two kinds of existents, for instance, between the universal horse in the

206 It is noteworthy that Avicenna, *Demonstration*, II.4, 144.15–145.1, concurs with *Metaphysics* V.1 in counting the artificial and fictional forms as kinds of universals; the heptagonal house and phoenix are mentioned there as well.

mind and the various individual horses existing in concrete reality. Conversely, in the case of artificial forms that have not been actualized in the concrete world, and in the case of all fictional forms, there will be no such correspondence and no relation between mental and extramental existence. Their status will be *qua* mental existents alone, with no relationship to the concrete world.²⁰⁷ In spite of this, these fictional and artificial universals are “among the [realm of] existents” (*min al-mawjūdāt*),²⁰⁸ although they exist only in the mind and, hence, possess only mental or intelligible existence.²⁰⁹ What is important here is that, like the natural forms, they are conceivable and, hence, possible objects of intellectual apprehension. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the present inquiry, I shall focus mostly on the natural forms, namely, on those intelligible forms that have a counterpart in the concrete, extramental world, and which thus presuppose a relation between the individual existents and the mental universals that correspond to them.²¹⁰

According to Avicenna, it is the various properties and concomitants (*lawāzīm* and *lawāḥiq*) and accidents (*‘awāriḍ*) they acquire in the mind that provide these various forms and entities with the characteristics of intellectual existence. Among these concomitants, the most prominent are existence (*wujūd*); actuality (*bi-l-fi‘l*); oneness (*waḥdah*), since even though a universal may relate to many things outside the mind, it is in itself a numerically one and single idea in the mind; multiplicity (*kathrah*), since it is composed of, and can be conceptually divided into, different meanings and intentions (*ma‘ānī*); and especially universality (*kulliyah*).²¹¹ Mental existence for Avicenna therefore implies a set of conditions or criteria that qualify quiddity in its mental context. These conditions or factors are the various concomi-

207 I leave out at this point the issue of whether artificial and fictional forms are related to the causality of the Agent Intellect.

208 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 207.5. Again, a doubt remains as to whether the fictional forms are really to be counted as intellectual existents.

209 But this is true, strictly speaking, of all universals according to Avicenna; see *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 207.10–12, 209.3–8, 212.2–5; these universals do not exist separately in the external world (207.7).

210 The justification for this is that the present analysis does not focus on the universals *per se*, but on the relation between quiddity in itself and its various concomitants, among which is universality. In this regard, the natural forms offer the best case study, because they raise the issues of how both the mental and physical concomitants apply to pure quiddity, as well as of the relation between quiddity in the concrete world and quiddity in the mind. What applies to the universal forms of natural existents (e.g., horse) in the mind presumably applies to the fictional forms, although this matter remains to be settled in a separate study. At any rate, it should be noted that it is the natural forms, especially ‘human’ and ‘horse,’ which constitute Avicenna’s stock examples when discussing the universals, essence, and mental existence.

211 Avicenna does not list these criteria systematically in one passage, but they may be inferred from his overall description of the mental universal existent. Immateriality or intellectuality, abstractness, and universality, are by definition the qualities of entities that exist in the intellect; the mental concomitants of the one, the many, the actual, and the universal are all discussed in *Metaphysics* V.1–2.

tants that attach to pure quiddity from the outside, since they are not constitutive (*ghayr muqawwimah*) of quiddity and do not enter into its core definition. Nor are they required for its conception. One upshot is that this universal mode of mental existence may be described as synthetic and composite, inasmuch as it requires that pure essence combine with various attributes and concomitants for the universal concept to arise. Moreover, Avicenna is explicit in conceiving these concomitants—especially universality, existence, and oneness—as extraneous and posterior to quiddity, with the implication that they essentially follow pure quiddity and adhere to it from the outside. The master also sometimes observes that they are notions, meanings, or conditions “added to” (*zā'id 'alā*) pure quiddity.²¹² From this synthetic conceptual process there results a corresponding multiplicity of meanings or notions (*ma'ānī*), since not only pure quiddity, but also each concomitant in itself can be regarded as a distinct meaning and notion added to pure essence to form a composite whole.²¹³

There are several crucial implications that flow out of these remarks. The first is that a conceptual distinction can be drawn between pure quiddity and universality and, hence, between pure quiddity and universal quiddity. The insistence and lucidity with which Avicenna defends this point in *Metaphysics* V.1–2 are noteworthy and represent an important philosophical contribution to the ancient and medieval discussions of the universals.²¹⁴ The second point is that quiddity in itself constitutes the irreducible principle or core of the universal intelligible. It represents the foundational meaning (*ma'nā*) on which other meanings, notions, or intentions are added to compose the universal. These added meanings (*ma'ānī*) correspond to the mental concomitants (*lawāzim*) that accompany pure quiddity in the intellect. On this account, even existence will be abstracted from pure quiddity and regarded as an ex-

²¹² See, for instance, Avicenna, *Salvation*, 536.11–12.

²¹³ Naturally, what is at stake here is essential and logical sequentiality and posteriority, not temporal succession. Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 207.10–12; cf. *Salvation*, 514.15–515.15; in *Categories*, II.1, 61–62. The concomitants that attach to pure quiddity in the mind to form the universal are chiefly oneness and universality; Avicenna himself dwells mostly on the latter. But he also occasionally describes existence (*wujūd*) as a concomitant of quiddity in the mind. For example, he describes existence as “a thing (*amr*) that necessarily follows [or is necessarily attached to, *yalḥaqu*] quiddity in the soul or in extramental reality.” As Avicenna explains in *Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 458–462, the concomitant of existence is essentially prior to the others; nothing advenes quiddity before existence (together, arguably, with oneness). As for unity and multiplicity, they occupy a special place, insofar as they are—like existence—inseparable from the actually existing quiddity and are somehow necessarily tied with existence; in *Discussions*, 278, n. 799, the author calls them “special accidents” (*al-'awāriḍ al-khāṣṣiyyah*) to be studied by metaphysics.

²¹⁴ According to de Libera, *La querelle*, 233: “La grande nouveauté de l'ontologie avicennienne est la distinction entre l'universel et son universalité.” But Avicenna's crucial contribution is a distinction between pure quiddity and universality, which enables us to consider quiddity in itself in abstraction from universality and the universal (regarded as a composite of quiddity and universality). Fundamentally, though, de Libera's point holds: I shall argue that pure quiddity possesses its own intrinsic or essential universality.

traneous, subsequent, and non-constitutive concomitant.²¹⁵ This, in turn, explains why Avicenna regards pure quiddity as a ‘part’ of these other synthetic aspects of essence—in this case, the universal concept of quiddity—and why he also believes that we can conceptually distinguish pure quiddity from the universal by conceptually removing its various parts. Yet, although pure quiddity is an intelligible part of the universal, it remains *epistemically irreducible* and represents the nature and conceptual core of this mental composite. Even when it underlies the universal concept, pure quiddity can be apprehended on its own in the mind. This is clear from Avicenna’s statement at *Metaphysics* V.1, 201.8 to the effect that “the consideration of quiddity in itself is possible [*jā’iz*], even if it is with something else [*wa-in kāna ma’a ghayri-hi*].”²¹⁶ As we shall see, Avicenna intends this statement to apply to both the concrete and mental aspects of quiddity—quiddity taken with additional concrete or mental concomitants—even though with regard to our present purposes it applies chiefly to the universal in the mind. The fact that we can consider quiddity in itself in abstraction from these various mental attributes means that there is a consideration of it that is not only *epistemically irreducible*, but also *epistemically or intellectually distinct*, since this consideration will focus on pure quiddity and only that. In other words, quiddity’s intellectual irreducibility also ensures its intellectual distinctness.

Thus, according to Avicenna, human beings can somehow consider, conceive of, or apprehend (*i’tabara*, *bi-i’tibār*, *manzūr*, *naẓara*, *taṣawwara*, *‘aqala*, etc.)²¹⁷ quiddity in itself in a mode distinct from universal quiddity and, hence, from the cluster of concomitants and properties that combine with the latter. As Avicenna explains, if we consider humanness or horseness in itself, it is “a meaning [*ma’nā*] other than the meaning of universality,”²¹⁸ and it is the combination of these two meanings or ideas—horseness and universality—that produces the universal intelligible. The quiddity as such, as something that can be considered or conceived of as having a

215 Avicenna’s view that there is an irreducible quiddity that can be conceived by the human mind in abstraction from all concomitants—both the concomitants and accidents attached to matter in the external world and the properties and concomitants attached to the universals in the mind—may very well have been developed as early as *Provenance and Destination*. In that work, he explains that “the forms that are in the imagination and memory [*fī l-khayāl wa-l-dhikr*] are deprived of their matters [*mawāddihā*], but accompanied by the accidents attached to their matter. [For instance,] the form of Zayd in the imagination is found there with his measurements of length and width, with color, in a certain position and in some place. These are accidents that occur to his [Zayd’s] humanness, but none of them is required for the essential quiddity [*māhiyyatuhu l-dhātīyyah*]; or else, all [humans] would have them in common” (Avicenna, *Provenance*, 74–8). Avicenna’s rather striking reference to the “essential quiddity” is a reference to the irreducible quiddity or quiddity in itself, except that in this work he had probably not yet elaborated the terminology of essence that was to become a hallmark of his later works.

216 Cf. Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 141.10–11, who repeats this formula in a slightly modified form.

217 See the previous discussion about *i’tibār*.

218 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 196.6–10.

distinct meaning, can be abstracted from all other things in the human mind, and hence also from the accidents of universal quiddity. One of the clearest statements to the effect that we can conceive of and apprehend pure quiddity appears in *Introduction* I.12, when Avicenna states that “animal in itself is a thing that can be conceived of by the mind *qua* animal, and inasmuch as it is conceived *qua* animal, it is nothing other than animal.”²¹⁹ This conception of pure animalness evidently does not correspond to the synthetic and conditioned universal existent, but to quiddity divested of its mental concomitants.²²⁰

As a result, the universal aspect of quiddity will always be *epistemically and ontologically complex, synthetic, and posterior* when compared to the mental state of pure quiddity. The consideration of quiddity *qua* universal existent is posterior and complex when compared to the consideration of quiddity in itself, since the latter occurs in abstraction from all the concomitants, meanings, and notions superadded to the former. The consideration of pure quiddity in comparison will be simple and prior, insofar as it is apprehended free of anything else. This, I believe, is why Avicenna at one point refers to the prior and simple existence of the pure nature or quiddity with regard to other aspects of quiddity. At the very least, he intends to underline how pure quiddity, as something *irreducible*, exists prior to the composite and synthetic universal according to a mereological analysis. But it is plausible that he also intends this statement in the sense that pure quiddity, as something simple that is *distinct* in the mind, precedes the universal. So I would suggest that the expression ‘in itself’ (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) should be construed in terms of irreducibility *and* distinctness.²²¹

219 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.16–19: *bal al-ḥayawān fī nafsihi shay’ yutaṣawwaru fī l-dhihn ḥayawān wa bi-ḥasab taṣawwurihi ḥayawān lā yakūn illā ḥayawān faqaṭ*. Cf. *Demonstration*, II.4, 144–14, which also distinguishes between the pure nature (*mujarrad ṭabī’ah*, *nafs al-ṭabī’ah*) and the universal, and which presents the pure nature as being conceivable in the mind: “as for the pure nature, its conception [alone] [*taṣawwuruhā*] and its conception as being numerically one [i. e., a one universal form in the mind] are not one [and the same] thing” (145.5–6).

220 Avicenna appears to extend this pure and abstract conception to numbers as well. This is suggested by his use of abstract nouns such as *ithnayniyyah*, e. g., to refer to the quiddity ‘twoness,’ as well as by his description of numbers as abstract (*mujarradah*) entities in the mind, which, incidentally, is the exact same word he uses to describe the pure quiddities humanness and animalness in the mind. As some scholars have suggested, Avicenna’s inclination for speaking of quiddities as purely abstract entities could have been influenced by the advent of algebra and a new and highly theoretical approach to mathematical reflection; see Roshdi Rashed, *Mathématiques*, 34–35; and especially Tahiri, *Mathematics*, 41 who describes numbers as “intentional objects.” Another notion Avicenna frequently subjects to abstract thought is ‘relationness’ (*iḍāfiyyah*), a quiddity which according to him also exists both in the mind and in the concrete; see *Notes*, 198–199, section 302; 262, section 442; 269, section 458; 429–430, sections 778–779; and Marmura, Avicenna’s Chapter “On the Relative.”

221 As I mentioned earlier, this simplicity and irreducibility in conception is one of the things that sets pure quiddity apart from the universal, inasmuch as the two otherwise share a common criterion

Finally, there are important ontological implications at play. The universal quiddity cannot exist in the mind without its concomitants. Just as it is not apprehended or considered in the mind without its concomitants, so it cannot *exist* in the mind without these same concomitants. The latter represents therefore an ontological requisite or condition to its existing as a universal concept. The upshot is that a quiddity can *exist actually as a universal only once it has combined with its concomitants*, e. g., existence, oneness, and universality, but it cannot actually exist as a universal in abstraction from these concomitants. Hence, by making the concomitants of quiddity a *condition* for mental existence, and by setting pure quiddity apart from all of these concomitants, Avicenna apparently excludes the possibility that essence can exist actually on its own. But there is a crucial qualification to be made here, since the mode of existence Avicenna describes consists in *composite and conditioned mental existence*. For a universal concept to exist, according to Avicenna, is for it to exist under special conditions and together with specific concomitants, but these do not apply to pure quiddity. So if pure essence were to exist, it could not possibly exist in this complex mode. In any case, what characterizes the mental universal existent may be said to be, (a) its being actually thought by the intellect in an abstract way; (b) its being thought as something universal and numerically one but relatable to many instances, and, as a result, (c) its having a conditioned, synthetic, and complex mode of existence consisting of the quidditative nature and its various mental concomitants. When these three conditions are fulfilled, then a universal existent proper is formed in the mind. Should one of these conditions be lacking, we fall short of obtaining universal mental existence.²²²

of mental existence, namely, abstractness or immateriality. Another key difference between the two is, as this section makes clear, the presence or absence of accompanying mental attributes.

222 Explaining Avicenna's views on how these aspects of quiddity differ from one another represents the first stage to elucidating his theory of pure quiddity. A crucial difference between Avicenna and the post-Avicennian tradition needs to be underscored here. Avicenna does not typically frame his discussion of the various aspects of quiddity according to the distinctions of various kinds of 'universals' (*kullī/kullīyyāt*), as becomes customary in the post-Avicennian tradition, when authors speak of the 'logical,' 'natural,' and 'intellectual' *universals*. Avicenna's use of the term and notion of universal appears to be much more restrictive and specific. Since, for Avicenna, universality (*al-kullīyyah*) is a property or concomitant of mental existence, he usually speaks of universals only insofar as these pertain to mental objects and intellectual existents; this is the case of the opening section of *Metaphysics* V.1, where the three classes of universals discussed all refer to mental universals. One implication of this approach is that universality—and, hence, the universals themselves—may be posited in the mind even when no extramental instantiations occur or exist actually. In *Introduction*, Avicenna regards the two aspects of universality—i. e., the logical (*al-manṭiqī*), which is universal genus or species itself irrespective of what it is predicated of, and the intellectual (*al-'aqlī*), which is a nature combined with logical universality (and, hence, a combination or composite of quiddity and logical universality)—as mental aspects or considerations. These aspects bear a relation (*nisbah*) to the exterior world, but in no sense do they exist in the extramental world. Avicenna's terminology thus contrasts quite markedly from that found in postclassical works. For example, it became a topos for such au-

To recap, if the conditions and criteria of mental existence are made to coincide with those of universal quiddity, only the latter will exist in the mind. By implication, this means that pure quiddity as an irreducible part of the universal will also exist in the mind together with or alongside these mental concomitants. One important conclusion, therefore, is that quiddity in itself—at the very least—exists mereologically and as something embedded in the universal concept of quiddity. In this case, ‘in itself’ means not ‘abstracted’ or ‘distinct’ from, but rather ‘irreducible.’ The quiddity animalness or humanness is in itself neither particular nor general, neither one nor many, neither actual nor potential, etc., but it is these things (and others) *only in its synthetic relation to the qualified and conditioned existence of universal concepts*, that is to say, after it has combined with the fundamental concomitants of oneness, universality, and existence.²²³ It is especially in *Metaphysics of The Cure V.1* that Avicenna insists on the distinction between pure quiddity and the necessary concomitants that attach to it in universal existence.²²⁴ There he argues that pure quiddity is an irreducible part of the universal, so that there can be little doubt that, if anything, pure quiddity *exists with or in the universal*. Given that it underlies the universal, and that the universal exists as a mental existent, this claim is sensible. The crux of the issue is whether pure quiddity also exists as an irreducible and distinct form in the mind. Does quiddity in itself exist intellectually, whereby ‘in itself’ is construed not only in terms of ‘irreducibility,’ but also in terms of intelligible ‘distinctness’ and ‘abstractedness’?

Thus, the main problem, i. e., whether pure quiddity can be said to exist in an intellectual mode that is both ‘irreducible’ and ‘distinct’ from the mental concomitants of the universal, remains unsolved. At first sight, proffering a positive answer to this question seems unlikely, given what was said above, as well as Avicenna’s occasional denial of the mental existence of pure quiddity. As he explains, in contrast to mental and extramental quiddities, quiddity in itself possesses no concomitants and properties, not even the most basic ones (oneness and existence). But all mental existents must, at the very least, be combined with a certain kind of oneness and universality. To exist intellectually, for Avicenna, as for Fārābī before him, is in some sense to exist *qua* a single or unitary entity and also to exist in a universal mode.²²⁵ Whereas a universal can be described as an intellectual existent in the strong sense, a *mawjūd fī l-dhihn* or *fī l-‘aql*—also called here ‘*aqli*’—the considera-

thors to refer to what Avicenna calls quiddity in itself or nature (*al-ṭabī‘ah*) as “the physical universal” (*al-kullī l-ṭabī‘ī*).

223 My conclusions regarding these points agree with the findings of Benevich, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz’*; and De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*.

224 Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 247.8–9, also maintains that pure quiddity is conceived in abstraction from all concomitants and “insofar as it is itself [*wa-hiya min ḥaythu hiya hiya*] it is not existent, nor non-existent, nor universal, nor particular, nor specific, nor general.”

225 On how oneness relates to existence in Avicenna’s metaphysics, see de Libera, *D’Avicenne à Averroès*; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, 158–160; Menn, *Fārābī*.

tion of quiddity in itself would seem to be a mental object in the mind (*‘aqlī*), but one divested from the criteria and conditions that characterize the universal mental existent. On these grounds, scholars have regarded pure quiddity as a mere consideration (*i‘tibār*), and not as an existing thing and mental existent proper. However, this conclusion might be unwarranted. Indeed, what is clear from Avicenna’s argumentation in *Metaphysics* V.1 is *not* that pure quiddity cannot exist in any way, but rather that it cannot exist *according to the standard Avicennian description of universal mental existence*.²²⁶

But restricting mental existence to the universals alone may strike us as hasty. When Avicenna makes it a point to stress the distinctness and abstractedness of pure quiddity, even with regard to existence, he is presumably referring to the state or mode of existence that characterizes the universal quiddity in its composite, synthetic, and derivative aspect. This is not the same as to deny all modes of existence to pure quiddity. Rather, it correlates one ontological mode with the synthetic and conditioned universals in the mind. For the mode of existence that is conceptually separated from pure quiddity is the one that belongs to a specific class of existents, namely, the universal concepts. Just as the mental consideration of universal quiddity ignores the material concomitants and accidents of quiddity in the concrete world, so the consideration of pure quiddity ignores the mental concomitants that attach to universal quiddity in the mind. The upshot is that the consideration of pure quiddity need not itself be deprived of its own ontological mode, but only from that of the universal. Several hints strongly suggest this hypothesis. First, it was observed already how difficult it is to convincingly separate the ontic from the epistemic in Avicenna’s philosophy. Since Avicenna assigns a distinct epistemic and logical status to quiddity in itself in the mind (in that it possesses its own *i‘tibār*, *ma‘nā*, and *šūrah ma‘qūlah*), it would be coherent if pure quiddity also assumed a distinct ontological status in the mind, given the general congruence of logic and ontology in his philosophy. As we saw, the terminological analysis definitely supports this hypothesis. It is important to realize that, given the close interplay between the epistemic and ontic planes in the master’s works, what may appear primarily as an epistemic argument—i. e., human beings can have a consideration of pure quiddity—need not be devoid of an ontological foundation. The fact that pure quiddity is considered in abstraction from existence need not entail that it does not somehow exist in the mind. As Ṭūsī explains in his *Commentary on Pointers*, “the absence [or non-existence] of the consideration of a thing is not the same as the consideration of [that thing’s] nonexistence.”²²⁷ Ṭūsī’s point—well taken here—can be applied to the case of

226 I mean chiefly the one reconstructed by modern specialists of Avicenna, since the master himself does not articulate an explicit and unambiguous definition of mental existence.

227 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 463.1–4; see also the section on Ṭūsī below. This comment appears in the context of a refutation of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s doctrine regarding subsistent (and possibly pre-existent) essences in the concrete world. Ṭūsī’s point is that just because we have the ability to conceptually isolate the consideration of an essence from its existence, it does

the Avicennian pure quiddity: omitting or deliberately sidelining the consideration of pure quiddity's existence does not automatically imply that it does not exist in any way. It could, for instance, exist mereologically as a part of a complex entity, or even in itself, without its existence being taken into consideration. In support of this view, there are numerous instances where Avicenna explicitly refers to the existence of pure quiddity in *Metaphysics* V.1, not only with regard to its intellectual *irreducibility in the universal*, but also occasionally with regard to its *distinctness from the universal* in the mind.

2.2 Separation, distinctness, and the various conditions (*shurūf*) applied to quiddity

As may have become clear by now, the crux of the problem lies in the way in which Avicenna describes pure quiddity in contradistinction to the universal and its various mental concomitants. In this regard, the proper interpretation of the expression ‘in itself’ and of the Arabic term *mujarrad* appear paramount, since they figure in virtually all of Avicenna's discussions of this topic. These words need to be clarified, since they can *a priori* convey notions as varied as epistemic or ontological separation, abstraction, distinctness, and irreducibility. In order to make some headway on this issue, passages from the Avicennian corpus that discuss the various conditions (*shurūf*) applied to quiddity should be examined. But first, let us return briefly to Text 3. There Avicenna speaks of pure quiddity as something whose status transcends that of a mere mental aspect or construct, since it is its own “intelligible form” in the mind. This expression suggests that pure quiddity and the universal amount to two distinct intelligible objects in the mind and, hence, also potentially to two distinct intellectual existents.²²⁸ In this regard, *Metaphysics* goes considerably further in its argumentation than *Introduction*, since it does not shy away from making explicit ontological claims about quiddity in itself. Yet, at the same time, this passage is perfectly aligned with *Introduction*, which had described pure quiddity as a “thing” (*shay*) and “form” (*ṣūrah*) that can be “conceived of” (*yutaṣawwar*) on its own in the mind.²²⁹

not mean that this essence is found as such without existence and in this state of isolation in the mind or in the real world, or that (pace Rāzī) it subsists before existing. It is not clear, however, that Ṭūsī is referring here to the special intelligible being of pure quiddity as opposed merely to its existing as a universal in the mind. The latter option—the more likely here—would imply that although we can conceptually contemplate essence in the mind in abstraction from existence, essence exists as a universal in the mind.

228 This is also how Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, understood this passage. He concluded that quiddity in itself is an object that is distinct from universal quiddity. Notice, however, that the fact that it does not combine with the mental concomitants makes it quite clear that it cannot be a mental existent in the way most modern scholars usually understand this notion.

229 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.16–19.

Avicenna further describes quiddity in itself as something intellectually and ontologically distinct and abstract in another passage of *Metaphysics* V.1. Here, however, he introduces another important feature of his discussion of quiddity, which hinges on the notion of the various conditions (*shurūt*) that can apply to it. Throughout *Metaphysics*, Avicenna frequently relies on this set of linguistic and logical distinctions to frame his discussion of pure quiddity and to tease out the subtle differences he perceives between the various aspects of quiddity he previously outlined in *Introduction*. These conditions are of both a positive and negative nature and, while they express what is primarily a conceptual or logical feature of quiddity they also yield various ontological implications that have to be fleshed out in detail. The crucial passage reads as follows:

Text 6: For this reason, there must be a distinction standing between our statement: ‘Animal, inasmuch as it is animal, is abstract without the condition of some other thing’ [*al-ḥayawān bi-mā huwa ḥayawān mujarrad bi-lā sharṭ shay’ ākhar*], and our statement: ‘Animal, inasmuch as it is animal, is abstract with the condition that there is no other thing’ [*mujarrad bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar*]. [A] If it were possible for ‘animal inasmuch as it is animal abstracted with the condition of no other thing’ to exist in the concrete, then it would be possible for the Platonic Forms to exist in the concrete. [B] Rather, ‘animal [inasmuch as it is animal] with the condition of no other thing’ exists only in the mind [*wujūduhu fī l-dhihn faqaṭ*]. [C] As for ‘animal abstracted without the condition of some other thing [i.e., ‘unconditioned animal’] it has existence in the concrete [*lahu wujūd fī l-a’yān*].²³⁰

The importance of this passage for a proper understanding of Avicenna’s theory of quiddity and for the development of the postclassical metaphysical tradition cannot be overstated. It is presumably this very passage that lies at the origin of the long commentatorial debate regarding quiddity and its relation to existence that one finds in such works as Ṭūsī’s *Abstract of Correct Belief* and the various writings that were composed in response to that work. Many postclassical philosophers must have had this text in mind when expounding on the *bi-lā sharṭ* and *bi-sharṭ lā* distinction, which is ubiquitous in the post-Avicennian philosophical literature.²³¹

230 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1.204.1–7; translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 155, revised. Marmura translates the second sentence as follows: “If it were possible for animal inasmuch as it is animal to be in abstraction, with the condition that no other thing exists in external reality, then it would be possible for the Platonic exemplars to exist in external reality.” The syntax of the Arabic is admittedly awkward, but I think that Marmura’s translation cannot be correct. Avicenna is not hypothetically positing the nonexistence of *everything other* than pure animal in the concrete (which would be somewhat absurd); rather, he is hypothetically positing the existence of pure animal in the concrete on the condition that no other thing be attached to it. It is this latter option he deems erroneous and blames the Platonists for upholding.

231 Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 3–4, describes these conditions of quiddity as a crucial aspect of postclassical Islamic metaphysics and rightly pinpoints the condition *bi-sharṭ lā* as a particularly hotly debated feature of Avicenna’s legacy.

In the text above Avicenna seeks to clarify the meaning of the two assertions *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* in connection with the various modes of existence of quiddity.²³² Although these two assertions are negative, one (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*) expresses a condition (albeit a negative one), while the other (*bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar*) expresses the absence of a condition or a state of unconditionedness. As Pasquale Porro and others have shown, Avicenna's argumentation in this passage relies on the difference between plain negation and metathetic negation or negation by equipollence, two forms of negation which Avicenna here applies to quiddity.²³³ Avicenna's immediate concern in using these distinctions in this section of *Metaphysics* is to explain which aspects of quiddity exist in the concrete world and which aspects exist in the mind. This concern is made plain by the recurrence of the term *wujūd* throughout this section of the text. In the process of doing so, Avicenna articulates three fundamental points (detailed as A, B, and C in the text), all of which revolve around the proper interpretation of these two conditions and their ontological entailments.

The first point [A] amounts to a well-known feature of Avicenna's metaphysics. It consists in the refutation that pure quiddity can exist in total abstraction and autonomously from the concrete beings in the extramental world. Avicenna levels this criticism chiefly at the Platonists, who contend that the Forms can exist on their own and autonomously from the concrete individuals that participate in them and the minds that think them. In this context, the term 'abstract' (*mujarrad*) should be understood as meaning a real ontological separation, in the way in which the intellectual substances or separate intellects are separated from matter. Accordingly, the condition *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* should be construed both in an epistemic way (quiddity is apprehended in abstraction from all other things) and in an ontological way (quiddity exists in the concrete world separately from all other things). Hence, *mujarrad* here means something close to *mufāriq*, 'ontologically separate,' and more precisely, 'separate from *matter*,' which is the term that Avicenna habitually relies on to express abstraction or separation in the extramental world.²³⁴ Avicenna's main claim in this connection is that pure quiddity is not *mujarrad* or *mufāriq* in the sense of 'separate' in the concrete world in the manner of a Platonic

232 I return to these conditions in more detail in section IV.1.5. For the time being, it is worth stressing that, even though these conditions proceed from a logical context and usage, they possess, in Avicenna's metaphysical treatises, an ontological scope whose function is to determine and clarify the mode of existence of quiddity and especially the relationship between quiddity and its concomitants. The ontological entailments of these conditions are discussed not only in *Metaphysics*, but also in other works such as *Elements of Philosophy* (*'Uyūn al-ḥikmah*), 55, where they are discussed in connection with quiddity and possible and necessary existence.

233 See Porro, *Immateriality*; idem, *AntiPlatonisme*, especially 138–139; Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 158–159.

234 Accordingly, the separate intellects are called *'uqūl mufāriqah* and occasionally *'uqūl mujarradah*. In *Metaphysics* VIII.6 Avicenna alternates between *mujarrad* and *mufāriq* to describe God's immaterial and separate existence; cf. *Salvation*, 587.11–15, where God is described as being *mujarrad*.

form or an intellectual being.²³⁵ The third point, [C], is directly related to point [A]. It contends that quiddity in itself can be said to exist in the concrete, extramental world, but not in abstraction or separately from the concrete instances in which it inheres. This point is a direct continuation of argument [A], since it clarifies Avicenna's position in contradistinction to the Platonic one. It explains how animal, inasmuch as it is animal, can be said to exist in the concrete world, but not in a mode of absolute separation from matter. Rather, according to Avicenna, animal inasmuch as it is animal can be said to exist in each concrete individual animal. Avicenna calls this aspect of quiddity *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar*, "without the condition of something else," which means that it is fundamentally unconditioned and hence epistemically undetermined with regard to whether it is considered with matter or without matter. His intention here is to stress that quiddity in concrete beings can be considered *either* with its material concomitants *or* without them as a result of the process of abstraction conducted by the human mind. It is in this sense that this aspect of quiddity is unconditioned and undetermined.

However, like the condition *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*, the expression *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar* also has ontological bearing, as is clear from the very terminology Avicenna uses in this passage and from the statement "it exists [or it has existence] in concrete beings" (*lahu wujūd fī l-a'yān*). In this case, it signifies a state of ontological irreducibility. For not only does quiddity *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar* exist in the concrete individuals of the exterior world, as Avicenna explains in this passage, but it also exists in them in an irreducible mode, which explains why it can be considered "not with the condition of something else." If quiddity were inextricably linked with other things or thoroughly combined with them, then its existence would not be described in terms of unconditionality. Rather, quiddity exists in concrete beings with its material concomitants and accidents, but it retains its identity and true inner nature. While *existing* in concrete beings, quiddity *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar* is epistemically and ontologically irreducible and remains quiddity and only that, or quiddity inasmuch as it is quiddity. What is more, it is plain from his own remarks that Avicenna intends to contrast quiddity *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar*, which exists irreducibly in concrete individuals, to quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*, which cannot exist in the concrete individuals and, more generally, in the exterior world.²³⁶

235 It is important to stress this point, because some modern authors do not clearly distinguish between the separateness of a Platonic form or an intellectual being, on the one hand, and the separateness of an intelligible object in the divine mind or in the Agent Intellect, on the other. According to Avicenna, only the first cases have existence that is 'separate' or *mufāriq*. Intelligibles in the divine and human intellects may be called 'abstract' or 'immaterial' (*mujarrad*), but not 'separate' (*mufāriq*).

236 The expression *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar* later becomes the standard way of referring to 'absolute quiddity' or 'unconditioned quiddity' and—more surprisingly—to quiddity 'in itself' as it exists in concrete beings. It is furthermore frequently identified with the 'natural universal' and 'nature,' two synonyms that refer to this extramental aspect of pure quiddity; the importance of these developments in the post-Avicennian tradition is discussed briefly below. But here I wish to tentatively raise the following pressing point: as its name indicates, unconditioned quiddity theoretically has

Another pressing and difficult issue concerns the second argument of this passage, [B], which revolves around how quiddity “with the condition of no other thing” (*bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar*), that is, essence taken purely in itself and in abstraction from everything else, can be said to exist. It is unclear at first glance which aspect of quiddity it corresponds to. Yet, the proper interpretation of this negative condition points to a key feature of Avicenna’s metaphysics and should be analyzed accordingly. In two articles devoted to Avicenna’s metaphysics and its reception in the Latin Middle Ages, Pasquale Porro has construed this condition in light of Avicenna’s refutation of the Platonic theory of the Forms, thereby attributing to it a purely polemical function. On his view, *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar* refers to the extramental and separate existence of the pure quiddities, a view Avicenna fiercely combatted.²³⁷

the capacity to acquire other conditions that qualify it. As such, and because it becomes identified with absolute quiddity, it underlies both the conditions of *bi-sharṭ shay’* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay’*. In other words, its unconditioned state enables it to be associated both with ‘the condition of something’ (i.e., the material concomitants) and with ‘the condition of not-something or nothing’ (i.e., its abstraction from all other things). This epistemic flexibility is clear; what is less clear are its ontological implications. The first conditioned state corresponds to the concrete existence of quiddity with or in things. But what about the ontological status of *bi-sharṭ lā shay’*? I provide a preliminary answer to this question in the rest of this chapter. But in order to fully clarify what this existential mode amounts to, one needs to examine the status of quiddity in the concrete world, which is the task of chapter III. Suffice to say here that unconditioned quiddity or quiddity *bi-lā sharṭ shay’ ākhar* can refer, according to a maximalist interpretation, to pure quiddity as it exists both in the concrete individuals (as an irreducible part) and in the mind, when considered without its material concomitants. When considered without its material and mental concomitants, it becomes quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar*.

237 Porro, *Immateriality*, 296–297; idem, *AntiPlatonisme*, 138–139. This excerpt showcases Avicenna’s use of plain vs. metathetic negation in connection with quiddity in itself. These kinds of negation and their application to Avicennian metaphysics have recently attracted some attention; see, in addition to Porro, Menn, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*; Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*, 243–289. Porro, who has written extensively on the topic, argues that Avicenna reserved the use of metathesis or negation by equipollence to establish the “positive, ontological separation” of the separate intellects and the First Cause and that he used plain negation to convey the mere notion of eidetic or mental abstractness. More specifically, in the context of his discussion of quiddity, when Avicenna describes quiddity in itself in light of metathesis, he is referring to the Platonic view of the extramental separateness of the pure quiddities and relies on this approach to reject their position, which would entail an ontological (as opposed to merely eidetic) separation. Thus, one implication flowing from Porro’s argument is that Avicenna did not define pure quiddity in terms of metathetic negation in his own system, since, if he had, then he would fall in the camp of the Platonists; see Porro, *Immateriality*, 296–297, 299, and 303. However, this approach, although it accounts satisfactorily for the polemical aspect of Avicenna’s argumentation, does not adequately illuminate his own doctrines on the matter, since within his system the master correlates metathesis not with a Platonic interpretation of the pure quiddities as extramental separate Forms, but as a distinct form in the human mind. So, if one follows Porro’s terminology, metathesis would suggest in this case pure mental abstractness and distinctness (‘eidetic separation’), rather than ontological separation in the concrete. But as I argued previously, such as dichotomy (between ‘ontological’ and ‘eidetic’ separation) is misleading, because Avicenna regards mental entities as existents, so that ‘an eidetic separation’ is also to be regarded as a kind of

In other words, Porro limits the application of this term to point [A] above in order to illustrate how quiddity does not exist according to Avicenna. And indeed, Porro is justified in connecting this condition with Avicenna's refutation of the Platonists. As was shown previously, Avicenna denies that pure quiddity can exist separately in the concrete world in the manner of autonomous forms. He accuses the Platonists of unwarrantedly sliding from epistemic (or what Porro calls 'eidetic') abstraction to ontological separation. According to Avicenna's critique, the Platonists commit the error of inferring an ontological argument from the *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* condition of quiddity on the basis of its being merely epistemically abstractable in the mind. In brief, the Platonists have transformed a merely linguistic, logical, and epistemic consideration into an ontological doctrine.

While this reconstruction of Avicenna's critique of the Platonic position is undoubtedly correct, it says nothing positive about Avicenna's own views on the matter and about the interpretation of point [B] in the above passage, which appears to go a step further. In this connection, it is important to distinguish between the polemical intention and tenor of the *shaykh's* Platonic refutation and the arguments that reflect his own philosophical position, a distinction not lucidly conveyed in Porro's and Benevich's articles.²³⁸ If, for the purposes of his attack against the Platonists, Avicenna does indeed associate the *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* condition with *separate existence in the concrete world* (a position he deems untenable), this is definitely not how he himself construes this expression in his metaphysics and when elaborating his own doctrines. Understandably, other scholars working on the Avicennian tradition have identified *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* more positively with an aspect of quiddity in the mind, namely, with universal quiddity.²³⁹ Many postclassical Arabic scholars also opted to connect abstractedness (*mujarrad*) and the special negative condition (*bi-sharṭ lā*) with the universal quiddity.²⁴⁰ The rationale underlying this approach is

ontological separation or distinctness, albeit in the mind. This is why the key term *mujarrad* can be applied both to the separate intellects and the intelligibles in the mind. At any rate, the key point is that Avicenna uses metathesis not only to refute the Platonists, but also to establish the doctrine that the pure abstract quiddity exists in the mind. It is precisely such a distinct or separate object in the mind, thereby further blurring the line between ontological and gnoseological or epistemic separation.

238 The fact that these two scholars focus almost exclusively on Avicenna's polemic against the Platonists and Ibn 'Adī leads them to ignore the equally important fact that Avicenna employs the condition *bi-sharṭ lā* to describe quiddity in the context of his psychology and as it exists in the mind. One of the main problems, of course, with limiting the interpretation of *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* to the Platonic Forms is that it fails to account for Avicenna's statement in *Metaphysics* according to which this aspect of quiddity "exists only in the mind."

239 See, e.g., Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 6, who identifies 'negatively-conditioned' quiddity with the intellectual universal (*kullī 'aqlī*). It should be noted that Izutsu's comments in this article apply primarily to the postclassical developments on Avicenna, not to Avicenna himself. This identification nevertheless is problematic in the context of Avicenna's philosophy.

240 With regard to this specific issue, there seems to be much uncertainty on the part of the post-classical commentators on Avicenna as well as of his modern interpreters. This issue is discussed

that the terms *shay' ākhar* is made to refer to the material concomitants of quiddity in concrete existents. But since Avicenna rejects the existence of the Platonic Forms, quiddity without these material concomitants can apply only to the universals in the mind, which are always disconnected from matter. This seems to make sense, since it accounts for Avicenna's statement that quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* does exist in the mind.²⁴¹ And since most scholars recognize only the universal aspect of quiddity as truly existing in the mind and discard quiddity in itself as a distinct mental existent, then on this reasoning universal quiddity represents the main candidate for the *bi-sharṭ lā* condition.

However, I believe that this interpretation is problematic. On closer examination, the premises supporting this approach do not cohere with the evidence that can be drawn from Avicenna's works. It would seem that the two propositions or conditions that scholars have applied to universal quiddity in the mind—the *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* condition and the qualification of abstractness (*tajrīd, mujarrad*)—are instead to be applied primarily to quiddity in itself in Avicenna's philosophy, and more specifically to the way in which quiddity in itself exists in the mind. As I argue below, there are strong reasons to believe that these conditions simply cannot refer to universal quiddity. Rather, the *bi-sharṭ lā* condition can refer only to pure quiddity in the mind, since it is the only aspect of quiddity that can be envisaged 'with the condition of

in detail below in the section devoted to the post-Avicennian thinkers. One thinker who might ascribe these qualifications to the universal is Rāzī, although his views are difficult to reconstruct; see Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*, especially 243–289. Ibrahim (272–273) describes the Avicennian passage under discussion as “puzzling” and claims that “recognizing the distinction between a quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā* and a quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ ...* is an epistemological point foreign to Avicenna's treatment. That is, Avicenna posits the distinction but the question of its recognition is not one that arises, or would arise, in the context of his analysis.” Ibrahim is justified in describing the relation between these two aspects of quiddity as a problem in the Avicennian works and one undermined by much ambiguity. In spite of this, Avicenna's distinctions in this passage remain, I would argue, a crucial feature of his argumentation about quiddity. The main issue at hand here concerns the identity of quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā* in the mind. On this point, other scholars have also remained undecided. Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 158, locates quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* in the human mind without specifying exactly what aspect of quiddity it refers to, the universal or quiddity in itself. Some years ago, Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, provided a detailed discussion of *bi-sharṭ lā* in the post-Avicennian context, but it is difficult to reconstruct his view on how Avicenna himself construed these expressions, since he provides scarce information to this effect. As for Marmura, he does not tackle this point in detail. In brief, there is little guidance to be gained regarding this issue from the modern studies on Avicenna.

241 Recall that in *Introduction* I.12, Avicenna employs the term “intellectual” (*'aqlī*) in several ways: in a general manner (*'aqlī*) to describe all objects in the mind (including quiddity in itself), and with a stronger ontological commitment to refer to the universal concept (*'aqlī*). The idiosyncratic usage of this term becomes clearer in light of the previous considerations, which unambiguously locate quiddity in itself in the human intellect, but at the same time maintain its distinctness from the universal. This point suggests that Avicenna regards pure essence as an intelligible form distinct from the universal form, and that it is the former, not the latter, which he qualifies primarily as being *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*.

nothing else,' where 'nothing else' refers not only to the material concomitants, but also to the mental ones. In light of this point, the universal existent is simply not an apt candidate for this condition, since it presupposes a cluster of mental concomitants, properties, or meanings that are not constitutive of quiddity in itself and therefore qualify as 'other things.'²⁴²

Let me elaborate on these important points. On the reading of Avicenna's theory of universality I proposed earlier, the condition *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* cannot apply to universal quiddity, because according to Avicenna the latter is accompanied by other 'things,' namely, the concomitants and attributes that qualify universal mental existence. Avicenna discusses these concomitants at some length in an earlier section of this book, where he explicitly refers to them as following or being entailed by (*talḥaqu*), occurring to (*ta'riḍu*), and conjoining to (*taqtarinu ilā*) quiddity from the outside (*lā dākhilah*) and being other than (*ākhar*) quiddity.²⁴³ According to the master's own terminology, then, universality is a thing added to pure quiddity, as are oneness and multiplicity. Because the universal is a composite of various mental things and attributes, it is understandable that Avicenna would have regarded pure quiddity as being characterized by "the condition of nothing else applying to it"—precisely in order to demarcate it from the universal, which is composite and inclusive of external 'things.' It is quite clear, then, that the 'thing' (*shay'*) referred to in this condition is inclusive of either concrete concomitants and accidents or mental concomitants. The main point is that quiddity in itself is envisaged in abstraction from all of these external things, regardless of whether they are concrete or mental. Accordingly, this negative condition can apply only to pure quiddity, since when

242 Here an important clarification is required. As Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, explains, the later commentatorial tradition distinguished between two different senses of *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*, which Izutsu described as System A and System B in his article. In System A, *shay' ākhar* is taken to mean all extraneous accidents and concomitants of quiddity, including the mental concomitants that combine with quiddity in the mind. In contrast, System B posits quiddity as an irreducible entity within a larger, synthetic concept (e.g., 'animal' in the definition 'human is a rational animal'), which allows us to consider it exclusively in itself and not inasmuch as it relates to these other concepts. According to Izutsu, this conceptual distinction has its point of origin in Qushji's interpretation of Ṭūsī's *Abstract of Correct Belief*, and more precisely of the section the latter devotes to his treatment of quiddity (which itself relies heavily on Avicenna and especially *Metaphysics* V.1). But this dual interpretation of 'negatively-conditioned' quiddity is to a large extent a later development. My analysis is based mostly on what Izutsu described as System A, which represents the crux of the issue in Avicenna and in his immediate commentators. The main issue these thinkers tackled was pure quiddity's relation to its mental concomitants and how this relation determined its mental existence.

243 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 196.6ff. On this point, cf., Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 11.16–18. Avicenna frequently describes the mental concomitants of quiddity in the mind as being added to (*zā'id 'alā*) it; for example, at *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.12, he explains that oneness is added to the quidditative meaning in the mind. Avicenna does not to my knowledge make this same statement with regard to existence specifically. But since he defines both unity and existence as external attributes of essence, there are good reasons to think it could apply to *wujūd* as well.

quiddity is considered truly in itself and in abstraction from all other things, it is considered on ‘the condition of nothing else applying to it.’ In fact, I shall argue shortly that, according to Avicenna, universal quiddity, or quiddity envisaged together with its mental concomitants, is not *bi-sharṭ lā shayʿ*, but rather a variant of *bi-sharṭ shayʿ*, just as quiddity envisaged with its corporeal concomitants is a variant of *bi-sharṭ shayʿ*. The thorny question of how, given these remarks, Avicenna can still claim that quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shayʿ* exists in the mind will also be addressed later on. For now, suffice to say that these remarks reinforce the previous conclusions concerning the need to posit two distinct modes of mental existence, one for universal quiddity and one for quiddity in itself.

Furthermore, while it is true that in the post-Avicennian tradition the term *mujarrad*, and especially the expression ‘abstract quiddity’ (*al-māhiyyah al-mujarradah*), are used flexibly and even ambiguously by individual authors to designate either universal quiddity or quiddity in itself, Avicenna for his part is consistent in applying the root *j-r-d* to quiddity in itself, not universal quiddity. In virtually every passage of *The Cure* where derivatives of the root *j-r-d* appear in connection with quiddity, their purpose is to describe pure quiddity, not the universal.²⁴⁴ One indicator of this practice appears in Text 3 above, where the *ṣūrat al-ḥayawān al-mujarrad* is said to exist in the mind and to be distinct from the universal (*kullī*). In this case, it is obvious that the “abstract form” is pure quiddity, not the universal concept. The very phrasing of Text 6 above amounts to strong evidence to this effect as well: there Avicenna juxtaposes “animal inasmuch as it is animal” (*al-ḥayawān bi-mā huwa ḥayawān*) with *mujarrad*, which shows that he intends quiddity in itself, and not the complex universal

244 See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 199.3, 204.1ff., and 205.5; Goichon, *Lexique*, vol. 1, 38–40, provides valuable insight into this term, but she does not distinguish its application to pure quiddity and the universal. Ṭūsi, in his *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 1, 205.17, and vol. 3–4, 440.15–16, also probably applies the term *mujarrad* to quiddity in itself. But on his view, this aspect of quiddity also exists in corporeal beings (for the intriguing post-Avicennian tendency of regarding the abstract quiddity as existing also in concrete beings, see Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, and chapter III of this book). The trend of using the term *mujarrad* to refer to the universal aspect of quiddity in the mind appears to be a later development, but again in those cases some uncertainty subsists as to whether these authors are using it to refer to quiddity in itself or to universal quiddity. For example, Qushjī, *Commentary*, 400.4–9, correlates *al-māhiyyah al-mujarradah* with quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shayʿ*, but it is unclear whether according to him it refers to pure quiddity or to a kind of mental universal. At any rate, and what is important here in spite of the uncertainty concerning the later tradition, is the fact that the position of these later authors may depart substantially from *Metaphysics of The Cure* V.1, 204.6, where this expression refers to quiddity in itself as a distinct form in the mind, not to universal quiddity. The term *mujarrad* in this passage means complete or absolute abstraction, i.e., abstraction or separation from concomitants, which is the state of pure quiddity, but not of universal quiddity, which is combined with mental concomitants. For additional evidence concerning how later thinkers departed from Avicenna with regard to mental existence, see Fazlōğlu, *Between Reality*.

concept, to be the truly abstract state of quiddity.²⁴⁵ Finally, in *Notes*, the expression *mujarrad māhiyyatihi* serves to designate pure quiddity, which, in this passage, is explicitly identified with “absolute humanness” (*al-insāniyyah al-muṭlaqah*).²⁴⁶ Bearing this in mind, it is likely that the statement from segment [B], “animal [inasmuch as it is animal] with the condition that there is no other thing, exists only in the mind” refers to quiddity in itself, even though Avicenna there omits to mention the qualification “inasmuch as it is animal,” probably in order to avoid any superfluous repetitions. Yet, the context and general meaning of the passage make this the most sensible interpretive option.

To conclude, the terms *bi-sharṭ lā* and *mujarrad* appear in connection both with Avicenna’s critique of the Platonists, according to whom this abstract quiddity exists separately in the exterior world, and in the midst of his own argumentation to the effect that pure quiddity can be conceived of and exists only in the mind. While the first context is polemical and refutative, the latter is assertive and conveys an important doctrinal nuance of Avicenna’s metaphysics. For the master, the negative condition refers to the distinctness of quiddity in the mind, and not to its separate existence in the extramental world, as the Platonists claim. And, in the mind, it serves to qualify quiddity in itself specifically, and not the universal aspect of quiddity.²⁴⁷ By implication, this means that the universal aspect of quiddity is not nega-

245 This is true, even though Avicenna regards this aspect of quiddity in itself as existing immanently in the composite beings of the concrete world. In fact, this is the ‘absolute’ state of quiddity, which, in its irreducible mode of existence, is both in the concrete world and in the mind, and which can be subsequently qualified with conditions (*bi-sharṭ* ...). More insight is provided on these points later on.

246 Avicenna, *Notes*, 43.11; see Text 4 above. Cf. also *Notes*, 44, section 26; *Salvation*, 594.6–10. As a result, I do not share Black’s statement (Avicenna, 2–3) to the effect that “within the context of a discussion of the intelligibles corresponding to material forms, abstractness does imply universality, and universality in turn implies abstractness: the two criteria are coextensive.” Naturally, the universal concept is also immaterial and abstract. Nevertheless, Avicenna applies the term *mujarrad* chiefly to pure quiddity and nature, not the universal.

247 It is true that at *Metaphysics* V.1.204.1–8, Avicenna applies the term *mujarrad* to the clauses *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar* and *bi-lā sharṭ shay’ ākhar*, which seems at first sight to undermine my argument. But there is in fact no inconsistency here, and the term *mujarrad* in both cases refers to pure quiddity. For ‘unconditioned quiddity,’ designated by the clause *bi-lā sharṭ shay’ ākhar*, refers to the state of pure quiddity taken without any conditions. This means that it can refer to the state of pure quiddity as an irreducible principle in concrete things. In turn, it can be either considered ‘with the condition of another thing’ (*bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*) or it can be abstracted by the mind and considered ‘with the condition of no other thing’; in this unconditioned state, quiddity also corresponds to the nature and reality of the concrete existent, a nature that, once abstracted, is a pure concept in the mind. If this occurs, then it becomes the pure concept of quiddity in itself in the mind. In brief, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar* can be said to be derivative of quiddity *bi-lā sharṭ shay’ ākhar*; the abstracted state of the latter (i.e., once it has been extracted from its material context and abstracted from its accidents) corresponds to the mental state of the former. This means that nature or pure quiddity exists irreducibly both in concrete existents and in the mind for Avicenna; these complicated points are discussed in detail in chapter IV. With regard to the present concern, Avicenna is justified in describing these two

tively conditioned (since it is pure quiddity that is negatively conditioned in the mind), but must be conditioned in other ways, which remain to be clarified. Further evidence corroborating these points can be found in a passage of *Metaphysics of Salvation* in which Avicenna discusses the relation of the universal to the individuals existing in the concrete world. There he argues that common predication, or predication of many, is the main characteristic of this universal quiddity, which can be regarded also as a condition (*sharṭ*) added to it. In the course of his exposition, Avicenna states:

Text 7: If you have understood this, then [you will find it acceptable to say that] ‘the universal’ [*kullī*] [can be predicated] of humanness ‘with no condition’ [of another thing] [*bi-lā sharṭ*], and that it [can be predicated] of humanness ‘on the condition that it be said of the many’ [*bi-sharṭannahā maqūlah ... ‘alā kathīrīn*], in one way or another known to us. The universal [*al-kullī*] on the first consideration exists in actuality in [concrete] things [*mawjūd bi-l-fi’l fi l-ashyā’*], and it is predicated of each one of them, not inasmuch as it is either one or many in essence [*bi-l-dhāt*], for these [numerical attributes] do not belong to it [viz., this kind of universal] on account of its being humanness [*bi-mā huwa insāniyyah*]. As for the second consideration [of universality], it consists of two aspects: the first is the consideration of its potentiality in [concrete] existence, and the second is the consideration of its potentiality when it becomes connected with the intelligible form.²⁴⁸

In this important and difficult passage, Avicenna explains that the universal can be considered in two basic ways. When it is considered without a condition or in an unconditioned way (*bi-lā sharṭ*), that is, without the condition of another thing being added to it, it is considered as existing *in actuality* in concrete things.²⁴⁹ This claim is consistent with Avicenna’s arguments in *The Cure* that essence actually exists in every concrete instantiation, although it is noteworthy that in this passage he refers to it specifically as a kind of universal (*kullī*); this point will be taken up in the next chapter of this book. Suffice to say here that, insofar as it exists actually in each concrete thing together with corporeal concomitants and accidents, quiddity is one aspect. And insofar as it may be abstracted and become a universal in the mind, it is another. These aspects apply to quiddity in concrete entities, albeit in different ways. This intrinsic flexibility of quiddity in the concrete world explains why it is *bi-lā sharṭ shay’* or “unconditioned”: it can be considered with or without its corporeal concomitants, and it also has the potentiality to become a universal in the mind once other conditions are added to it.

aspects of quiddity as *mujarrad*, since in both cases it refers to the nature alone in abstraction from any (concrete or mental) concomitants.

248 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 537.10–17.

249 It should be noted that, in these contexts, the expressions *bi-lā sharṭ* and *bi-sharṭ* are really a shorthand for the more complete formulae *bi-lā sharṭ shay’ ākhar* and *bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*. The point is whether one adds a thing (i.e., a consideration, attribute, or concomitant) to quiddity, or whether one considers quiddity purely in itself. This can be confirmed by a comparison of this passage with Text 6 from *Metaphysics of The Cure*, where these expressions are spelled out in full.

The other main aspect of quiddity mentioned in this passage is qualified by the condition “that it be said of many,” and it is this state of quiddity that is of immediate concern here. This aspect clearly corresponds to the mental universal in the mind, which is said of (*maqūl ‘alā*) a multiplicity of concrete individuals, and which therefore assumes a logical function. It is conditioned by mental attributes and concomitants and is qualified by the clause *bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*, where *shay’ ākhar* refers, among other things, to its universality, i. e., its predicability or shareability. Avicenna further explicates that this condition of universality or plural predicability can in turn be connected with two aspects of potentiality, one in the concrete world and the other in the mind. What the master presumably means by this is that quiddity in concrete beings is potentially a universal in the mind, i. e., once it has been abstracted from these concrete instantiations and connected with mental intentions. As for the second aspect of potentiality, it likely refers to the mind’s potentiality to reflect on this universal, i. e., to actually engage in its apprehension. At any rate, what is important is that one of the aspects of conditioned quiddity is applied to the universal in the mind. In other words, the universal is conditioned, because its being in the mind requires some mental attributes and conditions that are not required for its extramental existence. What primarily characterizes it in that mental state is its logical quality and its universality construed as a condition of potential predicability. Here, however, one needs to tread carefully in order to avoid certain pitfalls. In the concrete world, the potentiality of quiddity—or of what Avicenna in this passage somewhat confusedly calls the universal²⁵⁰—refers merely to the potentiality that the nature or pure quiddity has to be extracted and apprehended by the mind (this corresponds to the unconditioned aspect of quiddity *bi-lā sharṭ shay’* I mentioned above). This represents the first cognitive stage in the acquisition of the universal. In this context, its potentiality in the mind refers to the potentiality quiddity has to associate with mental universality and hence to become an actual universal form. In other words, the mental universal exists in potentiality in concrete things because the nature or quiddity of each concrete existent can be abstracted by the rational mind and combined with the attribute of universality and predicability of many. Nature, as it exists in the concrete world, is therefore theoretically amenable to mental universalization. Hence, potentiality here refers to the possibility of apply-

250 This is confusing insofar as, for Avicenna, the quiddity of a concrete thing is only potentially or hypothetically a mental universal, but it is not actually so, since, in order to be an actual mental universal, it needs to be reflected upon in the mind as being predicable of many. This perhaps explains why Avicenna refrains from talking about the quiddities in the concrete world as universals, and especially as ‘natural universals,’ as his later commentators will. Instead, he describes them in terms of nature, reality, and pure quiddity. This point also accounts for his careful definition of what constitutes a universal in *Metaphysics* V.1 and for his concern to distinguish between the terms *māhiyyah* and *kullī*, which are certainly not interchangeable in most cases. To say that the nature in concrete beings is a universal, as Avicenna does in this passage, is not to be taken strictly as meaning a mental universal: it is only *potentially* a universal *in the mind*, and what makes it such is the fact that quiddity can be abstracted and combined with universality in the mind.

ing a condition (*sharṭ*) of universality and plural predicability to the quiddity that exists in the concrete world once it has been abstracted from its material accidents in the mind.

For our purposes, what is crucial in this passage is the fact that the universal in the mind is also qualified “by the condition that [*bi-sharṭ anna*] it may be said of many.” This, in effect, is one of Avicenna’s minimum requirements for the universal to obtain, since, on his view, even a universal that has no actual instantiation in the concrete world is theoretically or hypothetically predicable of several things in external reality. So that universal quiddity in the mind—regardless whether it is considered potentially or actually—will be defined by its condition of plural predicability and universality. This interpretation of the universal as something ‘conditioned’ is corroborated by other passages taken from the master’s works: in *Metaphysics of The Cure*, where Avicenna explains that “horseness, taken with the condition that [*bi-sharṭ annahā*] its definition correspond to many things [in extramental reality], becomes general [or universal]”²⁵¹; and in *Notes*, where universality and “what is predicated of many” (*al-maqūl ‘alā kathīrīn mukhtalifīn*) is associated with genusness and speciesness and, thus, with what Avicenna calls there ‘the logical genus’ (*al-jins al-manṭiqī*), and not with nature or quiddity in itself, which is a distinct notion in the mind, and which must be combined with logical genusness or speciesness to create the universal concept proper. The condition or state associated with the universal is therefore one of mental complexity on the one hand (i.e., several notions or intentions must be synthesized and combined in the mind) and also one of multiplicity or of multiple relations being established between the form in the mind and its various referents in the concrete world on the other. We can conclude from the foregoing that universal quiddity is not *bi-sharṭ lā shay’* (on the condition of no other thing), but rather *bi-sharṭ annahā maqūlah ... ‘alā kathīrīn*, which is another way of saying that it is *bi-sharṭ shay’*. Here the condition consists in regarding quiddity as being predicable of many and, hence, as being universal in its relation to many, as opposed to being regarded merely in itself. So, just as there is an application of *bi-sharṭ shay’* to quiddity in the concrete world (i.e., when quiddity is taken with its material accidents and concomitants), so there is an application of *bi-sharṭ shay’* in the mind (i.e., when quiddity is taken with mental concomitants, such as universality). Clearly, then, the universal is, strictly speaking, neither negatively conditioned nor abstract in the full sense, but conceptually conditioned and composite.

Thus, there are different ways of regarding quiddity in itself in the mind in its connection with the universal: if quiddity in itself is combined with universality and other mental concomitants, then it is “with the condition of being predicated of many” (*bi-sharṭ annahā maqūlah ‘alā kathīrīn*), which, in Avicennian parlance, is another way of saying that it is “with the condition of another thing” (*bi-sharṭ shay’*). In this particular case, the ‘thing’ that conditions pure quiddity is universality

251 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 196.14–15.

(*al-kulliyah*), which makes it pass from one conditioned mental state (*bi-sharṭ lā shay'*) to another conditioned mental state (*bi-sharṭ shay'*). Recall that Avicenna in *Metaphysics* explains that universality and the other mental concomitants that attach to quiddity in the mind are things (*ashyā'*), attributes (*ṣifāt*), meanings (*ma'ānī*), and necessary concomitants (*lawāzim*, *lawāḥiq*). As such, they condition and qualify quiddity. Hence, it is clear that in this universal state quiddity is not *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*. However, if quiddity is regarded solely in itself in the mind, then it is *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*, without any of the aforementioned things. In brief, the expression *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* can apply only to quiddity in itself in its state of pure abstractness and distinctness (*mujarrad*) from everything else, including its mental attributes. Consequently, it cannot refer to the universals in the mind. This conclusion appears hitherto not to have been firmly established in the scholarship. When it comes to mental existence specifically, Avicenna appears to rely on these terms to express the perfect intellectual autonomy of quiddity in itself and to its being free of all concomitants and accidents. In his account, the term *mujarrad* goes hand in hand with the clause *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*. Both, according to my interpretation, would fulfill the same purpose, i. e., to clear quiddity in itself from any kind of external association whatsoever, including that with mental concomitants.²⁵² In this regard, they enshrine pure quiddity as an object in the mind that is *epistemically* and *ontologically distinct*.

What is more, it was shown previously that pure quiddity is *epistemically irreducible*. This is because its apprehension does not require reliance on other things, whether other concepts with which it is associated and are constitutive of it (e. g., animal and rational in the case of humanness), or the mental concomitants of quiddity (e. g., universality). While the former are subsumed under a single and simple cognitive act, the latter are external and non-constitutive of pure quiddity, and hence do

252 I believe that the semantic congruence of the expressions *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* support my reading of the evidence, since another construal of *mujarrad* would not account for Avicenna's consistent use of this term in connection with quiddity in itself: in contrast to pure quiddity, the universal is neither truly *mujarrad* nor *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*. Here, however, a distinction between Avicenna and his later interpreters and commentators is called for, since the latter employ these terms in a different way, and often more vaguely, than the master himself. Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 6, notes that the 'negatively-conditioned' quiddity was often associated with universal quiddity in the mind, but this is an elaboration that appears subsequent to the master's death. For one thing, Avicenna himself never identifies the universal as the 'negatively-conditioned' aspect of quiddity, and he goes through great pains to distinguish both aspects. In spite of this divergence, later authors usually recognize the intricate connection and overlap of *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā*; see for instance Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, 141.20–21; and Qushjī, *Commentary*, 400.4–9, who also juxtaposes them with regard to the same aspect of quiddity. As Izutsu notes (5–6), it is often highly challenging to determine to what aspect of quiddity these expressions apply. Rāzī, for instance, construes both *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* and *mujarrad* as signifying merely "not existing in the concrete world," which implies that they could apply to the mental universal. Understanding how post-Avicennian thinkers conceived of the distinction between universal quiddity and quiddity in itself *in the mind* is a desideratum for future research in Arabic postclassical philosophy.

not enter into its cognizability. Rather, pure quiddity is apprehended and cognized in a simple and direct way. But the irreducibility of quiddity also extends to the case of the universal, which is at root a combination or synthesis of pure quiddity and mental concomitants or intentions. In a psychological context, if one focuses on quiddity *bi-sharṭ shay*’, one is adding mental attributes and mental ‘things’ to the quidditative nature. What this means is that even when it is a part of, and when it necessarily underlies, the universal, quiddity remains *epistemically irreducible*.²⁵³ This is the other meaning that can be extracted from the Arabic expression *min ḥaythu hiya hiya* and the one at play when Avicenna asserts that “the consideration of quiddity in itself is possible [*jā’iz*], even if it is with something else [*wa-in kāna ma’a ghayrihi*].”²⁵⁴

In light of these clarifications, I wish to return momentarily to the issue of the mental existence of pure quiddity. Defining pure quiddity as something that is epistemically irreducible and distinct does not imply that it is devoid of an ontological basis in the mind. Quite the contrary, since it is a concept that is firmly rooted in the intellect, one should be inclined to regard it also as an intellectual existent. We saw in this regard that pure quiddity underlies the universal concept and is a part of it, while at the same time maintaining its own self-identity and nature. Avicenna is keen to develop this mereological argument both in *Metaphysics* V.1 and *Eisagoge*. Hence, in addition to being epistemically irreducible, pure quiddity is also *ontologically irreducible*. At the very least, it exists irreducibly in the mind *together with* the concomitants, attributes, and intentions that together constitute the universal concept. In this manner, the present analysis agrees with the mereological interpretation already proposed by some scholars.²⁵⁵

253 The upshot is that quiddity is *epistemically irreducible* regardless of whether it is also epistemically distinct (*bi-sharṭ lā shay*’) or taken together with mental accidents (*bi-sharṭ shay*’). Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 6, also advocates an understanding of quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay*’ as something irreducible.

254 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.8.

255 Notably Pini, *Absoluta*; De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*; and Benevich, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz.’* One point that needs to be clarified is how Avicenna conceives of the irreducibility of pure quiddity, especially when one compares it to the notion of self-identity. These two notions seem to be convertible: pure quiddity is irreducible *because* it is perfectly identical with itself (*hiya hiya*), and it is perfectly identical with itself, *because* it is irreducible. But here a problem arises: in *Metaphysics*, I.4, 27.4–8, Avicenna describes identity or the “self-identical” (*al-huwa huwa*) as one of the derivative properties (*tawābi*) of oneness or the one (*al-wāhid*). This would seem to imply that the self-identical cannot apply to pure quiddity, since the latter precedes the concomitant (*lāḥiq* or *lāzim*) of oneness and, *a fortiori*, of its derivative properties. So how can pure quiddity be said to be self-identical, when this property is described as essentially following oneness, which itself essentially follows pure quiddity? In fact, it appears that Avicenna holds two notions of self-identity: the first applies to the concrete existence and essence (*al-huwa huwa*), that is, to the existent taken as a substantial whole, which possesses an essence and an existence realized in concrete reality. This is the sense outlined in this passage of *Metaphysics* I.4, and its fundamental meaning seems to correspond to the other Avicennian expression *huwīyah*, which means something like ‘essential identity in concrete existence’; cf. *Notes*, 431, section 784, and 432, section 785, where a connection is made between *huwīyah*, *al-huwa huwa*, and *wujūd*. The other notion of self-identity is peculiar in that it applies exclu-

What is more, one logical outcome of Avicenna's argumentation is that pure quiddity is also *ontologically distinct in the mind*. By *ontologically distinct in the mind*, I mean that it exists in the mind with its own *ma'nā* and *ṣūrah*, and in abstraction from all the concomitants that attach to universal mental existence. As a result, it exists in a mode that is distinct from that of the complex universal concepts. This ontological distinctness, like the epistemic distinctness of pure quiddity, is signified equally by the two technical expressions *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* and *mujarrad*. It is important to stress that, given the intellectual or mental context in which Avicenna deploys these terms, their primary purpose is not to establish the ontological separation of quiddity in the concrete world, but merely its ontological distinctness in the mind. In other words, they underscore the argument that pure quiddity exists distinctly in the intellect. As Avicenna himself makes clear, this is what distinguishes his understanding of these terms from their Platonic usage. Hence, these expressions refer not only to the capacity our mind has to epistemically dissociate the concrete and mental concomitants from pure quiddity, but also to the way that quiddity actually exists intellectually when such an abstractive process has taken place. Furthermore, because all concepts must possess some kind of mental existence, and because a hard distinction in Avicenna's ontology and epistemology between *the thinking* of an intellectual concept and *the being* of an intellectual concept can hardly be made, one must conclude that Avicenna intended the qualifications *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* and *mujarrad* both in an epistemological and ontological way. When pure essence is considered in a universal way *together with* its mental concomitants, it exists in the universal in a mode that is epistemically and ontologically irreducible. However, when it is considered strictly in itself and as a distinct form or idea, it is *both* epistemically and ontological irreducible *and* epistemically and ontologically distinct. Ultimately, these conditions serve the function of stressing not only the *epistemic distinctness* of pure quiddity, but also its *ontological distinctness* in the mind, by which is meant its autonomous, abstracted, and separate mode of existence from anything that is not itself. This interpretation is, on my mind, best suited to explain Avicenna's statement at *Metaphysics* V.1.204.5–6 to the effect that quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* has existence (*wujūd*) only in the mind.²⁵⁶

sively to pure quiddity and also corresponds to the sense of existence that Avicenna elucidates in *Metaphysics* 1.5 and ascribes exclusively to quiddity, namely, proper existence. The main difference is that whereas the latter is absolutely irreducible, the former is not: the *huwīyyah* of a concrete being can be divided (at least conceptually) into its various metaphysical principles or constituents, such as form and matter, essence and existence, substance and accidents, etc. These distinctions do not apply to the self-identity of pure quiddity taken as a purely simple and unitary concept in the mind that excludes exterior and non-constitutive concomitants.

256 This interpretation finds independent support in Taftāzānī's *Commentary on the Aims*, vol. 1, 404.10 ff. This author relates that some philosophers (*ba'ḍuhum*) attribute mental existence to quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā*. Again in this case, there is some ambiguity as to whether Taftāzānī means mental existence with or without the mental accidents and concomitants, including universality. However, given that he previously (404.1–4) rejected the mental existence of quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā* on the grounds

At this juncture, two potential objections to the previous account should be addressed. The first is the claim that the condition *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* cannot possibly apply to pure quiddity, since in this case we would be faced with a multiplicity of considerations consisting of (a) the consideration of pure quiddity, and (b) the consideration of the condition *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. Indeed, one may argue, there is something unsettling about conceiving of pure quiddity as something conditioned—even if negatively—since it was said previously that it is intrinsically unconditioned. Moreover, it could be argued, a condition, even a negative one, can be regarded as something *added to* quiddity in itself. By way of reply it is important to stress that the condition or judgment *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* is an epistemic consideration, and more specifically a *negative* consideration or judgment, which refers to an ontological reality in the mind *without, however, adding anything to it*. Note that this negative condition is a negation by equipollence, which is absolute and excludes any other thing or relation applying to quiddity in itself. This epistemic and logical judgment therefore predicates something purely negatively of its subject, without affecting its ontological reality. In that sense, it may be compared to Avicenna's habit of predicating negative attributes or qualities of God, such as oneness, which serve to stress the simplicity of the divine essence by excluding other things. Or recall Avicenna's description of God as consisting of thinker, thought, and object of thought. These qualities, predicates, and distinctions add nothing to the divine essence, which remains irreducible and absolutely identical with itself. Rather, they signify God's simplicity and immateriality through a kind of negative theological approach.

What is more, as some scholars have noted, Avicenna occasionally employs metathetic negation to describe the existence of the First Cause.²⁵⁷ In some passages of *The Cure*, he explicitly applies the condition *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* to God. In this case, it is a negative judgment that does not affect in any way the ontological reality to which it refers. It does not add anything ontologically to God's being or essence. Although God and the condition of *bi-sharṭ lā* are two distinct things in the mind, they refer to a single ontological reality in the concrete world. Since this condition is absolutely negative, it does not add anything to its object and does not lead to any kind of multiplicity in the mind thinking it, in the way that a positive judgment and a positive condition would. In the final analysis, then, the negative condition serves to emphasize the abstractness and distinctness of quiddity itself. In the case of God, negative considerations can be formulated without them entailing any corresponding multiplicity in the divine essence, thereby leading to a kind of negative theology. Avicenna's particular use of metathetic negation and of the *bi-sharṭ lā* clause establishes an

that this mode of existence necessarily presupposes mental concomitants, the logical assumption is that Taftāzāni is describing here philosophers who maintained the mental existence of negatively-conditioned quiddity *without* its concomitants. It is possible on my view that he had Avicenna in mind specifically.

257 See Porro, *Immateriality*, 299, and Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 158. I return to this point later on.

intriguing parallel between God and the pure quiddities. They seem to represent the only two instances where Avicenna applies metathetic negation in his philosophy.

However, there is another, potentially more dire, criticism that can be leveled at the previous analysis. It could be argued from the foregoing that the characteristics of quiddity in itself are intended by Avicenna to express a purely epistemic or logical status and are not indicative of mental existence *per se*. In other words, our ability to logically conceive of quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā* and *mujarrad* does not warrant our positing it as a distinct and autonomous existent in the mind. What is more, the previous reasoning could be said to contain an egregious contradiction. On the one hand, there is the claim that pure quiddity can be conceived of distinctly and in abstraction from all other things. On the other hand, attributing existence to it would make it dependent on an external concomitant and undermine its very distinctness and abstractedness. Given that negatively-conditioned quiddity is, by definition, considered in total abstraction from *everything else*, it seems contradictory that something else, namely, existence, could be attached to it, because it would render it ‘quiddity together with something else.’ In brief, the crux of the problem can be put as follows: pure quiddity would be at the same time ‘on the condition of no other thing’ and ‘with another thing,’ namely, existence.

One possible way out of this conundrum is to maintain the epistemic and ontological irreducibility *and* the epistemic distinctness of pure quiddity, while foregoing its ontological distinctness. This would imply that we can conceive of pure quiddity in abstraction from all other things, but that it would exist only as a universal in the mind, or as part of a universal, and thus in an irreducible way and together with its concomitants. This mereological position has been recently adopted by some scholars.²⁵⁸ In this connection, Tūsi, in his *Commentary on Pointers*, draws a distinction between the absence, privation, or nonexistence of a consideration of a thing, and the consideration of the nonexistence of a thing (*‘adam i‘tibār al-shay’ laysa i‘tibāran*

258 This is Benevich’s position, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz,’* especially 110–115. According to him, pure quiddity can be said to be epistemically distinct, but not ontologically distinct. It can be said to exist only as a part of composite or complex beings—in this case, as a part of the universal. Benevich contends in this regard that mental existence for Avicenna is always and necessarily *universal* mental existence. As a consequence, it would appear, even the ‘divine existence’ of quiddity is to be construed in this mereological way, as referring to the existence of pure quiddity as a part the universal. On this point, I believe Benevich severed the link between Avicenna’s epistemology, on the one hand, and his ontology and theology, on the other. As I argue in chapters II, IV, and V, the mereological aspect is only one feature of a more complex ontological theory that also includes another distinct state of pure quiddity in the human and divine intellects. Thus, I disagree with Benevich’s suggestion to confine the divine existence of essence to this mereological aspect and his belief that mental existence is always universal (which is, admittedly, the standard view among interpreters of Avicenna). On my view, this is true neither of the human context, where pure quiddity exists distinctly in the mind, nor of the divine context, where *a fortiori* God’s and the separate intellects’ intellection cannot be said to be universal on the traditional definition of universality, i.e., as a mental and intentional accident that occurs to human thought.

li-‘adamihī).²⁵⁹ This statement could be interpreted along the lines that conceiving of quiddity in abstraction from existence and its other concomitants is not tantamount to conceiving it as something nonexistent. Thus, it would not entail that pure quiddity does not exist at all, but simply that its existence is not being presently considered. At the very least, it could be said to exist *irreducibly* in the universal concept.²⁶⁰ The problem with this approach is that it does not cohere with the conclusion reached above, which stresses the *ontological distinctness* of pure quiddity in the mind in addition to its *ontological irreducibility*. In other words, it may help us to strengthen the claim that quiddity exists irreducibly in the universal, while at the same time amounting to its own distinct consideration (*i’tibār*), but it does not participate in a solution to the problem of its distinct existence in the intellect. It therefore fails to address the key statement at *Metaphysics* V.1, 204.6, according to which quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā* exists in the mind, as well as the rich terminological evidence surveyed in previous sections of this book. Indeed, the hypothesis of essence’s distinct existence in the mind appears to be supported by too much textual evidence to be merely brushed aside.

In order to reach a more compelling solution to this thorny problem, a drastic readjustment concerning Avicenna’s ontology and especially his doctrine of realized existence is in order. More specifically, one needs to re-examine the view that complex realized or acquired existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*)—the existence of quiddity *taken with its accidents and concomitants*—exhausts all the ontological modes in Avicenna’s philosophy and represents the only two aspects of existence available to quiddity. If anything, the previous analysis strongly indicates the need to posit, or at the very least to envisage, *two modes of mental existence*—a complex and positively conditioned ontological mode pertaining to the universal concept, and a simple, fully abstract, and negatively-conditioned mode pertaining to quiddity in itself. Whereas the former is synthetic and contingent and premised on the inclusion of the external, non-constitutive concomitants of quiddity, the latter focuses on the simple and unitary nature of quiddity in itself and the putative ontological mode that would apply to it *in abstraction from all physical and mental concomitants* and, hence, intrinsically or essentially. This distinction would help to alleviate the apparent conundrum of how pure quiddity could be ‘on the condition of no other thing’

259 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 463.1–4.

260 I am using Ṭūsī’s argumentation purely heuristically here and with no insinuation that he recognized only the existence of universal quiddity. As I surmise below, Ṭūsī may have regarded both the universal and pure quiddity as existing distinctly in the mind. One upshot of this position would be that we are forced to construe Avicenna’s statement concerning the fact that quiddity *bi-sharṭ la shay’* exists “only in the mind” as referring merely to the irreducible existence of quiddity as a part in the universal. While not impossible, I contend that Avicenna is making the stronger claim that pure quiddity can exist in a distinct mode in the mind; and I believe he takes the parallel claim of the existence of pure quiddity in the universal as an established point deriving from the premises of the irreducibility of pure quiddity with regard to the composite contingent beings (extramental and mental), the priority of the part over the whole, of the simple over the complex, etc.—more on this below.

and yet at the same time ‘exist’ in the mind. But if, as I have argued, one identifies negatively-conditioned quiddity with pure quiddity in the mind (and not the synthetic universal), then this perspective offers a compelling solution to Avicenna’s puzzling statement to the effect that the negatively-conditioned quiddity exists in the mind.

2.3 The constitutive elements (*muqawwimāt*) of quiddity and the notion of essential irreducibility

Avicenna’s logical works provide additional insight into the essential structure of pure quiddity and the issue of how it can be said to underlie the ontology of complex existents. On the one hand, the essential meaning (*ma’nā*) of a thing, Avicenna tells us, is irreducible under a certain angle and can be immediately grasped by the intellect. As an essence regarded in itself (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*), it is a unitary and simple form (*ṣūrah*) and meaning (*ma’nā*) in the mind. Approached from this angle, complexity and multiplicity will be external to pure quiddity and will coincide only with its concomitants and attributes. In the logical section of *Pointers*, Avicenna discourses on the differences between the constitutive and essential elements of quiddity (*muqawwimāt*), which are internal to it, and its external or extrinsic concomitants, whether they be necessarily attached to quiddity in existence (the non-constitutive *lawāzim*) or separable from it (the true accidents).²⁶¹ Thus, there can be little doubt that quiddity, in spite of its being constituted by a variety of internal elements that are spelled out in its definition, can be regarded, at the level of conception (*taṣawwur*), as a single integrated entity that forms the basis of human intellection. In *Pointers*, Avicenna explains that “a thing can be known by a simple conception [*taṣawwuran sādhijan*], as when we know the quidditative meaning [*ma’nā*] associated with the term ‘triangle,’ or it can be known through conception [combined] with ascent.”²⁶² The conception of a pure quiddity is simple, because its essential constituents are embraced all at once: “all of the constituents of quiddity [*muqawwimāt al-māhiyyah*] enter with the quiddity in conception [*taṣawwur*], although they are not detailed in the mind.”²⁶³ And in his logical and metaphysical works, Avicenna’s argumentation relies on the premise of an unmediated and simple apprehension of pure quiddity in abstraction from its external concomitants and attributes: this is the *i’tibār* of quiddity in itself of *Introduction* I.2; the negatively-conditioned quiddity (*bi-sharḥ lā shay’ ākhar*) of *Metaphysics* V.1; and the pure nature (*tabī’ah*) that is distinct from the mental concomitants (such as genusness and universality) of *Categories* I.5. This immediate, unitary, and simple intelligible pres-

²⁶¹ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 199 ff.

²⁶² Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 182.1–2.

²⁶³ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 203.7–8.

ence of quiddity is due to its essential irreducibility. Thus, in *Notes*, one reads that “animal inasmuch as it is animal is an intellectual meaning [*ma'nā 'aqlī*],” which “in its essence” (*fī dhātīhi*) and “inasmuch as it is animal” (*huwa bi-mā huwa ḥay-awān*) is irreducible even when combined with genusness and other mental attributes.²⁶⁴ Elsewhere, it is stated that “every quidditative meaning is one in itself and in its true reality [*fī dhātīhi wa-ḥaqīqatīhi*] and does not become multiple in its true reality; it only becomes multiple due to accidents and attributes.”²⁶⁵ As Black eloquently puts it, “Avicenna is insistent that the intelligible content of any thought, as such, is always a single unity: the prior activities in preparation for receiving that content, and the subsequent sorting out of it, may be multiple and complex, but the intelligible, as intelligible, is one.”²⁶⁶

This intelligible and conceptual irreducibility of quiddity is what ensures its epistemic—and potentially also its ontological—status as something constant and real in the intellect. In that sense, pure quiddity is something that is immediately true and real in the mind thanks to its presence and intelligibility: its *ḥaqīqah*—a term Avicenna frequently associates with pure essence—is precisely its being-in-itself or self-identity. These notions of essential irreducibility, reality, truth, and self-identity are conveyed by means of various expressions and terms: ‘inasmuch as it is itself (and only itself)’ (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*); ‘x being x and only x’ (*al-farasiyyah farasiyyah faqaṭ*); ‘what it is in its essence’ (*mā huwa 'alayhi fī (or bi-) dhātīhi*); its being ‘negatively-conditioned’ (*bi-sharṭ lā*), etc.²⁶⁷ It is noteworthy that most of these formulas can be construed as expressing essential irreducibility *and* essential distinctness; in that case, the notion of ‘distinctness’ is contrasted to ‘otherness’ and ‘extrinsicity.’ The notions of essential irreducibility and distinctness are intricately connected and serve to qualify pure quiddity, albeit in different ways. Yet, it is clear that for Avicenna, pure essence is distinct precisely because it is irreducible

264 Avicenna, *Notes*, 61.6–7; cf. also 56, section 40; and 60, section 47, for the view that universality, genusness, and speciesness are other than pure quiddity. This conceptual immediacy and simplicity of pure quiddity has its logical counterpart in what Avicenna calls “simple notions” (*mufradāt*). At the level of logical or definitional enunciation, these simple notions, such as ‘human’ or ‘horse,’ are contrasted to the composite or complex notions (*murakkabāt* or *mu'allafāt*). Thus, the same quiddity can be regarded either as simple (human) or complex (mortal rational animal), depending on the consideration. These notions, however, are not simple when compared to the substances that are truly simple, such as ‘soul’ and ‘intellect’; thus, “that in which composition can be considered [*yu'tabara*] is not simple, for example humanness and animalness, for these can be divided in their definition [*bi-l-ḥadd*] into many meanings” (*Notes*, 41.6–8).

265 Avicenna, *Notes*, 153, section 217. The aim of this section is, ultimately, to prove that God is the only purely one and simple *ma'nā* in the world. But notice that Avicenna’s comments can apply to the pure quiddities in the mind, which are simple and irreducible and become multiple and complex *only when* mental attributes and concomitants are added to them. See also *Notes*, 386, section 684, on the essential unity and simplicity of the quidditative meaning humanness (*ma'nā l-insāniyyah*).

266 Black, Avicenna, 16.

267 For a more complete list of Arabic terms and expressions designating pure quiddity in Avicenna’s logical, psychological, and metaphysical works, see Appendix 1.

and remains itself and only itself *regardless of whether it is related to or combined with other things*: thus, “the consideration of animal in itself is possible even when it is combined with other things.”²⁶⁸

In spite of the foregoing, when approached from an analytical perspective that focuses on its internal essential structure, pure quiddity can be considered as something constituted of a plurality of elements and meanings (*ma'ānī*) that coalesce in its definition. When apprehended as discrete parts, these quidditative elements amount to a certain multiplicity, at the very least with regard to definition and enunciation, but also perhaps as a conceptual one, if the mind indulges in the task of analyzing each one of them and studying their various relationships.²⁶⁹ Yet, although these internal constituents can be conceptually separated from the full quidditative *ma'nā*, they are intrinsic to it and constitutive of it and unified in conception (*taṣawwur*), which enables us to have an immediate and cohesive apprehension of an essence (whether an artificial form such as heptagonal house or a natural form such as horse) without having to go through the process of breaking it down into its various constitutive parts. But when they are dissected and isolated from pure quiddity, these elements are themselves meanings (*ma'ānī*), which implies that any complete or realized quidditative meaning is itself made up of other quidditative meanings, such as ‘animal’ in ‘human’ or ‘shapeness’ in ‘triangle.’ Although Avicenna usually refers to these constitutive elements as *muqawwimāt*, he occasionally calls them *lawāzim*, in which case he means *lawāzim dhātiyyah*, essential or inherent properties.²⁷⁰ Focusing on the example of the triangle, Avicenna explains that shapeness (*shakliyyah*) is intrinsic to (*dākhilah*) and constitutive of (*muqawwim*) the quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) of triangle. In contrast, existence is not intrinsic to and constitutive

268 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.1, 201.8.

269 Approached from this angle, the quiddity humanness possesses different meanings (*ma'ānī mukhtalifah*), as is explained in *Notes* (41, section 23), and only purely simple substances such as ‘intellect’ are simple meanings or notions (*ma'nā basīṭ*). Nevertheless, these considerations are all relative, depending on what is being compared. Strictly speaking, only God will be a *ma'nā basīṭ* (see *Notes*, 153, section 217). Hence, this state of affairs is not dissimilar to what Avicenna says about the separate intellects: they are simple (*basīṭ*) according to one consideration, but complex (*murakkab*) or possess a multiplicity (*kathrah*) according to another, if their many objects of intellection and their intelligible concomitants are taken into consideration. Likewise, pure quiddity can be regarded as irreducible and simple in conception according to one consideration, and liable to division and multiplicity according to another, especially if one relates it to definition and speech. In general, one might say that the pure quiddities are unitary and simple in conception (*bi-l-taṣawwur*), but divisible in their definition (*bi-l-ḥadd*).

270 Hence, when applied to the things that relate to quiddity, the term *lawāzim* is ambiguous, in that it can refer either to the external concomitants of quiddity (e.g., universality, oneness, etc.), which is its more common function, or, more rarely, to the constitutive features within it (e.g., ‘animal’ in ‘human’). For the sake of clarity and consistency, I employ the term *lawāzim* to refer to the external concomitants of quiddity, and *muqawwimāt* to refer to its constituents and internal elements. Strobin, *Per se*, provides a detailed and insightful discussion of these terms based mostly on Avicenna’s logical treatises.

of it. Even though properties of the triangle like shapeness can be conceptually separated, the consideration of the triangle's *ma'nā* is a simple act that intuitively includes shapeness. Hence, its *ma'nā* is considered as one thing when envisaged in its overall essential constitution or subsistence (*qiwām*) and ascertainment or realization (*taḥaqquq*) in the mind.²⁷¹ Thus, as Avicenna puts it in *Notes*, "every quidditative meaning [*kull ma'nā*] is in itself [*fī dhātihī*] one in all regards and not multiple, such as humanness, and it becomes multiple only due to something else, which is matter."²⁷² With regard to the activities of the human mind, then, an important difference between the definition and pure quiddity has been underlined: whereas the former includes a multiplicity consisting in the enumeration of its discrete parts, and, hence, also amounts to a variety of considerations related to a single object, pure quiddity, on the other hand, is perfectly unitary and simple with regard to the way in which it is conceived by the mind. Whereas the definition is tied to language and is the discursive utterance that *points to* the quidditative concept, quiddity in itself is the actual concept as it is intellectually grasped in abstraction from everything else.

Having exposed these subtle points, Avicenna then notes that the various intrinsic and constitutive features of essence underlie *all manifestations or considerations of quiddity*: in the case of the triangle, for example, its essence is constituted by these internal elements "in the external world [i. e., in concrete things], in the mind [i. e., in mental existents], and whichever other way [it may be envisaged, *kayfa kāna*]."²⁷³ The last segment of the sentence is not explicitly spelled out, but it is presumably a reference to the direct intellectual apprehension of quiddity in itself, which excludes existence and all extrinsic attributes, but involves the core meaning of triangle and thus necessarily includes its various constituent elements. In other words, shapeness and three-sidedness will characterize *all* triangles, the concrete triangles existing in the extramental world and the universal concept 'triangle' in the mind, as well as (and in a primary way) the pure quiddity 'triangleness' when it is conceived of in the intellect. These elements always enter into the *ma'nā* of triangle and in the quiddity 'triangle in itself' abstracted from all other things, since a bare conception of triangle in itself requires a conception of three-sidedness and shapeness. It is this quidditative meaning realized by the essential constituents that represents quiddity in itself *in toto* and that can be said to underlie universal mental and individual extramental instantiations of triangle. What is more, the intelligible entity produced by these internal elements amounts to a single, unified, and immediately graspable concept in the mind, whose conception (*taṣawwur*) in turn serves as the foundation for the mental elaboration of the *universal* concept. In contrast to this constant, unitary, and self-realized quiddity, whose reality and truth is derived directly from its internal

²⁷¹ See Avicenna, *Categories*, II.1, 61–62. The example of the triangle to discuss essence was used by Aristotle at *Posterior Analytics*, II.792b.14 ff.

²⁷² Avicenna, *Notes*, 144, section 197.

²⁷³ See Avicenna, *Categories*, II.1, 61.9–10.

principles, the complex universal concept is composed of the nature or quiddity together with external concomitants, such as universality and numerical oneness. Consequently, this means that the essential reality ‘triangleness’ belongs first and foremost to pure quiddity and nature, and to the universal concept ‘triangle’ and the concrete instantiations only secondarily, posteriorly, and by derivation from this intelligible prototype in the mind.

It is significant that Avicenna in *Categories* II.1 describes these essential constituents as meanings or notions (*ma‘ānī*) of quiddity in itself, and more specifically as “constitutive meanings of quiddity” (*al-ma‘ānī l-muqawwimah li-l-māhiyyah*). This implies that the complete or realized meaning (*ma‘nā*) of pure quiddity is, in the final analysis, not an *absolutely* irreducible meaning, but a meaning which is itself constituted of a series of more fundamental meanings or notions that provide it with its epistemic validity and intelligibility. Accordingly, the irreducibility I previously ascribed to pure quiddity can, from this angle, be described as being merely relative or conditional. Now, since these more basic internal constituents and meanings are essentially prior to the *ma‘nā* of triangle in itself inasmuch as they constitute it, and since the *ma‘nā* of triangle, Avicenna tells us, is both distinct and prior to its external concomitants (including existence) and, hence, to realized existence in the concrete world, these constitutive meanings will, *a fortiori*, be essentially prior to any kind of realized existence that can combine with the quidditative meaning. The upshot of this is that they certainly cannot be regarded as existents (*mawjūdāt*) or even as existing in the same sense or on the same ontological level as the quiddity that is realized in existence *with its external concomitants (whether mental or concrete)*. The *ma‘ānī qua* constitutive and intrinsic quidditative meanings are more fundamental to quiddity and essentially prior than any of the external concomitants of realized existence that can apply to it. This suggests, in turn, that the notion of constituent meanings (or *ma‘ānī muqawwimah*) is distinct and autonomous from realized existence and the external concomitants or implicates of essence. If quiddity can be said to be essentially prior to existence in the mind, then it would seem that the *ma‘ānī* (viz., constitutive meanings) of the *ma‘nā* (viz., full and unitary quidditative meaning) are even more prior to existence than the *ma‘nā* they constitute, precisely because they are constitutive of it. These would be truly irreducible insofar as they are constitutive of the quidditative meaning, but nothing seems to be constitutive of them in their state of embeddedness in quiddity. These points will have interesting repercussions in the forthcoming discussion of quiddity and mental existence.

It is perhaps partly for this reason that Avicenna believes that, unlike existence, which is an external concomitant of the quidditative meaning, the internal constituents of quiddity, for their part, cannot be demonstrated or even understood (*tufham*). As he strikingly remarks:

It is impossible [*yastahīl*] for the thing [*al-shay'*] that makes a triangle a triangle or the triangle a shape to be sought [*yuṭlab*]. But it is not impossible for the thing [*al-shay'*] that makes the triangle existent in the mind or in the external [world] to be sought.²⁷⁴

Avicenna here appears to make a distinction between the essential cause, whose origin cannot be known, and the efficient cause, which can be known. The former corresponds to the inner structure and constituents of quiddity, the latter to its external concomitants and especially to realized or actual existence. But why would Avicenna claim that the search for the constitutive elements of the quidditative meaning is moot or impossible, or—more precisely—that the *thing* responsible for the constituents (e.g., triangularity or shapeness of the triangle) cannot be sought? And what exactly does he mean by this?

Avicenna is presumably referring here to the absence of an *external* cause binding the various constitutive meanings of a single quiddity—or our ignorance of it—and this precisely because these *ma'ānī* are irreducible in their very nature. In other words, human scientific inquiry does not allow us to know what binds the internal concomitants of the quidditative meaning in the way that it enables us to know the external concomitants that attach to the quidditative meaning, such as oneness, existence, and universality. Existence, for instance, can be known inasmuch as it is an external concomitant attaching to a quiddity and insofar as the cause responsible for this connection or relationship is also external to quiddity and hence identifiable and knowable. By way of example, if I witness a craftsman fashioning a triangle out of wood, I witness the efficient cause responsible for the concrete existence of this wooden triangle. As a result, I know the existence of this triangle through its cause. Likewise, Avicenna believes that our knowledge of the existence of the separate intellectual beings is possible, because we can deduce their existence from even higher causes and infer the necessity of their existence from the visible celestial motions, which require an immaterial cause and mover. In this regard, knowledge of the existence of a thing is closely tied in Avicenna's mind, as it was in Aristotle's, with demonstration (*burhān*), which can formulate a proof *that* something exists. However, by witnessing such an event and acquiring such knowledge, I do not by the same token know the cause binding the constitutive elements of triangle or the cause of triangularity underlying this very triangle. Rather, these are already embedded in the quidditative meaning of triangle. The root cause for this remains unknown, as it would amount to asking: what is the cause of the whatness of triangle? This quidditative meaning is already in the craftsman's mind when he is working and in my mind when I apprehend this particular triangle or universal triangle. Moreover, if the definition of a thing, as opposed to a scientific demonstration, can enunciate the various constituents of this thing's essence, it cannot on the other hand explain the origin and *raison d'être* of these very constituents, or why these constituents (as opposed to others) should constitute that

274 Avicenna, *Categories* II.1, 61.14–16; cf. *Introduction*, I.6, 34.10–15.

particular definition in the first place. In the case of these meanings, then, there is no obvious external cause responsible for their being what they are that can be grasped by the senses or the intellect. For what is essentially constitutive is not caused to be such from the outside, but is intrinsically and irreducibly so.

Yet, this might strike us as odd, because Avicenna is careful to point out in some texts that essence has a cause and that this cause is distinct from the cause of the existence of something. Both essence and existence have their own causes, which are distinct. What, then, is this essential cause for Avicenna? And why would he claim that the essential cause of triangle is unknowable? There is, of course, a way in which this essential causality is knowable; for human beings do have a grasp of the definitions of things by conceiving of genus, species, and differentia. For instance, there is a way to frame the cause of essence as the combination of genus and differentia, which is a relationship internal to it and which obtains in abstraction from concrete existence. Hence, the essence of human is made up of animal and rational, while the cause of triangle would be something like three-sided geometrical figure two of whose angles amount to a right angle. In those cases, human beings can conceive how these essences are composed, so to speak, and they can also conceive these definitions and derive knowledge from them. However, I do not think this is what Avicenna has in mind when he argues that what makes a triangle a triangle cannot be known. Rather, his point concerns the rationale underlying why specific internal constituents should bind together to constitute specific quidditative meanings in the first place, and what determines these combinations and formations. In other words, why should triangle have shape, why should trees be made out of wood, and why should human beings be rational? It is the causality underlying these internal quidditative relationships that, I surmise, Avicenna considers unknowable to the human mind, for they indeed seem completely random and unjustifiable demonstratively from a scientific perspective. Note that these questions differ markedly from the question of existence. Why this particular object exists or why this individual human being exists, for instance, can be answered quite easily by looking at the direct causes of these things: this son is the effect of his father and mother, the statue is the product of the craftsman's activity, etc. But in the case of the quidditative *ma'ānī*, no such causal account can be provided, nor can a rationale justifying the quidditative relationship between the various constitutive concomitants be proffered. The obscurity of the essential causal process binding the constitutive *ma'ānī* to the quidditative *ma'nā* when it comes to human cognition may explain Avicenna's rather disinterested claim that this kind of causality cannot be known. It lies so to speak beyond human cognition, since no necessary causal account of it and no demonstration can be formulated.

Although Avicenna is laconic on this point, it appears that he is implicitly making a theological argument: the causality binding the relations between the various *ma'ānī* of trianguleness, as well as the truth these relations express regardless of human judgment (*taṣḍīq*), suggest that this causality must be referred to the Absolute Truth of all things, namely, God. Ultimately, I suspect that Avicenna makes God *qua*

Divine Truth or Reality (*ḥaqq*, *ḥaqīqah*) responsible for determining the relationships between quiddity and its inner meanings, between the essence of triangle and the various constituents that compose it. Only an absolute creative agent such as God can determine the structure of essences in the very act of creation and according to the perfect order He intended for the universe. Seen from this angle, these quidditative structures are related to the notion of divine providence and to the common assumption shared by Avicenna and other medieval thinkers according to which God created a world profoundly imbued with order and goodness. Unlike humans, God knows these quiddities in themselves and is moreover their cause through His intellection of them. For God's knowing them and causing them is one and the same thing, so that the reason or causality underlying the quidditative meanings must be known to Him. From a human perspective, the cause that makes pure quiddity what it is represents the limit of human knowledge, insofar as the logical and causal rationale binding its various constituents escapes direct human understanding. The causal process lying behind quiddity in itself and responsible for its being such a quiddity rather than another (the quiddity of triangle being trianguleness rather than humanness) lies beyond the human ken and beyond what can be established scientifically, since science is occupied with causes it can identify and ascertain. Terminologically, it is also intriguing to realize—and certainly not a coincidence—that *ḥaqīqah* is a term Avicenna uses to refer to the pure quiddities and which also has an application in his theology to describe God, who is the ultimate Truth and Reality (*ḥaqq* and *ḥaqīqah*). Hence, one could say that the truth underlying quiddity in itself is related to the divine truth insofar as the latter is its cause. It is God, *qua* “the demonstration of all things” (*huwa l-burhān ‘alā kull shay’*), who establishes the quidditative meanings and, hence, is the cause of the thingness or whatness of all things. Human beings, in contrast, cannot know “the thing [*al-shay’*, here used in a non-technical sense] that makes a triangle a triangle.”²⁷⁵

It is also in this context that Avicenna's description of God as an unknowable *ma'nā* should be considered. In *Metaphysics* I.7, he states that the First Cause “is a meaning [*ma'nā*], the explication of whose term [*ism*] belongs only to It.”²⁷⁶ Here again he presents the irreducible quidditative meaning as a mystery from the human perspective, all the more so since this time it is God's *ma'nā* that is the focus of discussion. This is confirmed in *Notes*, where one reads that “we cannot know the true reality [*ḥaqīqah*] of the First.”²⁷⁷ Hence, knowing the causes of the true natures and quiddities lies beyond the human ken. This is true of God's meaning as well and eminently so: if the ultimate causes underlying the *ḥaqīqah* and *ma'nā* of

²⁷⁵ For an enlightening discussion of Avicenna's theory of truth in connection with essence, see Lizini, *Ontology and Logic*.

²⁷⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.7, 47.7. I relied heavily on Marmura's translation. An alternative and more literal translation could be: “but the meaning of the explanation of His name belongs only to Him.”

²⁷⁷ Avicenna, *Notes*, 72.7, section 62.

the pure quiddity of trianguleness are unknowable to us, then *a fortiori* the *ma'nā* of God will lie beyond human reckoning.²⁷⁸ The various implications of these points for Avicenna's theology are significant and will be discussed in more detail in chapters IV and V. I wish at this juncture to briefly outline their immediate metaphysical and epistemological upshots. The foregoing suggests that some of the *ma'ānī* in the human mind—*ma'ānī* here construed as quidditative meanings—may not correlate with mental existents construed as complex, universal concepts, but may nevertheless underlie all mental and concrete existents. Whereas the conception of pure quiddity presupposes the realization (*taḥaqquq*) of its internal constituents alone and is thus a kind of purely essential and intelligible realization, the realization of the complex universal ideas implies that quiddity be realized together with its external concomitants and attributes. Yet, the most fundamental, immediate, and simple kind of conception (*taṣawwur*) does not require them and finds its starting point in the constant intelligible reality of the pure nature and quiddity. What is more, the constitutive elements of the quidditative meanings, which Avicenna usually calls *muqawwimāt* and *ma'ānī*, are twice removed from the mental existent construed as a synthetic or complex entity: first, they are removed from the full unitary *ma'nā* or meaning of quiddity in itself *qua* its discrete parts; and second, they are removed from the additional, external concomitants (existence, oneness, and universality) that accrues quiddity in itself and makes it a complex mental existent. Avicenna's account is thus based on a matrix of logical distinctions regarding the various relationships between quiddity, its internal constituents, and its external concomitants. This matrix of logical distinctions is the bedrock on which he elaborates his epistemology of pure quiddity and the universal. But it is also one of the foundations on which he articulates his doctrine of mental existence. When it comes to pure quiddity, logic, epistemology and ontology are all intimately related in the master's works. Yet, even though Avicenna makes the pure quiddities and their constituents the irreducible and elementary building blocks of his epistemology, he stops short of attributing a positive or full-fledged existence to these *ma'ānī*. This is understandable, given that existence, on the standard interpretation of his ontology, involves the realization of the extrinsic attributes of quiddity. Consequently, the implication of positing quidditative meanings abstracted from existence would seem to be that these *ma'ānī* have nothing to do with existence, or at least—and this is a crucial qualification—with the realized, composite, and derivative existence of the extrinsic concom-

278 Naturally, the analogy is not to be taken literally inasmuch as God's *ma'nā* does not have a cause, even an intrinsic or constitutive cause, since God's quiddity—if a quiddity can be ascribed to Him—is not composed of a variety of constituents, unlike all the other quiddities. As Avicenna puts it in *Notes*, 77, section 72, a quiddity that has no parts has no definition. And God's meaning is perfectly simple; it is “a meaning one in essence” (*al-ma'nā l-aḥādī l-dhāt*, *Notes*, 79.6–7, section 75; cf. 386, section 683). What is more, while the *ma'ānī* of the other quiddities can be intellected, it is unclear whether Avicenna would regard God's *ma'nā* as truly cognizable by the human mind; at any rate, this passage seems to deny a true understanding or conception of it.

itants of quiddity. This, in a nutshell, is the difference between ‘the ascertaining or realization of existence’ (*taḥaqquq al-wujūd*) and ‘the ascertaining or realization of quiddity’ (*taḥaqquq al-māhiyyah*) that Avicenna mentions in *Pointers*.²⁷⁹

Furthermore, in light of the previous considerations, Avicenna’s comment can be interpreted to the effect that the essence to which universality is attached in the mind also exists in extramental reality in concrete beings, if one limits it to its constitutive elements.²⁸⁰ For the realization of quiddity is not limited to the realm of the intellect, but also includes the quiddities of concrete individuals. Describing quiddity in itself as a quidditative meaning (*ma’nā*) enables Avicenna not only to relate essence to universal mental existents and particular concrete existents and, hence, to account for what is common to all of these things—i.e., to account for how we can at the same time recognize particular concrete triangles and have a universal idea of triangle in our mind, while at the same time isolating the irreducible meaning ‘triangle-ness’ and conceiving of it strictly in itself—but also to hold that, even when we are dealing with the concrete instantiations of quiddity, as in the case of individual human beings, the quiddity in itself and the irreducible meaning (humanness) remains the same: “for this reason it is said that Zayd and ‘Amr both have a unique meaning [*ma’nā*] with regard to humanness.”²⁸¹ It is this basic quidditative meaning that underlies the quiddities associated with universal mental existents as well as the quiddities associated with concrete extramental existence. Because it is, at the very least, an irreducible logical and conceptual entity and meaning, it is primitive or foundational and acts as a kind of substrate for the other aspects of quiddity Avicenna outlines in *Introduction of The Cure*, that is, quiddity together with either mental or concrete concomitants. Accordingly, in *Metaphysics* I.2, Avicenna states that quiddity in itself is absolute (*muṭlaq*) with regard to the other aspects of quiddity and encompasses them.

Avicenna’s views on how pure quiddity relates to universal and particular things explain why he may have been reluctant to ascribe it the status of an existent (*mawjūd*). For making pure quiddity a fully autonomous and existent *ma’nā* would have entailed a theory of ontological separation and participation of some sort, a view that the master consistently shuns in his works. Were pure quiddity to exist as such as an independent existent, in the way that a Platonic form exists, it would

²⁷⁹ For a detailed discussion of these notions, see section IV.3.

²⁸⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 211.9–11.

²⁸¹ Avicenna, *On the Soul of The Cure*, V.5, 236.20–237.1: *wa-li-dhālika yuqālu inna Zayd wa ‘Amr la-humā ma’nā wāḥid fī l-insāniyyah*. As is clear from the context and from similar statements in *Metaphysics*, Avicenna is not alluding here to the universal form in the mind, but to quiddity in itself, which exists as a nature in each human being. The one and unique meaning (*ma’nā wāḥidan*) can only refer to humanness in itself, and not to the universal intelligible human, which is a compound of various *ma’āni* (humanness, universality, existence, oneness, etc.) and also constituted, at its core, of the irreducible meaning humanness. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see the next chapter, which is devoted to quiddity in the concrete world.

act as an archetype from which the quiddity of mental universals and concrete particulars would derive or in which they would participate. Defining quiddity in itself primarily as a logical and notional entity or meaning enables Avicenna to relate it to the mental and extramental existents and to situate its irreducible meaning at their very core without falling into the various pitfalls associated with Platonic notions of separation and participation. Yet, I shall argue that Avicenna's doctrine includes an ontological thrust as well, with regard to both the mental and concrete spheres: pure quiddity is not just an abstract meaning, but its essential irreducibility and reality is indeed a kind of essential, intelligible being. These ontological considerations derive from the convergence of Avicenna's matrix of logical distinctions between the constituents and concomitants of quiddity, on the one hand, and his ontologization of mental objects and his strong interpretation of mental existence, on the other.

2.3.1 Pure quiddities and primary notions

The previous analysis regarding the intrinsic conceivability of pure quiddity raises an intriguing question: what is the relation, if any, between pure quiddity—or quiddity taken 'in itself'—and the primary notions Avicenna describes in *Metaphysics* I.5?²⁸² Three elements in particular suggest a close connection between them. The first is that the primary notions, like quiddity in itself, are closely tied to conception (*taṣawwur*). In fact, according to Avicenna, they are what make conception possible in the first place and represent the fundamental building-blocks of abstract thought. As such, 'the existent' (*al-mawjūd*), 'the thing' (*al-shay'*), and 'the necessary' (*al-ḍarūrī*), as well as, presumably, 'the one' (*al-wāḥid*), are notions or meanings (*ma'ānī*) that are primary and foundational, and, it seems, acquired intuitively or innately by

282 It is well known that Avicenna's discussion of the primary notions in *Metaphysics* I.5 had a profound impact on the development of the scholastic theory of the transcendentals; see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, especially 81, 83, 159–160, 193–194, 421–422; and Koutzarova, *Das Transzendente*. Some medieval authors, such as Thomas Aquinas (as well as some modern authors after them, such as Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 194), re-interpret the Avicennian primary notions as consisting of being, essence, and oneness, while emphasizing the primacy of being. Strictly speaking, however, Avicenna mentions 'the existent' (*al-mawjūd*) and 'the thing' (*al-shay'*), not 'being itself' and 'essence itself.' The question investigated here is whether there is a pure quiddity of these primary notions, which again presupposes a theoretical distinction between the thing (*al-shay'*) and thingness (*al-shay'iyyah*). This task is rendered more difficult by the fact that, on Avicenna's account, both the primary notions and the pure quiddities have an unmediated link with conception (*taṣawwur*). One question worth asking, which provides an alternative approach to this problem, is why Avicenna would want to articulate a theory of the primary notions as well as a theory of the pure quiddities. It seems that the latter encompass the former and allow for a much broader ontological and epistemological system to emerge, which can accommodate a theory of primary notions, together with many other elements. Avicenna's main motivation for discussing the primary notions is presumably epistemological in nature and aimed at bypassing the pitfall of circular reasoning or infinite regress. After all, not all quiddities are epistemologically or logically primary and foundational.

the mind, without our reason having to labor intensively for their acquisition. In this connection, it is noteworthy that Avicenna stresses that the primary notions are “conceivable or conceived in themselves” (*mutaṣawwarah li-dhawātihā*).²⁸³ Later on, he adds that “existence is known in itself” (*al-wujūd yu‘rafu bi-dhātihi*).²⁸⁴ Now, these statements are reminiscent of the way Avicenna describes pure quiddity as something that can be known ‘in itself’ and in abstraction from other things. Like the primary notions, the pure quiddities can be conceived of and apprehended intellectually in themselves as meanings (*ma‘ānī*) and intelligibles (*ma‘qūlāt*) without recourse to something outside of them.²⁸⁵

The second element focuses on the locutions Avicenna relies on to describe the primary notions, which again echoes that of pure quiddity. Accordingly, it is not just the notion of ‘the existent’ that can be known and studied in metaphysics, but rather “the existent inasmuch as it is the existent” (*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd*); and “the existent taken absolutely” (*al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq*); as well as “existence inasmuch as it is existence” (*al-wujūd bi-mā huwa wujūd*); and “absolute existence” (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*).²⁸⁶ Now, these formulas, which have the purpose of emphasizing the conceptual abstractness and generality of the primary notion ‘existent’—and, by extension, ‘existence’—are also used by Avicenna in exactly the same fashion with regard to the pure quiddities. Recall that Avicenna speaks of pure quiddity—say, animalness or humanness—inasmuch as it is animalness or humanness, or animalness in itself, or absolute humanness (*al-ḥayawān bi-dhātihi*, *al-ḥayawān bi-mā huwa ḥayawān*, *al-insān bi-mā huwa insān*, *al-insāniyyah al-muṭlaqah*, etc.).²⁸⁷ In like manner, Avicenna refers to unconditioned existence or “the existent taken unconditionally” (*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd min ghayr sharṭ*), which directly evokes unconditioned quiddity (*al-māhiyyah bi-lā sharṭ* or *lā bi-sharṭ*).²⁸⁸ These parallels are significant, I believe, because they show that Avicenna regards the primary notions as belonging to the same kind of mental objects as the pure quiddities, that is, as mental objects that can be conceived of in themselves, absolutely, so to speak, and in abstraction from other conditions and intentions.

Furthermore, and unsurprisingly given the foregoing, Avicenna sometimes refers to the quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and essential reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the primary notions, such as existence. For example, in *Metaphysics* I.2, he explains that, since existence

²⁸³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, I.5, 29.13–14.

²⁸⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, I.5, 36.5–6.

²⁸⁵ An additional and related issue here is how the primary notions of *Metaphysics* I.5 relate to “the primary intelligible notions” (*al-ma‘ānī l-ma‘qūlah al-ūlā*) of *Metaphysics* I.2. Although Avicenna does not specify the latter’s nature, the two could be identical. At any rate, what is significant is the fact that Avicenna describes the primary notions and the pure quiddities equally as meanings or notions (*ma‘ānī*) and intelligibles (*ma‘qūlāt*) that are conceivable (*tuṣawwira*) in a direct and primary way.

²⁸⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, I.2, 13.7–8 and 12–13; I.4, 26.17; IV.1, 169.17; VI.3, 276.13; *Salvation*, 493.5.

²⁸⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.1, 201.8; 201.1–2; 202.3–4; *Notes*, 43.11, section 25. For a detailed list, see Appendix 1.

²⁸⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, I.2, 12–13.

or the existent inasmuch as it is existent is the subject matter of metaphysics, its definition and quiddity cannot be known with certainty. Yet, in order to proceed with the metaphysical inquiry, one has to posit hypothetically its existential reality and its quiddity (*taslīm inniyyatihi wa-māhiyyatihi*).²⁸⁹ Elsewhere, Avicenna mentions “the essential reality of the notion of existence” (*ḥaqīqah ma‘nā l-wujūd*),²⁹⁰ the true reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of possibility (*imkān*),²⁹¹ and he also treats ‘the one’ or, rather, oneness, like all numbers, as a pure quiddity in the mind.²⁹² Given that *māhiyyah*, *ḥaqīqah*, and *ma‘nā* are terms that Avicenna employs to describe quiddity in the mind, it would seem that the primary notions can be said to possess an intelligible reality comparable to that of the pure quiddities.

At the very least, then, the evidence adduced above suggests a strong link between the primary notions and the pure quiddities: these are all intelligible and conceivable in a primary way; they are completely abstract and free from all other things; and they have a reality in the mind that is irreducible, simple, and immediately graspable from an epistemological viewpoint. What is more, Avicenna applies the same technical terminology to describe them. Finally, regarding the primary notions as kinds of pure quiddities in the mind would explain one of the marking features Avicenna ascribes to *wujūd* as a primary notion, namely, that it is not a genus. A pure quiddity, likewise, for Avicenna, is not *in itself* a genus, although genusness (*al-jinsiyyah*) can be attached to it in the mind, which is why the master sometimes speaks of the various species of entities grouped under the notion of *wujūd*. If the notion of existence in the mind does amount to a kind of pure and simple quiddity, with which it is self-identical, then a remarkable symmetry between Avicenna’s ontology and gnoseology would emerge: to the First, Whose quiddity is pure existence in the extramental world, would correspond, in the human intellect, the pure quiddity of existence, whose simplicity and co-extensionality is also complete. The First would be the only extramental realization or ontologization of the concept of pure existence that exists in the mind. This tentative interpretation helps to explain why absolute existence can be regarded as a concept in the mind, a primary notion, and the main subject matter of metaphysics, on the one hand, and also coincide with the special mode of existence of God as a real extramental being, on the other. In both cases, quiddity would be the very intelligible existence of that entity or meaning (*ma‘nā*), a term, incidentally, together with *māhiyyah* and *ḥaqīqah*,

²⁸⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics* I.2, 13.10–12.

²⁹⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics* I.2, 12.14.

²⁹¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics* I.4, 25.5–6.

²⁹² At the end of *Metaphysics* I.3, 24.5–7, Avicenna explains that the essence of number (*dhāt al-‘adad*) and number taken absolutely (*al-‘adad muṭlaqan*) are not objects of study for the science of arithmetic, but of metaphysics. Relevantly, in other sections of the same work (as in IV.1, 164.122ff.) he studies ‘the one’ (*al-wāḥid*) and oneness from a metaphysical perspective and in relation to notions of ontological and essential priority.

which Avicenna regularly applies to God and to quiddities in the intellect. In these cases, then, existence (*wujūd*) would be identical with quiddity (*māhiyyah*).²⁹³

In spite of this intriguing suggestion, it remains unclear ultimately whether the primary notions can really be said to coincide with pure quiddities. One problem has to do with the notion of intelligible or quidditative irreducibility. As I showed earlier, the pure quiddities are only *relatively* simple and irreducible notions, and, at any rate, a definition can be attached to them that includes division, difference, and, hence, multiplicity. In contrast, Avicenna seems to conceive of the primary notions *mawjūd/wujūd* as being truly and absolutely simple and prior, inasmuch as it cannot be reduced to anything more elementary or more graspable intellectually than itself. This could explain also why the master appears to think that it is intuitively grasped, and why it has no definition. So an important difference in degrees of irreducibility and simplicity between the primary notion *mawjūd/wujūd* and the pure quiddity corresponding to, say, a natural being, such as horseness (*farasiyyah*), seems to prevail.²⁹⁴ In any case, the previous comments were intended merely to examine the relation between the pure quiddities and the primary notions in a tentative way; this difficult issue should be left open for future investigation.

2.4 Two modes of mental existence?

The previous terminological analysis and the investigation into the relationship between pure quiddity and universal quiddity converge toward an identical conclusion. They suggest that quiddity in itself does *exist* as a distinct form and concept in the mind, and hence that it possesses mental existence, but not in the way this notion is customarily understood by scholars of Avicenna. This is because the universal mental existent is characterized by conditions and concomitants that do not apply to

²⁹³ Naturally, such an interpretation would also make the notion of existence vulnerable to the kind of criticism that the Illuminationists levelled at ‘the Aristotelians’—the exact identity of this latter group remains unclear, but likely consisted of Ash‘arite Avicennizing scholars—and which rests on the argument that existence is added to the notion of existence, resulting in an infinite regress; see Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 46 ff.

²⁹⁴ What is more, in a rather obscure passage in *Physics* I.4, 34, Avicenna appears to fault the philosopher Parmenides precisely on account of his making a definable quiddity and substance out of *wujūd*. He credits him with making “the nature of existence (*ṭabī‘at al-wujūd*) *qua* the nature of existence ... a single quidditative meaning in definition or description [*ma‘nā wāḥid bi-l-ḥadd aw bi-l-rasm*].” However, it seems that what Avicenna disapproves of is not the act of regarding existence as a *ṭabī‘ah*, *ma‘nā*, or *māhiyyah per se*, but rather of implying that it could exist as such as substance in the extramental world, which would in turn require that existence vis-à-vis the other quiddities be in them as an internal principle of their essential constitution (through some kind of participation), whereas it is in fact an external and non-constitutive concomitant and does not exist in itself in the concrete. Nevertheless, since this passage of *Physics* is extremely compressed, the previous interpretation remains tentative.

quiddity in itself. The latter therefore must exist in a mode distinct from the former. Instead, quiddity in itself is defined by the sole condition of *bi-sharḥ lā shay' ākhar*, which is an instance of metathetic negation, and hence excludes all the other aspects and considerations that pertain to essence. In this unique state of existence as a pure object in the mind, quiddity in itself cannot be collapsed with the universal mental existent, since this would imply considering it together with something else that is extraneous to it. While pure quiddity is an absolutely simple form or concept in the mind, the universal can be regarded as a synthesis or compound of pure quiddity and other meanings or concomitants, universality being one of them.²⁹⁵

This suggests that there is another mode of intelligible and mental existence in Avicenna, which would essentially precede that of the universal existent. This hypothesis can help to explain Avicenna's apparently contradictory statements to the effect that pure quiddity exists in the mind *and* that it exists neither in the concrete world nor in the mind: it exists in the mind in this special, fully abstract, and purely negative state, but it exists neither in the mind nor in the concrete world in the mode proper to the contingent, composite, and conditioned beings. This hypothesis also caters to Avicenna's various explicit references to the existence (*wujūd*) of quiddity in itself in numerous passages of *Metaphysics* V.1, which would otherwise remain perplexing and unaccounted for. I shall return to this issue in detail in chapter IV and attempt there to elucidate the mode of existence that can be ascribed to pure quiddity. But at this juncture, and with the help of the previous analysis, I wish to return to the famous and vexed passage at *Metaphysics* V.1, 196.10–12, where Avicenna seems to be arguing that quiddity in itself cannot exist in the mind, or rather, that it exists *neither* in the mind *nor* in the concrete world. Naturally, this passage is problematic, because I proposed above that quiddity in itself can be said to exist in the mind as a purely abstract entity. What is more, I will contend in chapter III that pure quiddity can also be said to exist in the concrete world, not in a state that would be separate from things, but *in* concrete existents. This passage, therefore, represents a real challenge to my interpretation. This is compounded by the fact that scholars have treated it as a *locus classicus* to prove the nonexistence of pure quiddity. But in my view this interpretation is misguided and rests on a flawed partitioning and

295 This point seems to have been explicitly acknowledged by some scholars, notably by Marmura and McGinnis. McGinnis, *Making Abstraction*; and especially idem, *Logic and Science*, emphasizes that it is quiddity in itself that is the product of psychological abstraction and the first object of intellectual knowledge. McGinnis also dissociates the concept of pure quiddity in the mind from the notion of universality, which in his account is acquired separately from the Agent Intellect (he argues that the mental accidents and properties that attach to quiddity, such as universality, are emanated by the Agent Intellect onto the human intellects). McGinnis therefore perceptively realized the importance of Avicenna's theory of quiddity in itself in his studies on this thinker's epistemology. But in spite of his recognition of a distinct concept of quiddity in itself, McGinnis does not address the question of its ontology in the human mind and appears in the same studies to limit the existence of quiddity to the universal concepts and the concrete beings, thereby falling back on what I have called 'the standard' interpretation of essence in Avicenna.

translation of the Arabic text. In this regard, it is remarkable that this passage has often been amputated or not quoted properly and in its entirety in modern scholarly works. This has had the effect of radically distorting Avicenna's argument.²⁹⁶ Moreover, this passage contains numerous manuscript variants, which can quite radically alter its philosophical meaning. The priority in what follows is therefore to reconstruct the most accurate reading of this crucial passage in light of the general philosophical tenor of *Metaphysics* V.1 and by consulting the available manuscript evidence.²⁹⁷ Below is a full quotation and translation of the passage with my recommended amendments to the Arabic text:

Text 8: [A] *fa-innahu*²⁹⁸ *fī nafsīhi laysa shay' min al-ashyā' al-battata illā l-farasiyyah. fa-innahu fī nafsīhi lā wāḥid wa-lā kathīr wa-lā mawjūd fī l-a'yān wa-lā fī l-nafs wa-lā fī*²⁹⁹ *shay' min dhālika bi-l-quwwah wa-lā bi-l-fī'l* [B] *'alā an yakūna dhālika*³⁰⁰ *dākhilan fī l-farasiyyah* [C] *bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqaṭ.*³⁰¹

296 See, for example, Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, 118; Marmura, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals, 9; Bäck, *The Triplex*, 146; McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, 170; and Pasqua, *L'essence*, 78, who all omit to quote this passage in its entirety and who thus provide a partial analysis of it.

297 Special attention should be given to MS Malek recently published by Bertolacci and Dadkhah, *Avicenna*, which according to these two authors represents the oldest extant Arabic manuscript of *Metaphysics*. I am tremendously grateful to Amos Bertolacci for his help in obtaining some of the manuscript evidence discussed in this section of my book.

298 The subject of this sentence is quiddity in itself (more precisely, horseness in itself, *farasiyyah*), even though it is cast in the masculine in the Arabic text (*innahu*). This sentence, as well as the larger passage from which it is drawn, are convoluted, but the masculine subject here most likely harks back either to the term *ma'nā* or, more likely, to the term *ḥadd*, which are used to designate the pure quiddity horseness. Either way, this grammatical detail does not change the intent of the statement and my interpretation of it.

299 Many Arabic manuscripts omit this *fī* (including MS Malek recently published by Bertolacci and Dadkhah, *Avicenna*), as does the Latin translation of *Metaphysics*; see Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 511. As a result, it is often left out of modern translations; see notably Lizzini (Avicenna, *Metafisica*, 445); and Bertolacci (Avicenna, *Libro*, 413). Yet, the main text of the Cairo edition, as well as Anawati and Marmura in their translations, all retain it. The philosophical stakes are quite momentous, for the point would be either (a) that pure quiddity does not exist as a potential or actual thing (*lā shay'*), or (b) that it does not exist *in* one of these things (*lā fī shay'*). Either way, another more decisive point made in segment [B] trumps this issue: pure quiddity would not exist in this state—(a) or (b)—in a way that its concomitants would be internal to it. Personally, I see no strong reason to delete this *fī*, especially given that Avicenna begins this sentence by asserting that horseness is not a thing (*shay' min al-ashyā'*). So preserving the *fī* would in fact add to his argument, namely, that pure quiddity exists neither as a (separate) thing nor within a thing in a way that its external attributes become internal to it or fuse with it.

300 The term *dhālika* is preserved only in certain manuscripts (see the variants of the Cairo addition), including MS Malek. Nevertheless, it is, I believe, a much needed amendment to the common edition and reading of this passage, since it helps to understand the function of segment [B] as a qualification of segment [A]. More precisely, the generic *dhālika* here refers to the external concomitants of quiddity (oneness, multiplicity, universality, potentiality, and actuality) that Avicenna enumerates in [A] and, more broadly, in V.1, and which he strives to dissociate from pure essence.

[A] And it [the pure quiddity horseness] in itself is absolutely nothing other than horseness. It is in itself neither one nor many, neither existent in the concrete nor [existent] in the soul, neither [existent] in a thing from among these in potentiality nor in actuality³⁰²—[B] in a way that this [i. e., these concomitants] would become internal to horseness—[C] but [only] inasmuch as it is horseness alone.³⁰³

The first step is to consider this sentence in its entirety and not in a truncated form as has often been done. As such, it includes three main segments [A], [B], and [C]. Thanks to this approach, one quickly realizes that the two last segments, [B] and [C]—often omitted by scholars, who typically limit their quotations to [A]—are vital for a proper grasp of the passage as a whole. In fact, [B] and especially [C] represent the conclusion of what amounts to a subtle and cogent argument on Avicenna’s part. As it turns out, Avicenna is not making simply a negative claim concerning the various ways in which pure quiddity cannot exist; he is also explaining, I believe, how quiddity in itself can be said to exist in its distinct and irreducible mode. In this regard, there are two crucial elements of the sentence that have to be highlighted. The first is the qualification of segment [A] brought about by segment [B] “in a way that this [i. e., these things or concomitants] would become internal to horseness,” systematically omitted from the scholarly discussion; the other is the issue of what the ultimate segment, [C], “but inasmuch as it is horseness alone [*bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqat*]” refers to in the sentence and how it relates to the previous segments.

Segment [A] strings together several negative claims conveyed by the Arabic expression *lā ... wa-lā*: pure quiddity cannot exist as one or multiple, either in the concrete or in the soul, either potentially or actually, etc., the gist of the argument being that pure essence cannot exist in the way its concomitants and accidents exist, or on a par with these things, or, better still, in the way ‘mixed’ or ‘conditioned’ quiddity taken with these things can be said to exist. Avicenna’s argument in this first part obviously alludes to the mode of positively-conditioned, contingent, and composite existence (whether mental or concrete) that necessarily implies the presence of accidents and concomitants alongside quiddity. If one hypothesizes that quiddity exists in this mode, it would no longer be pure or negatively-conditioned quiddity (*bi-shart*

301 There are many different manuscript variants for segment [C]; see the notes of the Cairo edition, and Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, 511. Both the main text of the Cairo edition and the original phrasing in MS Malek (Bertolacci and Dadkhah, *Avicenna*) support the reading maintained above. Its philosophical implications are discussed in detail in the main text.

302 Strictly speaking, the wording of the Arabic text connects the clause *wa-lā fī shay’ min dhālīka* with potentiality alone, with the ensuing translation: “neither [existent] in a thing from among these in potentiality, nor in actuality.” However, the general meaning of the argument makes it clear that *wa-lā fī shay’ min dhālīka* should be connected with actuality as well. This can be inferred from the previous symmetrical statement, where *mawjūd* is connected strictly only with *fī l-a’yān*, but obviously applies also to *fī l-nafs*.

303 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 196.10–13.

lā shay' ākhar), but rather conditioned quiddity (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*), which, for example, is the case of the universal, as was shown previously. Even more to the point, pure quiddity cannot exist with these things combining or fusing with it, whereby they would become constitutive of it. This point is stressed by the specification in segment [B] that pure quiddity cannot exist lest “[these things or concomitants] become internal to horseness [*dākhil fi l-farasiyyah*].” Indeed, that pure quiddity could exist simultaneously ‘in abstraction from’ (*mujarrad*) and ‘on the condition of no other thing’ (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*), as well as ‘together with’ or ‘fused with’ external things, is absurd and paradoxical. Thus, the rationale for denying existence to pure quiddity in segments [A] and [B] is not absolute, but rather qualified. It does not refer to existence *simpliciter*, but rather focuses on a certain mode or state of existence, which qualifies the positively conditioned and composite things and necessarily involves the external concomitants.

Yet—and this is the second crucial point—this string of negatives is counterbalanced and even canceled out by a positive statement that appears at the very end of the passage in segment [C], and which is introduced by the Arabic conjunction *bal*.³⁰⁴ At this juncture, however, it is essential to point out that whereas the various manuscripts of *Metaphysics* I consulted provide broadly concurring readings of segments [A] and [B], they adduce multiple variations of segment [C], which are liable to change the overall meaning of the sentence. This textual diversity is hardly surprising, given the important philosophical implications at stake here. It undoubtedly reflects an uncertainty on the part of later commentators and scribes as to how to interpret the meaning of this sentence and Avicenna’s intention in this passage. For example, MS Oxford, Pococke 125, offers the reading *bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah farasiyyah faqaṭ*³⁰⁵; MS Leiden Or. 4 has *bal huwa min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah farasiyyah faqaṭ*³⁰⁶; MS Malek originally displayed *bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqaṭ*, which was later amended in the margins to *bal huwa min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah farasiyyah faqaṭ*³⁰⁷; finally, the Tehran lithograph edition suggests *bal hiya min ḥaythu hiya farasiyyah faqaṭ*.³⁰⁸ These variants (except for the original formulation of MS Malek, which, it should be noted, agrees with the Latin translation of this passage³⁰⁹)

304 Some translators, such as Lizzini (Avicenna, *Metafisica*, 445), read this last segment [C] as the beginning of the next sentence, but I do not think this approach is vindicated by the Arabic syntax.

305 MS Oxford, Pococke 125, 327.27.

306 MS Leiden Or. 4, 632.4.

307 More precisely, the scribe later chose to add an additional *huwa* and *farasiyyah* in the margins, either because of a scribal mistake (a hypothesis that strikes me as unlikely) or because after collating manuscript variants he opted to read this sentence as an independent clause, in line with other manuscripts and with some modern scholars.

308 Tehran lithograph edition of *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*, 200.14.

309 Avicenna, *Philosophia prima*, V.1, 228.36: *sed ex hoc quod est equinitas tantum* (“but on account of the fact that it is horseness alone” or “but only inasmuch as it is horseness alone”). The Latin translation therefore agrees with MS Malek and the Cairo edition. This is significant, since the Latin translation is based on an early Arabic version of Avicenna’s work.

have in common the fact that they make segment [C] an independent clause that can stand on its own, and whose gist could be conveyed as follows: “But inasmuch as it is horseness, it is horseness alone [and nothing else].”³¹⁰

Now, the philosophical implications of the textual variations between the Cairo edition, MS Malek, and the Latin translation, on the one hand, and other manuscripts such as MSS Oxford and Leiden, on the other, are significant, because, depending on the reading one relies on, one can construe segment [C] either as an argument pertaining merely to the cognitive self-identity of pure quiddity or, alternatively, as an argument pertaining to its ontology. One reading, concurrently exemplified in the Oxford and Leiden MSS and the Tehran lithograph edition, makes segment [C] an independent clause whose meaning can be isolated from [A] and [B]. The other, which appears in MS Malek and the Latin translation and was also opted for in the Cairo edition, makes it a dependent clause, whose meaning only makes sense if it is connected with what precedes it. If one follows the former and regards [C] as an independent clause, then Avicenna would merely be repeating a claim he makes elsewhere in *Metaphysics* V.1 to the effect that, taken in itself, pure quiddity is just pure quiddity. This would amount flatly to a self-identity statement and correspond to the way Marmura translated this clause—wrongly, one might add, on the basis of the Arabic edition he provides, which does not grammatically substantiate it. Conversely, the other variants, where [C] is made into a dependent clause, allow for an alternative interpretation, which is laid out below.

However, I need first to explain in more detail my decision to follow MS Malek, the Latin translation, and the Cairo edition (also favored by Marmura) over and above the other manuscript variations. Notwithstanding the fact that MS Malek and the Latin translation represent two of the oldest testimonies in our possession, there are two compelling reasons why I believe this reading should be deemed the most accurate. The first is that Avicenna puts forth the self-identity argument on behalf of quiddity twice already in the paragraph from which Text 8 is taken, making it unlikely that he would repeat it yet a third time in such a condensed passage. Avicenna states at 196.10 that “in itself, it [horseness] is not a thing at all except horseness” and at 196.16 he reiterates that “horseness in itself is only horseness.” Hence, this thesis is conveyed clearly enough in this paragraph of V.1, and the repetition would seem to render segment [C] superfluous and deflationary, if the latter’s sole aim was to repeat the identity claim on behalf of quiddity. This is compounded by the fact that the main focus of Text 8 is on existence (from “existing neither...” (*lā mawjūd*) forward), and not merely on the irreducibility of quiddity. Given these considerations, if construed merely as reiterating the self-identity thesis, segment [C] would represent somewhat of an anticlimax to the sentence taken as a whole.

The second reason emerges from a comparison of this text with another passage of *Metaphysics* V.1, which contains numerous syntactic and doctrinal parallels with

310 Bertolacci opts for a similar reading in his Italian translation (Avicenna, *Libro*, 412–413).

the text at hand, and whose focus is equally on the existence of quiddity, but this time explicitly:

Text 9: This consideration [of animal in itself] is prior in existence [*mutaqaddim fi l-wujūd*] to the individual animal with its accidents and to [animal *qua*] universal intellectual existent, in the way that the simple precedes the complex and the part precedes the whole. With this existence, it is not genus, or species, or individual, or one, or multiple. Rather, with [or on account of] this existence, it is animal only and human only [*bi-hādhā l-wujūd lā huwa jins wa-lā naw' wa-lā shakḥ wa-lā wāhid wa-lā kathīr bal huwa bi-hādhā l-wujūd ḥayawān faqaṭ wa-insān faqaṭ*].³¹¹

As we can see, this passage closely mirrors the one in Text 8 above. The last part contains a similar string of negatives (*lā ... wa-lā*), to which is opposed a final clause introduced by the conjunction *bal*. Moreover, the general wording is extremely close. Finally, and beyond these purely stylistic and grammatical resemblances, the philosophical gist seems identical: both excerpts aim to contrast pure quiddity to quiddity taken together with its accidents and concomitants. The only notable difference is that Text 9 explicitly refers to *the existence (wujūd)* of pure quiddity, a point that is only intimated in Text 8. It is on these textual and contextual grounds, and because it allows for a strong ontological interpretation in line with the general tenor of V.1, that the reading *bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqaṭ* should be preferred to the other manuscript variants. Not only does this suggestion accord with the principle of *lectio difficilior potior*; it is also supported by the oldest extant Arabic manuscript and by the medieval Latin translation of *Metaphysics*.

Now that this point has been established, let us turn to the proper interpretation and translation of this segment. For one thing, if segment [C] is treated as a dependent clause, then the wording leaves no doubt that this segment is grammatically connected to what precedes and that it represents the conclusion of a prior reasoning. But the question that now arises is *of what* exactly is this last segment the continuation? From a grammatical and syntactical perspective, the only coherent option is to connect *bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqaṭ* to the preceding statement that begins with *wa-lā mawjūd*. This is a standard Arabic construction, which involves first a negation and then a positive assertion. Accordingly, Avicenna's statement can be paraphrased as follows: quiddity in itself exists neither in the concrete world nor in the soul with concomitants that combine or fuse with it, "but [only] inasmuch as it is horseness in itself" (*bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqaṭ*). What this means is that the clause "but [only] inasmuch as it is horseness in itself" is directly connected with the term *mawjūd* in segment [A] and amounts to a positive ontological claim. Its role is to specify exactly how pure quiddity exists.³¹²

³¹¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.10–13.

³¹² Compare this reading to the translation provided by Marmura (in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 149) and favored by many scholars: "for, in itself, it is nothing at all except 'horseness'; for, in itself, it is neither one nor many and exists neither in concrete things nor in the soul, existing in none of these things either in potency or in act, such that [these] are included in 'horseness.' *Rather, in terms*

In this connection, Avicenna explains in this same passage how pure quiddity can be said to possess a distinct ontological mode, or rather, he begins by specifying what mode it *cannot* be said to have: quiddity in itself “exists neither in the concrete world nor in the soul ... *in a way that this [i.e., the concomitants] would become internal to horseness.*” The master is introducing a condition or qualification regarding how quiddity cannot be said to exist. The Arabic expression *‘alā an* means literally “in a way that” or “with the condition that,” thereby turning the sentence into a negative conditional statement: pure quiddity cannot exist in the mind *with the condition that* the accidents or concomitants be internal to it.³¹³ This reasoning leads in turn to the conclusion that it must exist “[only] inasmuch as it is horseness in itself.” Hence, on my interpretation, the main thrust of Text 8 would be to distinguish between the conditioned and complex existence of quiddity taken *together* with its concomitants

of itself, it is only ‘horseness.’” Notice that Marmura’s translation makes the last segment an autonomous clause standing on its own and one that is disconnected syntactically from the previous sentence, in spite of the fact that the Arabic text on which he relies does not allow this. Furthermore, the Arabic construction *min ḥaythu* that is used in segment [C] would require a different phrasing to be construed reflexively, as in the expression *min ḥaythu hiya hiya*, which appears in other passages of *Metaphysics*, or a construction such as *fa-l-kullī min ḥaythu huwa kullī shay’*, which appears shortly before our text (196.6). Marmura’s translation has the effect of shifting the emphasis from ontology (pure quiddity *exists*) to identity (quiddity in itself is just itself). But the latter rendering, quite apart from the fact that it finds no support in the Arabic phraseology, would be superfluous, since Avicenna himself makes such a statement immediately after this passage (196.16) in a way this time that excludes all ambiguity and focuses squarely on the identity of pure quiddity: “In itself, however, horseness is only horseness [and nothing else] [*fa-l-farasiyyah fī nafsihā farasiyyah faqat*].” Both *fa-l-kullī min ḥaythu huwa kullī shay’* and *fa-l-farasiyyah fī nafsihā farasiyyah faqat* are independent clauses, unlike *bal min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqat*, which is a dependent clause. This suggests that this key segment seeks to establish another, albeit related, point from the one that appears at 196.16.

313 Here an important clarification should be provided. It might be objected that even with regard to the complex universal in the mind, the accidents and concomitants that accompany quiddity are not internal to quiddity, but merely attach to it from the outside. They are what Avicenna calls external concomitants. So that, in the very example Avicenna provides in this passage, universality is not internal to horseness, even when ‘the universal horse’ is considered as a complex concept made up of quiddity and universality. This is, in fact, correct. On this reasoning, it is interesting to note that Avicenna’s claim that quiddity does not exist in the mind with the condition that the concomitants be internal to it can apply *both* to the complex universal and to the distinct concept of pure quiddity. It even applies to the concrete horse, when other types of concomitants and accidents are intended. However, I think Avicenna has a more specific point in mind here that concerns the ontology of pure quiddity specifically. In this passage of V.1, his intent is to distinguish ‘the thing’ (*shay’*) *qua* complex universal (i.e., pure quiddity and universality) and ‘the thing’ *qua* quiddity in itself. Seen from this perspective, there is a sense in which universality as an accident enters into the complex universal *qua* thing, but not into pure quiddity *qua* thing. Hence, there is a sense in which the concomitants and accidents can be regarded as internal to the thing, and a sense in which they can be regarded as external to the thing, depending on what ‘thing’ refers to (pure quiddity, the complex mental concept, the *sunolon*, etc.) and on whether one adopts a mereological framework. This distinction can be connected also with the conditions *bi-sharṭ shay’* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay’*.

and that of pure quiddity or quiddity taken only *in itself*.³¹⁴ This in turn enables us to propose the amendment *bal [mawjūd] min haythu huwa farasiyyah faqaṭ*, which appears auspicious also on account of the close parallels between Text 8 and Text 9 highlighted above. It should be noted that these ontological statements concerning pure quiddity are very much aligned with the overarching aim of section V.1 and reflect Avicenna's broader intentions in this chapter of his masterwork.³¹⁵ More specifically, they accord with the statement at *Metaphysics* V.1.204.5–6 with regard to the existence of pure quiddity in the mind.³¹⁶

In light of the foregoing, a new, more literal, and more complete translation of Text 8 can be proposed, which does justice to the crucial ontological underpinnings of the passage:

[A] And it [the pure quiddity horseness] in itself is nothing other than horseness. It is in itself neither one nor many, neither existent in the concrete nor [existent] in the soul, neither [existent] in a thing from among these in potentiality nor [existent in a thing from among these] in actuality³¹⁷—[B] in a way that this [i.e., these various concomitants] would become internal to horseness—[C] but [it exists only] inasmuch as it is horseness alone.

In the final analysis, this key sentence is not merely apophatic, as has long been recognized, but also prophatic, in that it indicates *that* pure quiddity exists and *how* it exists, i.e., in perfect autonomy from its external concomitants, either of a material or mental kind, and hence distinctly and irreducibly (as segment [B] in particular

314 I am not alone in translating the text in this way and in upholding this particular interpretation of this key passage. Anawati opted for a similar interpretation in his French rendering of *The Cure* (*La Métaphysique*, 234): “En elle-même [horseness], elle n'est ni une, ni plusieurs, ni existant dans la réalité, ni dans l'âme, ni dans une de ces choses en puissance, ni en acte, en ce sens que cela entrerait dans l'équinité, *mais en tant qu'elle est équinité seulement.*” Hence, on Anawati's mind, the last segment of the passage, which I italicized, is to be connected grammatically to “ni existant dans ...” Cf. Marc Geoffroy's translation (in de Libera, *L'art*, 656–657): “Bien au contraire, [la définition de la caballéité existe] en tant qu'elle est la caballéité seulement,” and his glossing *wujūd khāṣṣ* in *Metaphysics* I.5 as “être définitionnel” (648, note 4). This “être définitionnel” presumably amounts to a kind of intelligible being in the mind.

315 Recall in this connection that the subtitle of V.1 is “On general things and the manner of their existence” (*fī l-umūr al-'āmmaḥ wa-kayfa wujūdiḥā*), which announces the chapter's emphasis on existence.

316 I cite this specific passage for the express purpose of supporting my argument of how pure quiddity can exist on its own distinctly from the composite and contingent mental and concrete existents and to show therefore that these two modes are not inclusive of all ontological modes. But this represents only one context of the existence of pure quiddity, and quiddity can also be said to exist in composite things in an irreducible way.

317 Strictly speaking, the wording of the Arabic text connects the clause *wa-lā fī shay' min dhālika* with potentiality alone, with the ensuing possible translation: “nor in a thing from among these in potentiality, nor in actuality.” However, the general meaning of the argument makes it clear that *wa-lā fī shay' min dhālika* should be connected with actuality as well. This can be inferred from the previous statement and term *mawjūd*, which is connected strictly only with *fī l-a'yān*, but also obviously applies to *fī l-nafs*.

stresses). In this regard this passage is congruent with—and the interpretation of it I adduced above supported by—many other parts of *Metaphysics* V.1 that mention explicitly the existence (*wujūd*) of pure quiddity.

One point Text 8 does not dwell on in detail, however, is *where* pure quiddity exists in this mode. This issue was partially answered previously by means of *Metaphysics* V.1.204.5–6 and a protracted analysis of its implications: at the very least, there is a concept of pure quiddity that exists distinctly in the human mind. Identifying this concept seems to be one of Avicenna’s main intentions in this part of *Metaphysics*. Moreover, pure quiddity can also be said to exist in the universal and to underlie it ontologically. Yet, Avicenna in the passage at hand does not elaborate on the issue of the localization of pure quiddity. In short, Avicenna’s argument can be paraphrased as stating that quiddity in itself exists neither in the mind nor in the concrete world *in a contingent and composite mode*, but exists in the mind in a mode which concerns only itself and which excludes all other things. It is therefore ontologically distinct and irreducible.

If these remarks are properly appreciated, they change the meaning of the statement quite radically from a statement *denying pure quiddity any kind of mental existence* to a statement *denying it a particular mode of mental existence*. So Avicenna may not be claiming that quiddity in itself in no way exists in the mind. Rather, he may be explaining that it cannot exist in the mind in a manner that would affect its pure, abstract nature, i.e., *with mental concomitants*, like the universal. The upshot is that there are two possible modes of existence of pure quiddity: (a) a distinct mode of existence, in abstraction from all mental concomitants; and (b) an irreducible mode with or in the universal—with external concomitants, but without these concomitants affecting its true nature. These two states or modes of mental existence, the purely abstracted and simple one (pure quiddity), and the composite and concomitant one (the universal concept), also correspond to two different conditions: *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar* and *bi-sharṭ shay’* respectively, where *shay’* is taken to mean “mental concomitant,” “universality,” and “predicability of many.” By the same token, the concept of existence (*wujūd*) would not apply identically to pure quiddity and to other things, and it would require further distinctions.³¹⁸ This ap-

318 The conclusions I reach here are not altogether new. Marmura had already briefly alluded to—but not developed in any substantial way—the hypothesis of the dual mental existence of quiddity in itself and universal quiddity. In effect, Marmura in his studies sometimes regards quiddity in itself as possessing mental existence (while at the same time maintaining a distinction between it and the universal existent). On my view, this was Marmura’s most valuable insight regarding quiddity in Avicenna, which, as far as I know, was not picked up by any later interpreter. The most interesting passage in this connection is the section “The nature in itself and mental existence” of his article, Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals, 43–47. Marmura, *Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals*, 46, states: “As an existent in the mind, the quiddity [in itself] associates with mental accidents—universality, particularity, and the like. But these accidents are not necessary concomitants of the abstracted nature, since it can exist in the mind without them.” And: “Avicenna also speaks of an essence in itself as an abstraction—‘in itself’ having the meaning of ‘by itself’, that is, the essence is considered as

proach enables us to preserve the premise of the perfect co-extensionality of quiddity and existence—albeit by construing *wujūd* in a modulated manner—as well as the hypothesis that pure quiddity is a distinct existent in the human mind, which would pay heed to much of the evidence gleaned from *Metaphysics* V.1–2. The interpretive position defended here is that quiddity in itself possesses an ontological status distinct from that of universal mental quiddity and a kind of existence that cannot be inclusive of mental accidents and concomitants. Yet, this ontological mode still needs to be analyzed in detail; this will be the task of chapters IV and V.³¹⁹

2.5 Essential and accidental universality

At this juncture, I wish to touch on a potential shortcoming regarding Avicenna's doctrine of quiddity and universality, as well as on two interesting upshots that could derive from ascribing existence to pure quiddity in the mind. One might

'something' that is 'apart' from (a) the individuating circumstances that must attach to it in external existence and (b) the accidents that attach to it in the mind." However, it must be said that Marmura's argumentation in this section is not particularly clear. He seems to have oscillated between regarding quiddity in itself as a separate existent in the mind and as a nominal or conceptual notion deprived of true existence and merely as an aspect of the universal mental existent. Furthermore, one of the main shortcomings of Marmura's article is that it gives no indications about what this alternative ontological state of pure quiddity could be. As a result Marmura struggled with his conclusions, and although he could not deny the textual evidence he had collected, he failed to distinguish between these two states of mental existence. He was consequently preoccupied by what he perceived as an irreducible contradiction in the Avicennian texts. As an attempt to alleviate this difficulty, Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, 83, and idem, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*, 46, introduced the distinction between "the quiddity *in* itself" and "the quiddity *by* itself," but this conceptual distinction appears more confusing than helpful and is at any rate not supported by any textual evidence in Avicenna. Marmura was puzzled by the seeming paradox that Avicenna sometimes appears to ascribe existence to quiddity in itself and claims at other times that it does *not* exist in the mind; see Marmura, *Quiddity and Universality*, 83 and idem, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*, 44, with specific reference to *Metaphysics*, V.1.196.11. But, as I argued above, this is a false paradox, since there is another way of interpreting this statement that harmonizes it with the rest of the evidence. Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*, 272–273, who also relies heavily on Marmura in his analysis, intimates at times that quiddity in itself exists mentally. But he does not elaborate on its mental ontological status and how it differs from the universal mental existent. Overall, his views on this topic are not fully spelled out. It should be said, however, that Ibrahim's focus is Rāzī's interpretation of Avicenna, rather than Avicenna's doctrine *per se*. In contrast, Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*, forcefully rejects the hypothesis of non-universal mental existence in Avicenna's philosophy.

319 In the final analysis, upholding the interpretation of an alternative ontological mode for pure quiddity appears to be the most compelling and viable way of preserving three distinct and seemingly incompatible claims made by Avicenna: (a) that quiddity is always associated with existence, or that a *shay'* is always also a *mawjūd*; (b) that quiddity in itself does not exist (i.e., in a certain way or mode) in the mind and in the concrete world; and (c) that quiddity in itself nevertheless exists in the mind. The special, intelligible and abstract, and negatively-conditioned ontological mode of pure quiddity offers a harmonization of these various claims.

argue that an impasse has been reached concerning the relation between essence and universality. For despite Avicenna's best efforts to separate universality from essence, it appears that the latter itself remains on some grounds a universal or endowed with some kind of universality. This conundrum applies not so much in the case where pure quiddity is regarded either as a consideration of the universal concept (albeit abstracted of its universality) or as a part of it according to a mereological interpretation—for in this case pure quiddity remains fundamentally identified with the universal form ontologically—but rather arises from the interpretation of the formal and intelligible distinctness of pure quiddity in the mind, which was defended above.

Let me spell out this problem in more detail. On the one hand, Avicenna defines universality as an external concomitant or attribute of quiddity and the universal as an aspect of essence that is taken 'with the condition of something else' (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*). This 'something else' refers to the mental concomitants, chiefly universality, which is, in turn, defined by Avicenna as 'being predicated of many' (*al-maqūl 'alā kathīrīn*). Thus, the universal is a concept that can be conceived of in the mind as being predicated of, and which is relatable to, many concrete instances. On the other hand, quiddity, when taken purely 'in itself' and theorized as being a distinct meaning, form, or entity, seems to remain, in the final analysis, and in spite of Avicenna's best efforts to divest it from this condition and criterion of universality, a special kind of universal, since it itself can be predicated of many, and since it can be universally envisaged in the mind as relating to many concrete instances. After all, Avicenna frequently claims that 'humanness in itself' and 'animalness in itself'—and not merely the universal human or the universal animal—are said of many concrete instances, and even at times that they exist in each concrete instances of human and animal. Humanness exists in each actual human being, such as Zayd and 'Amr. This universal or generic nature of pure quiddity would seem to undermine or even annul the validity of the epistemic and ontological distinction between pure quiddity and the universal concept that Avicenna so eagerly seeks to establish. Worse, it could lead to a contradiction: if, as I previously argued, pure quiddity in the mind in its state of complete abstraction is negatively-conditioned (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*), and yet remains predicatable of many in that very state, then it would also at the same time be positively-conditioned, which is contradictory.

Taken at face value, the previous reasoning would seem to substantiate the interpretation put forth by some scholars who deny any strong separation between pure quiddity and the universal in the mind. This is the case of Pini, for example, who puts forth two interpretations, neither of which allows us to ascribe a distinct substantive status to pure essence in the mind. According to Pini, either (a) pure quiddity and the universal are really two different ways of considering the same mental entity (this is what Pini calls "the gnoseological interpretation"), with the implication that they are ontologically co-extensive, since pure quiddity is none other than the universal apprehended from another angle; or (b) pure quiddity is merely a part of the universal and is not ontologically co-extensive with it. On this mereo-

logical interpretation, pure quiddity could be said to exist *in* the universal. Yet, these two aspects (pure quiddity and the universal) would ultimately pertain to the same mental object (this is what Pini calls “the ontological interpretation”).³²⁰ This interpretive problem, which arises in the first place from the ambiguity of Avicenna’s comments on universality,³²¹ is compounded by the fact that the master defines the universal as that which is *theoretically* or *potentially* predicated of many, not as that which is *actually* predicated of many. In other words, those essences that have immediate and actual concrete instantiations, such as the natural forms (human, horse, tree, etc.), as well as those universal concepts that have just one or even no concrete instantiations, such as certain unica (the Sun) and fictional forms (heptagonal house), would still qualify as universals. This distinction between actual and potential predication when it comes to universal concepts is important, because it means that any mental form that has a conceivable quiddity can be described as a universal in complete abstraction from its extramental instantiations, as long as predicating it of many in the mind in a potential or theoretical way encounters no obstacle or yields no logical absurdity. On Avicenna’s definition of mental universality, the heptagonal house and the Sun remain universals even when many instantiations of these forms do not actually exist, as long as one attaches the intention and meaning of universality to them, be it in a purely theoretical or potential manner. On this added ground of potential predicability, any pure quiddity in the mind would appear to qualify necessarily as a universal or, at the very least, as a potential universal.

In light of the foregoing, nature and pure quiddity would seem to be potentially universal as well. What is more, according to a mereological interpretation, the quidditative natures lie at the core of the universal concepts, which are actual universals, as in the case of human, horse, etc. Thus, nothing prevents one from describing a pure quiddity like horseness as theoretically common or predicable of many. But, then again, these are the very notions by which Avicenna defines the various categories of universals in *Metaphysics* V.1. This would seem to make pure quiddity and its

320 See Pini, *Absoluta*. It will be noted that Pini restricts the meaning of ‘ontological’ in his article to mean ‘mereological,’ which is the only ontological mode he envisages for quiddity in the mind. Either way, this author’s dual interpretation erases any sharp ontological distinction between the universal and pure quiddity.

321 Universality (*al-kulliyah*) is, like so many other key metaphysical notions in Avicenna’s system (oneness, existence, form, etc.), a modulated notion (*yuqāl bi-l-tashkīk*) that can be considered under various aspects and together with different qualifications (see sections IV.1.2 and 1.3 for a detailed analysis of *tashkīk*). Thus, in both *Metaphysics*, V.1 and *Demonstration* II.4, 144.15, Avicenna states that the universal has “three aspects” (*wujūh thalāthah*), and the very fact that he applies universality to things as diverse as scientific concepts in the mind, fictional and artificial forms, and even natures in reality suggests that it possesses a range of meanings and aspects, all of which need to be highlighted. This multifaceted approach can be explained partly by the fact that Avicenna’s conception of universality was deeply informed by an array of Aristotelian and Platonic theories and views elaborated in the late-antique philosophical tradition, which were not all compatible with one another, and which the master had to sort out before developing his own doctrine.

corresponding universal concept equally universal and the entire argument circular.³²² The task of finding a resolution to this problem is not simple and necessitates the postulation of another subtle distinction, which would focus this time on different kinds or aspects of universality. Indeed, the scholarly assumption thus far has been that Avicenna only recognizes one kind or mode of universality—the mental universality associated with concepts—and that he upholds a strictly univocal notion of universality in his philosophy. But this appears to distort what is at root a much more subtle doctrine of universality. Just as Avicenna maintains that ‘existence’ (*wujūd*), ‘the simple’ (*basīṭ*) and ‘the one’ (*wāḥid*) are said in many ways—for example, the separate intellects, concepts in the mind, and primary elements such as air or water are not ‘simple’ in the same way and, with regard to themselves, are not absolutely simple inasmuch as they are also characterized by a kind of multiplicity, making simplicity a relative or modulated notion, especially when compared with the absolute simplicity of God—so universality appears to be a modulated and semantically flexible notion in his metaphysics. In at least two passages analyzed elsewhere (Text 7 and Text 20), the master explicitly distinguishes between the essential universality of pure quiddity and the accidental universality of quiddity as a universal concept in the mind. So, although Avicenna is usually intent on separating pure quiddity from the universal in the mind, he also at times seems to think that pure quiddity possesses its own special kind of universality, a universality that would belong to it intrinsically and essentially and that would not be reducible to that of the complex universal concept. Indeed, there appears to be a difference between the universality and predicability of many that attach to an essence as mental attributes and concomitants, and the conception of this essence in abstraction from these added intentions. The latter, for Avicenna, is also universal, but its universality should not be regarded as accidental to its nature, but rather as essential and intrinsic to it. Pure quiddity is conceived of in itself and is in no way attached to these added meanings and intentions in the mind. Its apprehension occurs regardless of whether there are or not concrete instantiations of it and also in complete abstraction from a relation to a potential multiplicity. This distinction expresses, fundamentally, the difference between quiddity ‘with the condition of something else,’ which corresponds here to the accidental universal in the mind, and the two negative states of quiddity ‘with the condition of nothing else’ (*bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar*) and ‘not with the condition of something else’ (*lā bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*), where ‘something else’ can signify either *potential predication* (as in the case of the heptagonal house) or *actual predication* (as in the case of horse). It is therefore according to a different sense or aspect altogether that pure quiddity can be said to be predicated of many and a universal when it is

322 This critique is articulated by Bahlul, Avicenna, 21–23.

envisaged in its negative aspects. In that case, its being common or universal is essential to it, not accidental to it.³²³

I will argue in chapter III that the ambiguity and subtlety that characterize Avicenna's thought on this topic reflect similar types of discussions that had unfolded in late-antique Neoplatonic and Peripatetic circles regarding the nature of common things (*ta koina*) and their relation to universal concepts in the mind.³²⁴ For our immediate purposes, and without anticipating too much on the forthcoming analysis, suffice to say that the distinction between nature and universality amounts, in a certain way, to a distinction between something that is intrinsically or essentially common or universal and something that is accidentally so. The latter is defined as a mental kind of universality and more specifically as an intention generated by the mind and consciously added to quiddity. The distinction at stake here may therefore be formulated in terms of *essential and accidental universality*. Avicenna himself intimates that there are various senses or modes of universality at the very beginning of *Metaphysics* V.2, when he writes: "you have therefore ascertained what is the universal among existents [*al-mawjūdāt*], namely, that it is a quidditative nature to which *one of the senses of universality has occurred accidentally* [*wa-huwa hādhihi l-ṭabī'ah*

323 There are other relevant passages in addition to the evidence contained in Text 7 and Text 20. At *Demonstration* II.4, 145.4–6, Avicenna explains that nothing in itself prevents "pure nature" (*nafs al-ṭabī'ah*) from being predicated of many in the mind; what does prevent this is an added meaning, notion, or consideration (*ma'nā ākhar*), which, one surmises, is the negative condition (*bi-sharṭ lā*) in the mind; this makes the pure nature potentially universal. One upshot is that the potentiality of quiddity in itself is twice removed, so to speak, from the universal that is actually predicated of many concrete instances in the mind. For (a) a pure quiddity is only potentially a mental universal predicated of many; and it is also, by the same token, (b) potentially a mental universal predicated of many *in actuality*, when that universal happens to correspond to many concrete instantiations. But given that the main criteria for universality according to Avicenna are conceivability in the mind and potential or theoretical predication of many (and not predication of actually existing things), the main aspect of potentiality at play here is that between the pure nature and the mental universal, and not that between potential and actual universal predication; thus, when Avicenna says that nature (e.g., horseness) is 'potentially' a mental universal, he means a mental universal generally, regardless of whether that universal is potentially or actually predicated of many entities in the concrete world. Predication of many thus appears as a purely abstract or theoretical condition for universality, whose main purpose, I would surmise, is to establish whether any given notion is a true essence or form or a logical impossibility. Accordingly, both horse and heptagonal house can be potentially predicated of many, but not pure nonexistence or square circle. Another upshot is that all pure quiddities will be potentially universals in the mind, so that there is co-extensionality in this regard; only absolute impossibles will correspond *neither* to pure quiddities *nor* to universals.

324 The Greek thinkers outlined and defended various modes of universality and commonness depending on whether they were discussing Aristotelian mental concepts or Platonic forms, and there was at any rate no consensus regarding these theories. Avicenna's ambiguity on the relationship between quiddity and universality must be regarded as a direct continuation of this rich and often hair-splitting conversation about the universality of essences, natures, forms, and concepts in the late-antique background.

[*‘arīḍan lahā aḥad al-ma‘ānī allatī sammaynāhā kullīyyah*].³²⁵ In light of this, I would argue that, in spite of what has been claimed, Avicenna does not restrict universality to a single sense that would be confined exclusively to the mind and to the complex universal concepts. Rather, he conceives of this notion in a nuanced and modulated manner. This gives him the leeway to deploy various senses of accidental universality (as the aforementioned quotation suggests), as well as to ascribe a kind of intrinsic universality or commonness to nature in its essential being. This kind of essential commonness is distinct from the purely mental and logical kind of universality that attaches to quiddity in the mind accidentally and as an extrinsic concomitant (*lāzim*) and added intention (*ma‘nā*).³²⁶

Hence, for Avicenna, mental universality, i.e., the universality that attaches exclusively to the universal concepts in the mind as an external concomitant, is accidental (*‘araḍī*, *‘arīḍ*) in that it is not intrinsic or constitutive of the nature as such and qualifies it from the outside. Yet, it is not an accident proper, since, if it is ‘said of’ (*maqūl ‘alā*) individual concrete things as a universal, it is on the other hand not ‘existent in’ or ‘present in’ them (*mawjūd fī, fī mawḍū‘*) in the way that an accident exists in a subject. Accordingly, Avicenna is adamant that the universal horse does not exist accidentally in Bucephalus. In contrast, the pure nature horse-ness is common by virtue of its very essence and inner reality, because it is *in itself* a common nature (*ṭabī‘ah ‘āmmah*).³²⁷ It is perhaps for this reason that, in contrast to

325 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.2, 2075–6.

326 Interestingly, Rashed, *Essentialisme*, 255–256, ascribes a theory of essential universality to form to Alexander, who was undoubtedly one of Avicenna’s main sources. This distinction between the essential or intrinsic universality or commonness of the nature or pure quiddity and the universality of the complex universal concept in the mind will have an important role to play in chapter V when discussing the topic of divine knowledge and intellection. For universality construed as an accidental mental concomitant should be confined exclusively to the human mind.

327 The term *‘āmm* is, like most Avicennian technical terms, somewhat ambiguous or rather, I would argue, modulated. In some contexts, especially the logical ones, it can be used interchangeably with *kullī* to convey the notion of generality or universality in definitional predication. In this case, it is confined exclusively to the mind (see, e.g., *Notes*, 162, section 236, where “the general concept” (*al-ma‘nā l-‘āmm*) is said to exist only in the mind). However, inasmuch as pure quiddity is said to exist in the concrete beings as their essential reality, it is clear that Avicenna also ascribes a sense of commonness to the pure nature in the concrete world. This is done in an effort to account for the fact that different individuals of the same species have a similar essential structure by virtue of their nature; but this is an ontological reality that transcends the purely definitional and predicational aspect of the problem. Thus, the pure quiddity or nature humanness is common (*‘āmmah*) in the concrete and shared by (*mushtarakah*) various individuals, without being strictly a universal (*kullī*), or being common because it is a numerically ‘one’ nature; in fact, Avicenna reiterates that the notion of numerical oneness is external to pure quiddity. A recent discussion of these terms in the context of Avicenna’s physics was proffered by Lammer, *The Elements*, 155, 175–176. Lammer distinguishes between two senses of *‘āmm*, “the numerically common” and “the generically common,” and concludes, rightly I believe, that form and essence are not numerically one and numerically common for Avicenna, but rather generically common. However, the latter notion is treated somewhat vaguely in his analysis, for although he states that, in the case of a generically common form

the universal concept, Avicenna holds that it is both ‘said of’ and ‘existent in’ individual concrete things, albeit not in the way that an accident exists in a subject, nor in the way that a universal logical predicate is said of a particular thing. This is why he strenuously denies that ‘universal horse’ exists in Bucephalus, but argues that ‘horseness in itself’ somehow exists in Bucephalus. The catch here is that things like horseness and animalness are not existent in the concrete particular *qua* universal species and genus, but as something else altogether, because species and genus are precisely what qualify the mental universal notions (‘animal-genus’ and ‘horse-

such as human, “the ontological status and the epistemological apprehension conform to one another” (175), he says nothing precise about this ontological status of the substantial form. Rather, Lammer seems to connect generic commonness exclusively with universality and predicability in the mind and so to regard it as a purely mental notion. At any rate he does not explain in detail how this logical commonness relates to the nature and essential forms of beings. Nor does his distinction allow for a sense of commonness that would qualify the quiddity or nature in itself in the concrete in a mode distinct from numerical commonness, which is, admittedly, not the sense that Avicenna intends in this case. So I think there is a qualified sense of the common and commonness that is missing from Lammer’s analysis, and which is neither numerical commonness nor universal logical commonness, but what I shall call ‘essential commonness,’ that is, a commonness that pertains uniquely to pure quiddity or nature. Another problematic and related point is Lammer’s decision to connect the term *mushtarakah* with the numerically common (175) and, more precisely, with God as *the* numerically common Agent and End of all things. In fact, Avicenna more frequently applies the term *mush-tarakah* to essential nature (*tabī’ah*) as it exists in beings, and not with the sense of ‘the numerically common.’ So, again in this case, an interpretation additional to the one that Lammer develops is called for. These points notwithstanding, nature’s commonness is not opposed to the particular so much as to what is specific (*khāṣṣ*) and individualizing. But these shifting semantics of ‘*āmm*’ and the attribution of a special kind of commonness to nature pose a problem, inasmuch as Avicenna in *Metaphysics* V.1 explains that pure quiddity is neither specific nor common (‘*āmmah*). Furthermore, and to make things even more confusing, in *Metaphysics* I.5, he connects quiddity with special or proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), which would seem to be incompatible with the idea of regarding the pure nature or quiddity as something common. In each case, however, one should examine in what context and with what exact purpose Avicenna intends these terms. If the term ‘*āmm*’ is used to suggest mental universality, then obviously pure quiddity will not be ‘*āmmah*. Hence, whenever it is applied to quiddity, this notion presumably refers to the mode of existence of quiddity in the concrete beings, in which case Avicenna also tolerates that one qualified or modulated sense of universality be attached to it; see Text 7 and Text 20. As for special existence, it refers to the first and most pointed answer to the question ‘What is it?’, so that anything is first and foremost distinguished from other things by its irreducible quiddity, be it blackness or humanness. Hence, the terms ‘*āmm*’ and *khāṣṣ*’ here are located at different levels of analysis and discourse, but are not incompatible. This reflects a typical feature of Avicenna’s methodology based on notional hierarchy. Other relevant examples focus on his noetics (in the discussion of how the different levels or degrees of intellect relate to one another) and on his logical classifications, where the same thing (e.g., animal) can be both genus for one thing and species for another thing. Likewise, pure quiddity is common with regard to its presence in various individuals endowed with specific accidents and concomitants that distinguish them individually and as particulars, but it is specific or specifying with regard to the general question ‘What is it?’ that is asked of them, and when one seeks to adduce an immediate or primary criterion of differentiation between these and other beings.

species' in the mind).³²⁸ Horseness in itself and animalness in itself are neither accidental nor universal species and genus, but a common nature and essence that is both 'said of' and 'existent in' each concrete individuals. Exactly how horseness in itself can be said to exist in the concrete horse, but not *qua* accident or universal concept, will be addressed in the next chapter.

What philosophical benefit, if any, can be gained from separating pure quiddity and nature entirely from the mental universal? One likely hypothesis is that, by separating accidental, mental universality from pure quiddity, Avicenna is attempting to articulate a theory of quiddity that is not restricted to the domain of conceptual thought and logic alone, but also encompasses the mode of existence of concrete beings and allows him to predicate quiddity of such beings in a way that does not land him in a logical quandary. In other words, defining logical universality as an accidental feature or external concomitant pertaining to the universal concepts allows him by the same token to endow pure quiddity with an essential commonness or intrinsic universality that transcends this logical plane and opens the way for a new ontological theory of how essence exists in the real world. The philosophical ramifications linked to the distinction between these two kinds of universality become even more salient when the question of ontology is addressed. For what is *ontologically common* to all existents, for Avicenna, is not the universal *qua* concept or the attribute of universality, but rather nature and pure quiddity itself. Quiddity and nature are said, in a qualified sense, to exist both in the concrete individuals and in the universal concepts in the mind, so that it is quiddity in itself, rather than the concomitant of mental universality, which should be regarded as ontologically common. For there to be many concrete instantiations of horse in the extramental world, and for there to be a universal concept of horse in multiple individual human minds, there must be something common that transcends each one of these concrete horses and each one of the minds thinking the concept 'universal horse.' This common principle is not the determined, numerically one universal concept of horseness in any single mind. Rather, it is the undetermined nature horseness that is being synchronously intellected by various individuals together with the intention of universality. Fundamentally, then, the distinction between pure quiddity and the concomitant of mental universality is not only valid and justified, but necessary in the context of Avicenna's metaphysics: it enables the master to maintain a special notion of essential commonness or universality that serves as the foundation for concrete individuals and universal concepts. This principle is the foundational and common quidditative meaning and entity (*ma'nā*), which, when conceived of strictly in itself, is nevertheless unrelated to any other thing and any external concomitant.

328 Strictly speaking, Avicenna differentiates between 'universality' (*kulliyah*) and 'genusness' (*jinsiyah*), which are two distinct concomitants or attributes of the pure nature horseness in the mind; indeed, universality also qualifies other things such as species, differentia, etc. The key point is that they both qualify the universal concept horse in the mind, but are extrinsic to the pure quiddity horseness as such.

Having addressed this difficult point, I turn now to the two thought-provoking implications that could arise from ascribing existence to pure quiddity in the intellect. The first has to do with Avicenna's concept of special or proper existence as outlined in *Metaphysics* I.5. I dwell on this concept at length in chapter IV, but it is worth saying a few words about it in the context of the present discussion of quiddity in the mind. In that chapter, Avicenna devotes one sense or aspect of existence to quiddity or thingness, which he calls "special" or "proper existence" (*wujūd khāṣṣ*). This is a rather perplexing statement that has caused a great deal of speculation on the part of scholars ever since the Latin reception of Avicenna's works and whose exact interpretation is not immediately obvious. Here I wish merely to point out that the context of his remarks in this chapter validates the assumption that proper existence is primarily intended to qualify quiddity *as it is conceived in the mind*, and in contradistinction to what Avicenna calls in this same passage "realized" or "acquired existence" (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) and "established existence" (*wujūd ithbātī*), which would seem to apply chiefly to the concrete world. Now, given that Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence is primarily, if not perhaps exclusively, a conceptual one, and that this chapter of *Metaphysics* aims chiefly to elucidate primary notions in the mind, it is sensible to presume that it is also within this mentalist framework that one should construe the distinction he makes between these two senses of *wujūd*: realized existence, which qualifies the complex entity taken together with its various accidents and concomitants, and proper existence, which qualifies quiddity when conceived of strictly in itself. In view of what has been said above regarding essence as *ma'nā* in the mind, it would seem that proper existence is the state that corresponds to the *ma'nā* of pure quiddity when it is conceived of intellectually and strictly in itself. For horseness or whiteness alone, when conceived of in the mind, is still something, it is an entity or object that possesses a certain immediate intelligible reality. One might say that it is an irreducible intelligible entity that possesses a mental presence or being, regardless of other considerations of realized or acquired existence, and regardless of whether it is related to a concrete being in the exterior world—and even, perhaps, to a realized being in the mind, where the latter is defined as quiddity taken with its external mental concomitants, such as oneness and universality, and where the universal concept is accordingly regarded as being 'realized' in an intellectual setting. In brief, there are reasons to believe that proper existence could correspond to the mode of existence that characterizes pure quiddity *qua ma'nā* in the intellect. This would be in line with the overall conceptualist or intellectualist tenor of the chapter.

The second point is related and concerns the connection between essence and final causality. Avicenna is often keen to stress that essence, as something that is conceived in the mind, is a kind of final cause. In this intellectual context, essence *qua* final cause can be regarded as something that precedes the realization of existence and the efficient cause in the exterior world. This intellectual reality and priority of the final cause is, it would seem, in turn to be connected with the *ma'nā* of quiddity and, on the basis of what was said above, with its proper existence in the

intellect. Hence, just as Avicenna explicitly refers in some passages to the essential and ontological priority of pure quiddity over realized composite existence, he stresses in others the priority of final causality over efficient causality. All of these notions—pure quiddity in the mind, proper existence, essential distinctness, irreducibility, and priority, as well as final causality—seem to converge toward the intelligible state or mode of being of pure quiddity in the mind. There are therefore various—and at this stage still hypothetical—doctrinal implications that seem to flow from the hypothesis that quiddity is a distinct and irreducible entity in the intellect. If the latter hypothesis is correct, it would only make sense that Avicenna would want to relate this theory of pure quiddity in the mind to some of his other fundamental theses about existence, causality, and human knowledge in order to further ground it as a key tenet of his philosophy. Remarkably, Avicenna’s focus on the intrinsic intelligibility and irreducibility of pure quiddity can be traced in part to the works of Mu‘tazilite theologians who struggled with similar epistemological and ontological issues.

2.6 Avicenna and some Baṣṛian Mu‘tazilites on ‘the thing in itself’ in the intellect

Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī (d. 933 CE) is famous in Islam for having introduced the theory of the ‘states’ (*aḥwāl*) in order to solve the conundrum of how a plurality of attributes (*ṣifāt*) could be predicated of the divine essence without introducing multiplicity within It. This theory, and its fate in later Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite theology, has recently been the focus of several insightful studies.³²⁹ One particularly interesting phenomenon in Islamic intellectual history is how Abū Hāshim’s theory of the states, and more generally his ontology, were combined with Avicennian philosophical elements in the works of later Ash‘arite authors who endorsed this feature of the Mu‘tazilite theologian’s system.³³⁰ In what follows, I focus more narrowly on the connec-

329 See especially Thiele, *Kausalität; Theologie*; and Abū Hāshim. For a lucid account of the theological imperatives and problems that incentivized Abū Hāshim to develop this theory, see Gimaret, *La théorie*; and Thiele, *Ḥāl*.

330 This interesting question raises a host of methodological problems. To begin with, there are no extant works by Abū Hāshim, so that we are almost completely dependent on later reports for a reconstruction of his system. Many of these accounts are conveyed by Ash‘arite authors who were sometimes hostile to his doctrine or whose priority was to naturalize specific elements of his system within their theology. An additional problem concerns the post-Avicennian sources on the Bahshamites, which often rely on a terminology that is profoundly colored by Avicenna’s works to describe the views of Abū Hāshim and his followers; this is the case, for instance, of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and especially Shahrastānī. This sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish what is properly Bahshamite from what is, for want of a better term, a kind of ‘Avicennized Bahshamism.’ If one adds to these difficulties the inevitable process of doctrinal transformation and adaptation that accompanies the writing of commentaries, then it becomes clear that the later sources on the Bahshamites should

tion between Abū Hāshim (and his early legacy) and Avicenna, thereby limiting myself to theological sources that predate or are contemporaneous with the *shaykh al-ra'īs*. More specifically, it is Abū Hāshim's theory of 'the Attribute of the Essence' that will be the main concern here.³³¹ Following brief suggestions by other scholars, I explore the possibility that this Bahshamite theory represents an important source for Avicenna's views on pure quiddity.³³²

The various medieval reports on Abū Hāshim agree in ascribing to him the authorship of the theory of the states. According to most modern reconstructions of his system, he devised this doctrine in order to explain how the divine attributes could be said to reflect real (*thābitah*) attributes, states, or aspects in God without their entailing a multiplicity of things and existents (*ashyā'* or *mawjūdāt*) in Him or alongside Him. Abū Hāshim's solution was to introduce a new ontological mode that occupied an intermediary position between existence and nonexistence and that applied uniquely to these attributes and states. Accordingly, the attributes are actual and real, but distinct from 'the existent' (*al-mawjūd*) and 'the nonexistent' (*al-ma'dūm*), with the result that predicating them of the divine essence does not result in a plurality of existing entities. This means that for Abū Hāshim, as well as for the later followers of his doctrine known as the Bahshamiyyah or Bahshamites, the divine attributes are neither existent things (*ashyā' mawjūdah*) nor nonexistent things (*ashyā' ma'dūmah*). In spite of this, they are real states or qualities of God and hence can be spoken of in a meaningful way and with truthful descriptions (*awṣāf*).³³³ This strategy enabled the Bahshamites to claim both that the divine attributes are real and not just based on sheer linguistic word play, and that they do not possess entitative existence on a par with God's unique existence.

Abū Hāshim eventually extended the notions of states and the essential attributes to his ontology in general to describe how the various properties of a thing relate to it or its essence. For Abū Hāshim, what truly exists or has existence (*wujūd*) are

be handled with extreme caution. In spite of these challenges, scholars have elaborated a relatively consistent picture of Abū Hāshim's theory of the states by relying on the earliest sources at our disposal and by turning a critical eye to the evidence in the later sources. For my purposes, I have relied exclusively on Mu'tazilite sources that either precede or are contemporary with Avicenna in order to eliminate the issue of doctrinal and terminological cross-contamination as much as possible. The following account is based on the works of the prominent Bahshamite thinkers Abū Rashīd, 'Abd al-Jabbar, and Ibn Mattawayh.

331 I follow Frank in capitalizing this expression in order to underline the unique status of this attribute and to better differentiate it from the essential attributes.

332 To my knowledge, Gimaret, *La théorie*, 61, and Bonmariage, *Le réel*, 32–33, are the only scholars to have suggested a direct connection between the Bahshamite theory of the Attribute of the Essence and Avicenna's doctrine of quiddity.

333 On this point, the Bahshamites disagree with their theological opponents the Ash'arites, who conceive of the attributes as truly existent entities in God. But it is important to note that the theory of the states came to be endorsed by some prominent Ash'arite thinkers as well, such as Bāqillānī and Juwaynī. For insight into the Ash'arite assimilation of the theory of the states, see Gimaret, *La théorie*; and Benevich, *The Classical*.

substances (*jawāhir*) and accidents (*a'rād*), which can be described as primary constituents or things (*dhawāt*, *ashyā'*), and which are caused to exist by an agent. Individual substances and accidents, and by extension the composite wholes that they form, can thus be described as concrete and existent essences, entities, or things (*dhawāt* or *ashyā' mawjūdah*).³³⁴ By existence or *wujūd*, the Bahshamites mean exclusively 'actual' and 'realized' existence in the concrete world. In their view, a *mawjūd* is a concrete existent in the exterior world, which is also an individual and determined thing or essence. In short, all existents are concrete realized beings consisting of a bundle of substances and accidents. In contrast, the various attributes, properties, and states that can be predicated of a thing, such as 'being black,' 'being knowing,' or 'occupying space,' cannot be said to exist proper. These attributes do not correspond to an existing entity (*ma'nā*) and thing (*shay'*) in the concrete world, nor are they an entity *in* a being, although they can be said to be real (*thābit*) and to qualify that being. They are not therefore nonexistent or limited to the purely nominal and linguistic plane. Rather, the description (*waṣf*) that is enunciated corresponds to an attribute (*ṣifah*) that denotes a real state (*ḥāl*) in the concrete, realized being or thing. Consequently, the ontological status of the essential attributes and the states is strictly speaking neither one of existence nor nonexistence, but one of reality or subsistence (*thubūt*). Because they are neither things (*ashyā'*) nor entities (*ma'āni*), the attributes and states are neither *mawjūd* nor *ma'dūm*, although they can be said to be real (*thābit*) and even actual or actualized (*ḥaṣala*).

One upshot of this ontological system is that 'the thing' (*al-shay'*) is extensionally broader than the existent (*al-mawjūd*). Furthermore, since 'thingness' or 'the state of being a thing' is common to both a *mawjūd* and a *ma'dūm*, it can be said to possess a certain kind of reality or ontological autonomy in abstraction from realized existence or nonexistence. It is therefore crucial in Bahshamite ontology to distinguish between the realized and actual existence of a concrete entity, on the one hand, and the reality of thingness as it applies to substances and accidents in abstraction from realized existence, on the other. It is in this context that Abū Hāshim develops the theory of the 'Attribute of the Essence' (*ṣifat al-dhāt*).³³⁵ According to the

334 Abū Hāshim uses the term *dhāt* to refer exclusively to a determined existent or essence in concrete reality, that is, to an actual and individual essence or thing in the world, and not to abstract essence or quiddity. In that sense, *dhāt* is close to other terms such as *naḥs*, 'ayn, and even *shay'* *mawjūd*; see Gimaret, *La théorie*, 59–60. In Avicenna's philosophy, in contrast, *dhāt* can either be used interchangeably with *māhiyyah* to express abstract quiddity, or it can also mean an actual being, in which case it also carries the sense of 'self,' as in *fī dhātīhi* or 'in itself.' This distinction is important for what follows, because Avicenna's notion of quiddity will turn out to have more in common with the Bahshamite notion of the *ṣifat al-dhāt* than with the notion of *dhāt*.

335 For a discussion of the Attribute of the Essence, see Gimaret, *La théorie*, 57 ff.; Frank, *Beings*, 53–57; idem, *Al-ma'dūm*; Alami, *L'ontologie modale*, 61–71; Thiele, Abū Hāshim, 370–371; and idem, *Ḥāl*. The hypothesis of a Bahshamite influence on Avicenna's ontology has been briefly entertained before, but never studied in detail: see in particular Gardet, *al-Djubbā'*; Gimaret, *La théorie*, 61, 80; and especially Marwan Rashed, *Chose*, whose study is the most notable effort in this direction.

Bahshamites, the Attribute of the Essence is a special and unique attribute that is inseparable from the thing itself inasmuch as that thing is either an existent or non-existent thing. It refers to the way a thing is in itself, essentially, and irreducibly (*mā huwa 'alayhi fī dhātihi*), to what it is to be that thing, and, fundamentally then, to a thing's *thingness*.³³⁶ These considerations hold irrespective of whether that thing actually exists or not. In other words, the Attribute of the Essence is an essential and irreducible qualification that captures the very thingness of a thing. It applies, and can be known, even when the thing it refers to does not actually exist in concrete reality. Fundamentally, then, the Attribute of the Essence could be said to encapsulate a statement of identity that affirms the thingness and true reality of a thing.³³⁷ The two stock Mu'tazilite examples one finds in the Arabic sources are "blackness' being blackness" (*kawn al-sawād sawādan*) and "the atom's being an atom" (*kawn al-jawhar jawharan*). As Frank puts it, the *ṣifat al-dhāt* express "the thing-itself's being as it is in itself" (*mā huwa 'alayhi fī dhātihi*) and "its being itself identical with itself in itself."³³⁸

By virtue of its conveying the essential core or identity of a thing, the Attribute of the Essence is irreducible as well as epistemologically and ontologically distinct. It is what reflects the singularity or specificity of a thing and sets it apart from other things, such as blackness from whiteness. Moreover, if it bears a close relation to

Alami, *L'ontologie modale*, compares the Bahshamite and Avicennian views on a number of occasions in his book, but usually by way of contrast, and he at any rate does not detect a direct influence of Abū Hāshim on Avicenna. Exactly why Abū Hāshim formulated his theory of the Attribute of the Essence remains unclear. One explanation could be epistemological. Given that, for Abū Hāshim, things and individual beings are knowable only through, or by virtue of, their various attributes, it was necessary to explain how any intellectual knowledge of these things could be achieved in the first place. This presumably is the function of the Attribute of the Essence, which, on the one hand, conveys the basic information about the thingness of an entity, and on the other is the foundation on which the other attributes can be known.

336 As Frank, *Beings*, 53, in his inimitable style, puts it: "Of itself and in itself as a thing-itself it can be predicated only of itself, and it is this identity of itself in being itself that abū Hāshim and his followers term the Attribute of the Essence."

337 As Thiele, Abū Hāshim, 370, notes, the Attribute of the Essence "describes or defines what a thing is in itself." However, it is not strictly speaking a *definition* in the Aristotelian sense, since it does not include and enumerate the constituents of a thing. Rather, it is a statement of identity or self-identity of the kind 'A is A,' similar to Avicenna's formula 'horseness is just horseness' or 'horseness is nothing other than horseness.' Alami, *L'ontologie modale*; 53 ff., for his part speaks of the "en-soi des essences," which indicates their irreducibility and distinctness; but he also grants them a high degree of ontological autonomy, to the extent that he regards them as unconnected to not only concrete existence, but also to human and divine thought. On Alami's interpretation, they seem to occupy a realm of their own that is not dependent on divine knowledge. This interpretation of Abū Hāshim's ontology, however, is not unanimously accepted. On my interpretation, the Attribute of the Essence and the nonexistent thing are only such because God thinks them, so that their ontological status is directly dependent on the divine knowledge. On this point, see also Benevich, *The Reality*, 33 ff.

338 Frank, *Al-ma'dūm*, 194.

the existent essence and ‘the thing-itself’ conceived as existing concretely, it is nonetheless unaffected and unconditioned by them. As Thiele notes, this attribute is “not grounded in or conditioned by any other entity.”³³⁹ Whereas some attributes refer directly to concrete entities (*ma‘āni*) in beings and are therefore dependent on them or grounded in them, the Attribute of the Essence does not refer to an entity in the concrete world, nor is it itself such an entity. Rather, it reflects the state of the very essence or thingness of a thing. In brief, the *ṣifat al-dhāt* is a unique, distinct, and irreducible attribute and state.

There are some important epistemological implications flowing from the Bahshamite theory of the Attribute of the Essence. This Attribute, for Abū Hāshim, is what enables the mind—both the human mind and God’s mind—to know something irreducibly and distinctly and as it is ‘in itself.’ In that sense, it is responsible for the knowledge we can have of a thing regardless of whether that thing actually exists. So this attribute produces in our minds the knowledge of the thingness of actually existent things and nonexistent things, of concrete entities in the world and of future contingents. The Attribute of the Essence therefore is unique not only because it is uncaused and ungrounded in the thing-itself and bears a necessary and constant relation to the thing-itself, but also because it is eminently and constantly intelligible to the mind and informs the knower about the very thingness of a thing. It does this even when the particular thing does not actually exist. By way of example, nonexistent atoms are still ‘things’ that share the attribute ‘being an atom.’³⁴⁰ Its relation to the individual essence is therefore permanent and fixed, without however ever being identical to the existent thing-itself or dependent on its realized existence. So that if a thing is *ma‘dūm* or nonexistent, the Attribute of the Essence, on the other hand, will have some kind of intrinsic intelligible subsistence or reality (*thubūt*) by which it remains cognizable by the human and divine minds.³⁴¹

339 Thiele, Abū Hāshim, 370. Gimaret, *La théorie*, 61, compares the Attribute of the Essence to quiddity, because it encapsulates the ‘what-it-ness’ of a thing.

340 Abū Rashīd, *Issues*, 34.18–19: “We know that the atoms, when they exist, have in common [the attribute] of ‘occupying space’ [*al-taḥayyuz*]; and if they do not exist, they still have in common [the attribute] of ‘being an atom.’” See also the discussion and the views reported at 37.11 ff. For a discussion of the nonexistent, see Dhanani, *The Physical Theory*, 27, note 34.

341 One important but delicate question is whether the reality or subsistence of the Attribute of the Essence in the mind amounts to a kind of mental existence. According to the Bahshamites, this Attribute is, strictly speaking, a state and so is neither existent nor nonexistent; but since it is intelligible and plays a role in cognition, one might be tempted to ascribe to it a kind of mental existence. Although this question appears to have been debated in the later Arabic literature from several angles (see Alami, *L’ontologie modale*; 47–58), the Baṣrian Mu‘tazilites seem to have been generally consistent in denying it any mode of mental existence proper. However, modern scholars seem to have held different views on this issue. Alami himself rejects this hypothesis, not on account of the special intermediary status of the *ḥāl*, but on account of his claim that the ‘things-themselves’ have an ontological status that depends neither on concrete beings nor on human and divine thought. In effect, Alami ascribes a fully independent ontological realm to the Mu‘tazilite *ma‘dūmāt*, with the result that Abū Hāshim’s theory of the nonexistent would amount to an original ontology, rather than an aspect

What is more, the Attribute of the Essence is a requisite for our perception or apprehension (*idrāk*) of a thing's states and attributes when it is in existence. Since cognition of the thingness of a thing precedes its actual existence, it also precedes our apprehension of the various properties it acquires when it enters concrete existence. In this regard, although, according to Bahshamite epistemology, 'the thing known' (*al-ma'lūm*) and what is sought from a cognitive point of view is the individual existent thing-itself (*shay'*) or essence (*dhāt*), our knowledge is really a knowledge *about* it rather than *of* it. It is a knowledge about the various properties and states that qualify it in its existence, and it is these properties and states that can be perceived or apprehended by the mind.³⁴² According to the Bahshamites, we can only ever apprehend and know a thing through or by virtue of its actual and real attributes and states as they are manifested when that thing exists. For example, an atom is known with regard to its occupying space (*kawnuhu mutaḥayyiz*) and of its being in a certain location (*kā'in fī jihah*). But what makes this knowledge possible in the first place is the Attribute of the Essence, which informs us not only about what kind of a thing it is, and what its irreducible and essential reality is, but also about the kinds of attributes and states that thing can have when it exists. As Ibn Mattawayh puts it, "what is [first] obtained by our apprehension [*al-idrāk*] from among the attributes is the atom's occupying space. But this [apprehension] rests on the Attribute of the Essence, which ceases neither in nonexistence nor in existence. In contrast, occupying space is conditioned on existence [*mashrūṭ bi-l-wujūd*], and existence makes it actual."³⁴³ Thus, for the Bahshamites, the atom's occupying space is an attribute entailed by (*ṣifah muqtaḍāt*) the Attribute of the Essence. Although it only ever becomes actual and real when the atom exists, its manifestation is a corollary of, and is necessarily entailed by, 'its being an atom.' In that sense, everything that can be known about an existent entity can be said to be posterior to and entailed by the Attribute of the Essence. As Mānkdim Shashdīw, a prominent Zaydī Mu'tazilite, explains, "an essence only enters its [state of] being a known essence [*dhāt ma'lūmah*] by virtue of its

of his theology. Alami's interpretation, however, does not reflect the majority reading of Bahshamite ontology. Moreover, with regard to the immediate problem at hand, it seems that Alami confuses the status of the Attribute of the Essence, on the one hand, which can be known and has an intermediary ontological status, with 'the thing,' on the other, which is either *mawjūd* or *ma'dūm*, and which cannot *in itself* be known. Frank, *Beings*, especially 53–57, distinguishes more clearly between these two aspects, and as a result his account is, I think, more coherent. He explains that whereas the Attribute of the Essence is knowable, the thing-itself, whether as *mawjūd* or *ma'dūm*, is not. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*, 106, suggests that the Mu'tazilites described mental objects as nonexistent things. Thus, the crux of the issue, at least when it comes to the doctrines of Abū Hāshim and the Bahshamites, seems to be whether a mental object is better described as an Attribute of the Essence or as a nonexistent thing. Yet, since the former expresses the thingness of the latter, I assume that both formulations are correct. In neither case, however, does this amount to a positive mode of mental existence according to the Bahshamites, and therein lies the main difference between them and Avicenna.

³⁴² Dhanani, *The Physical Theory*, 23.

³⁴³ Ibn Mattawayh, *Reminder*, vol. 1, 13.8–9.

being specified by the Attribute of the Essence.”³⁴⁴ As such, our apprehension of an atom’s occupying space is inextricably linked to our knowledge of the Attribute of the Essence.³⁴⁵

The picture of Abū Hāshim’s theory I have sketched thus far should already resonate with readers, since it contains many features that bear striking resemblances to Avicenna’s theory of pure quiddity. In fact, the epistemological and conceptual parallels between Abū Hāshim’s theory of the Attribute of the Essence and Avicenna’s consideration of pure quiddity are so striking that they naturally suggest a historical and doctrinal connection between the two. There is, admittedly, an obvious, albeit important, terminological and doctrinal difference between their views: what is an attribute (*ṣifah*) and state (*ḥāl*) for Abū Hāshim is a consideration (*i’tibār*), meaning or idea (*ma’nā*), and form (*ṣūrah*) for Avicenna. This terminological difference notwithstanding, these two authors fundamentally agree on the possibility of a pure, distinct, and eminently intelligible mental consideration of the essence of a thing. For these thinkers, there is an irreducible mental consideration that refers to the way a thing is in itself, to the ‘thingness’ of a thing, in abstraction from other considerations, such as existence, and hence regardless of whether that thing actually exists in the world. Furthermore, these thinkers equally frame this theory in terms of an identity statement whereby the thing is what it is in itself and by virtue of its essence. In this regard, Abū Hāshim’s examples of “blackness’ being blackness” (*kawn al-sawād sawādan*) and of “the atom’s being an atom” (*kawn al-jawhar jawharan*) directly echo Avicenna’s formula that “horseness is just horseness.”³⁴⁶ In sum, both the theory of the Attribute of the Essence and the consideration of quiddity in itself are intended to capture the quiddity, thingness, and ‘what-it-is-to-be-a-thing.’ Both express an identity statement that is immediately intelligible to the mind.

According to Abū Hāshim and Avicenna, the Attribute of the Essence and the consideration of pure quiddity are intelligible precisely by virtue of this abstractness and cognitive purity. They refer to the true reality and inner core of a thing in abstraction from its other properties and its status in existence. This makes them intrinsically intelligible and knowable in a mode that is constant and permanent. As Thiele explains, “Since the identity of an object finds its expression in ‘the attribute of the

344 Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 108.10–11. This Mu’tazilite theologian, who died in 1034 CE, and who was therefore a contemporary of Avicenna, wrote a paraphrase or set of notes (*ta’līq*) on the commentary (*sharḥ*) that ‘Abd al-Jabbār wrote on his own work entitled *On the Five Fundamental Principles (al-Uṣūl al-khamsah)*. The Cairo edition by ‘Uthmān used here mistakenly attributes the text to ‘Abd al-Jabbār. On this point and on the complicated history surrounding the authorship of the *Ta’līq fī Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsah*, see Gimaret, *Les uṣūl al-ḥamsa*.

345 On this point, see Abū Rashīd, *Issues*, 31.20 ff.

346 Not coincidentally, Avicenna also frequently chooses whiteness or blackness as examples in his own writings, as in *Discussions*, section 648, p. 218, and in his treatment of quiddity in *Metaphysics* I.5, where, I believe, he is directly responding to the Bahshamites and offering an alternative ontological model.

essence,' the Bahshamis regard this attribute as the ground or basis on which something is intelligible and thereby becomes an object of knowledge (*ma'lūm*).³⁴⁷ Likewise, for Avicenna, pure quiddity is at the core of true scientific knowledge, since it underlies our universal concepts in the mind. Here there is an additional parallel between the two thinkers: for Abū Hāshim, the Attribute of the Essence is conceivable, but not perceptible. Likewise, for Avicenna quiddity in itself is an intelligible concept that can be apprehended by the intellect, but not by the senses.³⁴⁸

The Attribute of the Essence, like Avicenna's conception of pure quiddity, is therefore irreducible and, as such, distinguishes a thing from another in a permanent manner. It is, for instance, what essentially distinguishes blackness from whiteness, or an atom from its accidents. This applies primarily, of course, to the mind and to human reflection about the world. Things are distinct from another in the mind by virtue of their different thingness. But according to Abū Hāshim, it applies also in a certain way to entities in the concrete world. For recall that the attributes, if they come short of being existents, are nonetheless real and actual. This means that there is a correspondence between the Attribute of the Essence as it is intellected in the mind and the essence as it comes to exist in the concrete world. This correspondence is in fact what guarantees the possibility of knowledge and mental discernment of existent essences and things. One finds a similar premise in Avicenna's epistemology, where the very possibility of knowledge and the symmetry between science and logic is ensured by the presence and reality of quiddity in the concrete beings and the concepts in the mind. Additionally, for both Abū Hāshim and Avicenna, the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity are what convey distinctness and specificity (*khāṣṣiyyah*), and even difference (*ikhtilāf*), on the one hand, and similarity (*tamāthul*) and commonality (*mushtarakah*), on the other. All atoms can be qualified by the same Attribute of the Essence consisting in the statement "the atom's being an atom" (*kawn al-jawhar jawharan*), just as all horses, for Avicenna, have in common the pure quiddity horseness (*farasiyyah*).³⁴⁹ At a fundamental level, then, both the difference and commonality between things are grasped by the mind thanks to this irreducible and intelligible consideration, which lays the ground for further distinctions based on accidents and properties to be drawn at a later stage

347 Thiele, Abū Hāshim, 371.

348 That is to say, these notions are intelligible in themselves and can be considered in abstraction from existence. For both Abū Hāshim and Avicenna, what is perceptible are the various manifestations and properties that are actualized as a result of the thing's realized existence, although Avicenna extends this criterion to the realm of complex universal concepts in the mind, since they too have concomitants, albeit mental ones. But the essential core in itself is irreducible and intelligible and, hence, only accessible to the intellect.

349 According to Abū Rashīd, *Issues*, 34.12–16, all atoms (*jawāhir*) are common (*mushtarakah*) in that they share the same attributes.

and when the things come to exist and its various manifestations perceived and known.³⁵⁰

Because it is permanent and irreducible, and because it applies indiscriminately to all things that can be qualified by it regardless of the circumstances of actual existence, Abū Hāshim and the Bahshamite claim that the Attribute of the Essence is “unconditioned by anything else” (*ghayr mashrūṭah bi-amr siwāhā*).³⁵¹ This goes hand in hand with this attribute being ungrounded and uncaused (*ghayr mu'allalah*) in the thing itself and, thus, also unrelated to the conditions (*shurūṭ*) of actual existence, which only affect realized and existent entities and things (i.e., substances and accidents). The Attribute of the Essence is unconditioned by existence itself, since it is cognizable in abstraction from existence and thus possesses its own intelligible subsistence. Consequently, for Abū Hāshim, the unconditioned and irreducible status of the Attribute of the Essence makes it also prior to the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*) and prior also to the realization of the thing as an existent in the concrete world. It is therefore prior in an intelligible and cognitive sense in the divine and human minds.³⁵²

Needless to say, Abū Hāshim's description of the Attribute of the Essence as unconditioned or *ghayr mashrūṭah bi-amr siwāhā* directly anticipates Avicenna's own view that pure quiddity is unconditioned or *bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar*.³⁵³ Both Abū Hāshim and Avicenna associated the state of being conditioned with actual or realized existence and, hence, with causedness and the relation to an exterior agent. More specifically, as will be discussed later on in detail, Abū Hāshim construes actual existence in connection with the various essential attributes that derive from the Attribute of the Essence and become actualized. Along much the same lines, Avicenna conceives of existence in connection with the various concomitants (*lawāzim*) that are entailed by quiddity, such as oneness and particularity, which are caused to exist and become realized with the composite substance. When one establishes a relation between pure quiddity and these concomitants and accidents, then quiddity is conditioned (*bi-sharṭ* or *mashrūṭah*), but, if it is taken only in itself, then it remains unconditioned. At any rate, for the Bahshamites, it is this very unconditionedness that makes the Attribute of the Essence a ground and root (*aṣl*) for other attributes, while itself remaining uncaused and ungrounded. Likewise, for Avicenna, it is the intrinsically unconditioned mode of quiddity that enables it to be qualified by conditions and to exist either in concrete individuals or in the mind.

The parallels between Abū Hāshim and Avicenna would thus appear to extend beyond their epistemology and into their ontology as well. More specifically, the intention on the part of these Mu'tazilites and Avicenna to ascribe a special ontological

350 See Alami, *L'ontologie modale*; 77–101. For the reception of this Mu'tazilite doctrine in the Ash'arite tradition, see Benevich, *The Classical*.

351 Frank, *Al-ma'dūm*, 195–196.

352 Frank, *Beings*, 54.

353 Frank, *Beings*, 53.

status to the Attribute of the Essence and to pure quiddity respectively that coincides neither with realized existence nor with nonexistence seems to proceed from a shared concern regarding the intrinsic conceivability and intelligibility of thingness in itself. These thinkers jointly separate thingness from the notion of realized existence, endowing it with a distinct status in the mind. Abū Hāshim regards this mode or state of the Attribute of the Essence as corresponding to a special ontological status by virtue of which the thing is what it is or “the way it is in itself,” and this regardless of whether the thing-itself actually exists in the concrete world. It is therefore something that can be predicated of the thing-itself *qua mawjūd* or *qua ma’dūm*. This *ṣifah* and *ḥāl* remains a principle of identity and also of qualification and distinctness (*khāṣṣiyyah*) over and above actual existence, because in itself it is ontologically unconditioned and undetermined. Its permanent intelligible reality transcends the realm of realized existence and makes it permanently cognizable.³⁵⁴ This is what motivates Mānkdim Shashdīw to assert that “the most adequate [definition of *al-ma’dūm*] is for the nonexistent to be defined as an object of knowledge that is not existent” (*fa-l-awlā an yuḥḥada l-ma’dūm bi-annahu l-ma’lūm alladhī laysa bi-mawjūd*).³⁵⁵ What makes its essence cognizable is nothing other than the Attribute of the Essence.

The textual evidence therefore suggests that the ontological status of the Attribute of the Essence is closely tied to our knowledge and conception of it. For instance, the Attribute of the Essence of ‘atomness’ or ‘blackness’ can be known and conceived by the human and divine minds regardless of whether this particular unit of ‘black’ or ‘atom’ is a *shay’ mawjūd* or *shay’ ma’dūm*.³⁵⁶ Even though the Bahshamites, unlike many of the *falāsifah*, do not recognize a special mode of intellectual existence *per se*, their theory of the Attribute of the Essence and its special ontological state are closely linked to notions of conceivability, intelligibility, and epistemic irreducibility. This point in particular strikes me as significant, for it can account for some of the defining features of Avicenna’s own doctrine of essence in the mind, while also directing our attention to some of the ways in which—and to some of the reasons why—he departed from the Bahshamites. The latter focused especially on the characterization of mental objects as nonexistent things and on the intermediary ontological status of the states. In contrast to Abū Hāshim and his followers, Avicenna up-

354 Thiele, *Ḥāl*, 58.

355 Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 176.16–17.

356 By extension, the Mu’tazilite position postulates a relation between what is conceivable and intelligible, on the one hand, and what is possible, on the other, i.e., what is possible of existence, the latter corresponding with the *shay’ ma’dūm*. Since the Attribute of the Essence can apply to a nonexistent thing, the latter is in some ways a possible thing, i.e., a thing possible of existence in the actual world, or else its essence would not be conceivable in the first place. This would imply that for the Bahshamites, what is impossible of existence is not even conceivable and intelligible. So even though these theologians do not posit mental existence in the way Avicenna does, there are interesting parallels between their views and Avicenna’s definition of the universals and pure quiddity as utterly conceivable things in the mind that should be explored further.

holds the law of the excluded middle and does not recognize an intermediary ontological state between existence and nonexistence. As a result, objects of thought for Avicenna are existents, albeit of a mental kind. When it comes to pure quiddity specifically, he does not define its special ontological mode as ‘neither existent nor non-existent’ (although some of his later Ash‘arite commentators will), but rather ascribes to it a sense of existence and defines it within the confines of a positive ontology. Since Avicenna upholds the law of the excluded middle, the Bahshamite position clashes with one of the cornerstones of his ontological outlook and must therefore be rejected.³⁵⁷

In spite of these and other major ontological and epistemological differences between these thinkers, the Bahshamite position nevertheless intersects with Avicenna’s theory of quiddity in an intellectual context in quite remarkable ways. As I argued, for Avicenna as well, pure quiddity possesses its own distinct ontological status in the intellect. The Bahshamite idea that the special ontological status of the Attribute of the Essence is premised on its intrinsic intelligibility and its presence in human and divine knowledge finds an important parallel in Avicenna. It can be compared to the master’s ascription of a special sense of existence to pure quiddity in *Metaphysics* I.5, a chapter which, I would contend, has to be read in light of Avicenna’s engagement with Bahshamite sources and doctrines. In this passage, Avicenna assigns a special ‘sense of existence’ (*ma‘nā l-wujūd*) to pure quiddity, which he calls ‘special’ or ‘proper existence’ (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), and which he sharply contrasts with realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*). The relation between these two senses of existence will be explored in depth in chapter IV. Here I wish merely to highlight the fact that this special sense, and possibly mode, of existence of quiddity is mentioned in the context of Avicenna’s discussion of human cognition and the primary notions in the mind. Inasmuch as pure quiddity is eminently intelligible and something that can be immediately and intuitively grasped by the intellect, the sense of being Avicenna ascribes to it is to be connected chiefly with its intrinsic *conceivability* and *intelligibility*, as well as with the status of ‘the thing’ as a primary notion in the intellect. More precisely, proper existence seems to be tied with the immediate and simple intellectual conception of quiddity and its mental representation as something distinct, essentially and intellectually prior (to composite entities that include the essential concomitants), and irreducible. Notice, in this connection, that the formula *wujūd khāṣṣ* that Avicenna uses in this passage directly echoes Abū Hāshim’s mention of the specificity or ‘properness’ (*khāṣṣiyyah*) of the Attribute of the Essence.

In brief, this essential irreducibility and specificity and the unmediated conception of thingness in the mind are connected with the special ontological status of both the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity as objects that remain unaffected by the conditions associated with realized existence. They are what enable the mind

³⁵⁷ On this point, see Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, especially 35–40.

to immediately distinguish a thing from another thing and grasp its essence. Given that Avicenna in another passage of *Metaphysics* I.5 directly rebuffs the Mu‘tazilite notion of an intermediary status between existence and nonexistence and upholds the principle of the excluded middle, it is not far-fetched to surmise that in formulating his theory of the proper existence of quiddity and thingness in the mind, Avicenna was consciously and deliberately responding to the Bahshamite views and more specifically to their theory of the Attribute of the Essence and its intermediary ontological status. If this hypothesis is correct, then Avicenna’s disquisition in *Metaphysics* I.5 would be qualified both by significant borrowings and departures from the Bahshamite tradition. But perhaps the key element to bear in mind here is that this ‘Bahshamite connection’ bears especially on Avicenna’s conception of the epistemological and ontological status of pure quiddity in the mind. Although he may have found Abū Hāshim’s theory of the Attribute of the Essence thought-provoking in many ways—it likely helped him to better conceptualize and articulate his own theory of pure quiddity and its relation to the essential concomitants—he on the other hand could not endorse the ontological underpinnings that came with it, especially the theory of the intermediary ontological status of the attributes and states. I would surmise that Avicenna’s formulation of proper existence in connection with the conception of pure quiddity in the mind was shaped partly out of a dialectical encounter with, and reaction to, the Bahshamite theory of the Attribute of the Essence.

Given the somewhat tentative nature of any reconstruction of Abū Hāshim’s doctrine, one can conclude with certainty neither that the picture of the Attribute of the Essence that scholars have painted corresponds exactly to the one initially developed by Abū Hāshim nor, as a result, that Avicenna would have been directly influenced by this doctrine. Indeed, the possibility of Avicennian or Avicennizing Ash‘arite contamination of Abū Hāshim’s thought in the reports that post-date the *shaykh al-ra’is* cannot be completely excluded. With that being said, modern studies on the topic, especially those of Frank, and more recently those of Thiele, have relied heavily on sources that precede or are contemporaneous with Avicenna, and which at any rate do not suffer from a potential Ash‘arite bias. There thus appears to be a sufficient volume of evidence and degree of historical accuracy concerning Abū Hāshim’s theory of the Attribute of the Essence to warrant the tentative conclusions reached above. Moreover, even if the link between this Mu‘tazilite thinker and Avicenna is tenuous, it remains likely that the latter tapped into other Bahshamite sources composed before or during his time by disciples of Abū Hāshim, especially Abū Rashīd, Mānkdim Shashdīw, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and Ibn Mattawayh. In light of these considerations, the historical and philosophical connection between the Bahshamites and Avicenna assumes a real significance.

To recap, it appears that several crucial features of Avicenna’s theory of pure quiddity find one of their roots, or at the very least a source of inspiration, in Abū

Hāshim's innovative theory of the Attribute of the Essence.³⁵⁸ In spite of obvious and considerable differences, there are salient epistemological and conceptual parallels between these two theories. Among the commonalities, one notes that the Attribute of the Essence and the consideration of pure quiddity are, *qua* mental or intellectual objects, intrinsically intelligible and conceivable, knowledge-producing, irreducible and permanent, unconditioned, and prior (even though some of these notions are construed differently by these authors). To this should be added the fact that, according to Abū Hāshim and Avicenna, these objects possess a distinct and special ontological status that does not coincide with realized existence or with nonexistence. In chapters III and IV I will delve further into the ontological implications of Abū Hāshim's theory, which seem highly relevant when assessing Avicenna's ontology of quiddity, especially with regard to the notion of necessary entailment (*iqtiḍā'*, *ilti-zām*) and the relation between essence and its concomitants and accidents. If the hypothesis of a Bahshamite influence on Avicenna as delineated above is correct, it would amount not only to an instance of *kalām* feeding into the discussions of the philosophers—in itself not a surprising idea, and one already highlighted by Wisnovsky's studies—but also, in a more implicative fashion, of specific Mu'tazilite ideas and doctrines making their way expressly in Avicenna's ontology and epistemology and being assimilated and combined with the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic material.³⁵⁹

3 Some later commentators on pure quiddity and mental existence

Before examining the works of individual authors, I wish to make some general remarks concerning the reception of Avicenna's doctrines of mental existence and quiddity in the postclassical tradition.³⁶⁰ As I mentioned previously, there are two main reasons why subsequent thinkers were weary of Avicenna's theory of the men-

358 This possibility was briefly raised by Gimaret, *La théorie*, 61, who sees in the Attribute of the Essence an antecedent for the *māhiyyah* of the Avicennian tradition. The last sentence of Gimaret's article reads: "Il est cependant fort probable que les spéculations d'Ibn Sînâ relatives à la distinction et à la définition de l'existence et de la quiddité doivent en partie leur origine à la théorie des *aḥwāl*."

359 The previous remarks therefore accord with Dhanani's, *Rocks*, hypothesis of Avicenna's familiarity with some Mu'tazilite sources. I would even suggest that the master may have been influenced by Mu'tazilite *kalām*. We should not forget in this regard that this theological school had flourished long before Avicenna's time and that some of its prominent representatives, such as 'Abd al-Jabbār, were his contemporaries.

360 There is now a rich modern literature on the reception of Avicenna's works and ideas in the late-classical and postclassical Islamic periods; for general orientation, see Gutas, *The Heritage*; Eichner, *Dissolving*; eadem, *Essence*; Griffel, *Theology*; idem, *Between al-Ghazālī*; and the various studies by Wisnovsky. In spite of this, the reception of Avicenna's theories of quiddity and mental existence remains to be analyzed in depth.

tal existence of pure quiddity. The first is that they reject the category of mental existents *en masse* and recognize only concrete, extramental entities as true existents. Put differently, the realm of existing things in their system would overlap only with the objects of the concrete, mind-independent world. This position, however, even though it was endorsed in some theological circles during the first centuries of Islam, appears not to have prevailed in the postclassical period.³⁶¹ By far the majority of thinkers who participated in this philosophical dialogue after Avicenna recognized some kind of mental existents, even though they debated at length regarded their exact nature. A more widely defended position by far was the view that quiddity could not exist in a pure, absolutely abstracted state in the mind, since mental existence always implies the existence of accompanying mental accidents and concomitants. According to this line of reasoning, other considerations are necessarily added to the consideration of pure quiddity in the mind, with the resulting synthesis amounting to a mental existent. But quiddity itself, as defined merely by its privation of accidents and attributes, will not exist in this abstract state. As Izutsu has shown, some medieval thinkers appear to have advocated this interpretation and to have criticized their predecessors and contemporaries for failing to tease out the full ontological implications of mental concomitants. At any rate, this view—rather than the more extreme position entailing a complete denial of mental existents—appears to be the one advocated by thinkers who resisted the identification of pure quiddity with an intellectual existent.³⁶² This problematic—namely, the elucidation of how mental concomitants relate to quiddity in the mind—has continued to grasp the attention of scholars and reached a high level of argumentative sophistication in the postclassical sources. Alongside the increasing sophistication of the discourse on the mental concomitants of quiddity, one notices a keen interest in the technical vocabulary that props these discussions. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that most of the technical terms and expressions that underpin these ideas in the postclassical tradition find their origin in Avicenna's works. In fact, virtually all of them appear at one point or other in *Introduction* I.2, I.12, and *Metaphysics* I.5 and especially V.1. These sections of the Avicennian corpus provided the foundation on which the ter-

361 The denial of mental existence is associated with early *kalām* circles and especially with al-Ash'arī and his followers. With regard to the post-Avicennian tradition, Rāzī is sometimes described as rejecting mental existents, but additional research on his works is required before a clear picture of his position on this matter can emerge.

362 It is as yet unclear how this interpretive stance connects with the development of the terms *i'tibār* and *i'tibārī* as meaning something purely 'suppositional' and as opposed to something 'real' or 'true.' Some thinkers pit the *i'tibārāt*, which are merely suppositional or conjectural considerations, against the realm of the true mental existents, which, in their correspondence to the extramental world, convey the realm of the "state of the matter" (*nafs al-amr*). In this case, the argument would not be that there is no consideration of pure quiddity distinct from mental concomitants and accidents, but that such a consideration would not amount to a true mental existent. It is unclear to me how exactly these ideas and trends are related in the later philosophical literature; further investigation is required.

minological and conceptual musings of the postclassical period on the issue of quiddity developed. Even centuries after Avicenna's death, the accounts of thinkers such as Taftāzānī, Qushjī, and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640 CE) are deeply indebted to the terminology the master implemented in those particular works. However, postclassical thinkers either refined some of the terms they borrowed from the Avicennian or devised new expressions to complement those that were established as part of the standard nomenclature.

The various semantic developments revolving around the term *i'tibār* after Avicenna are a case in point and aptly illustrate the former phenomenon. One notices a shift in the ontological and epistemic status of the term *i'tibār* in later authors and commentators. While Avicenna had, in *Introduction*, ascribed a *distinct i'tibār* to pure quiddity, which he appears in *Metaphysics* V.1 to assimilate to the negatively-conditioned and abstract quiddity, subsequent exegetes often redefine and renegotiate the conceptual relationship between *māhiyyah* and *i'tibār* in light of their theory of mental existence, causality, and other factors. For example, some thinkers define pure quiddity *and* the clause *bi-sharḥ lā shay'* as *two* distinct considerations, whose exact relationship was the subject of extensive glossing and bitter controversy. In parallel, it is noteworthy that the idiosyncratic terminology Avicenna applies to pure quiddity underwent considerable transformation in the postclassical period. Later interpreters of Avicenna interpret the *j-r-d* root and the *sharḥ bi-lā shay'* clause in a much more flexible way than the master, since they seem to have applied it to a variety of entities (universal quiddity, or quiddity in itself, or other distinct considerations of quiddity not reducible to the latter) in a way that challenges any attempt at systematizing the textual evidence. As a result, while (on my reading) Avicenna ascribes this condition to pure quiddity in the mind exclusively, these later authors sometimes appear to depart from his teachings by using it to qualify other aspects of mental quiddity, including universal quiddity.³⁶³ As a corollary, they often identify pure quiddity with the unconditioned quiddity (*bi-lā sharḥ shay' ākhar*) rather than with negatively-conditioned quiddity.³⁶⁴ And with regard to mental existence, they often regard negatively-conditioned quiddity either as pertaining to the universal or to some other conditioned aspect of quiddity, but as not amounting strictly to

363 I say “possibly” because the present state of research on the postclassical tradition does not allow us to perceive clearly how these terms were applied to the various considerations of quiddity. What does seem to be the case, however, is that they were applied in a more flexible way, and not always in connection with pure quiddity regarded as a distinct form in the human mind.

364 This aspect of the problem is tackled in chapter IV with regard to Avicenna's views as well as the later philosophical theories he inspired. Strictly speaking, co-relating pure quiddity to unconditioned quiddity rather than negatively-conditioned quiddity is not un-Avicennian, since, as will be shown later, it is consistent with Avicenna's broader metaphysical doctrine. Moreover, it will become clear then that there is an essential connection between these two aspects of quiddity via the process of abstraction. But with regard to the context of mental existence specifically, Avicenna connects negatively-conditioned quiddity with pure quiddity in a way that few of his followers, commentators, and critics do.

quiddity in itself. In brief, the various comments Avicenna had made concerning pure quiddity as a distinct concept in the mind are often adapted and re-applied to other aspects of essence by the later Arabic philosophers. This leads to a veritable conceptual puzzle, where the pieces have to be relabeled and rearranged depending on the philosophical system of individual thinkers.

These broad terminological and conceptual outgrowths from Avicenna's works were due, I believe, to two major factors. First, the extensive and continuously renewed attempts by postclassical authors to elucidate and pin down the notion of mental existence and its various criteria. The second factor concerns the intrinsic ambiguity of Avicenna's terminology. This is true in particular of those terms and conditions that qualify the way in which quiddity relates to its mental concomitants, a topic that preoccupied the master, and which also turned out to be a very complicated issue in the postclassical tradition. A case in point is the term *mujarrad*. This technical term is intrinsically marked by ambiguity, since, when applied to quiddity, it can mean merely 'separated or abstracted from matter' or, in a more committal way, 'abstracted from all things and all concomitants, including the concomitants associated with mental existence.' In other words, *mujarrad* can mean either abstracted from the material concomitants or abstracted from both the material and mental concomitants. According to the former sense, the mental state of quiddity in itself and universal quiddity could be said to be *mujarrad*. But on the latter sense, quiddity in itself alone is *mujarrad*, not universal. My conjecture is that later exegetes started to prioritize either the first sense or the second sense, depending on their intentions, without always clarifying which. This, naturally, created some confusion. For example, some of them apply this term to the *various mental considerations* of quiddity (including universal quiddity) that presuppose abstraction from matter and material accidents, and not just to quiddity in itself, as (I argue) Avicenna had originally intended. While for Avicenna the abstract quiddity is pure quiddity in the mind, for some later exegetes this expression also applied to the universal mode of quiddity. They did this in order to emphasize these forms' separation from matter generally, rather than their separation from the mental concomitants specifically. This is also the case of the condition *bi-sharḥ lā shay'*, whose proper interpretation became a matter of intense controversy. As Izutsu has shown, it became the object of profound exegetical scrutiny and of a variety of interpretations in the postclassical tradition.³⁶⁵ These shifts of emphasis, I believe, engendered some confusion and were responsible for inspiring a distinct exegetical development with regard to the theory of quiddity in itself.³⁶⁶

365 Izutsu, *Basic Problems*.

366 See, for instance, the general remarks in Heer, *The Sufi Position*, where he explains that for many postclassical thinkers the abstract and negatively-conditioned quiddity is identified with the intellectual universal (*al-kullī l-'aqlī*), which is none other than universal quiddity. But from an Avicennian point of view this is problematic, given that the mental universal is, strictly speaking, neither abstract (from mental concomitants) nor negatively-conditioned. This explains why Avicenna applies

Overall, the postclassical elaborations on the terms *i'tibār*, *mujarrad*, and *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* as applied to quiddity are extremely dense and subtle and mark doctrinal departures from Avicenna. This interpretive trend may have started shortly after the master's death, although Bahmanyār for one does not seem to have much to say on the topic.³⁶⁷ It is with the works of Rāzī and later Ṭūsī that the issue gets addressed in earnest, inaugurating a long exegetical effort that spans at least up to the twentieth century with Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Muḥammad 'Abduh. In these works, the technical terms and expressions *i'tibār*, *mujarrad*, and *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* gradually position themselves at the forefront of the debate regarding the mental existence of the various aspects of quiddity. By Ṭūsī's time, and definitely by the time of Qushjī's commentary on Ṭūsī's *Abstract of Correct Belief* in the fifteenth century, they have become part and parcel of the technical vocabulary relating to mental quiddity. Accordingly, it seems worthwhile to provide a brief sketch of how later authors use these terms in their analysis of quiddity and in what ways they depart from Avicenna.³⁶⁸

In addition, new terms and expressions make their appearance in these post-Avicennian sources. Even if they have a fleeting precedent in Avicenna's works, they are invested with an entirely new meaning and argumentative function in the later sources and therefore merit an independent analytical treatment. Two examples are the

these (negative) qualifications to pure quiddity, not universal quiddity. To what extent was this post-classical exegetical turn prompted by a misunderstanding of the Avicennian doctrines? This question, to some extent moot, would need to be answered on a case by case basis. What one can say, however, is that there were other factors that elicited this development. One of them is the tendency in later works to speak of the various aspects of quiddity generally in terms of universals: 'the natural,' 'logical,' and 'intellectual' universals. This threefold scheme is mapped onto the various distinctions of quiddity Avicenna discusses in his works, as in *Introduction* 1.2. But the extent to which these distinctions really overlap remains unclear. Avicenna himself in general avoids speaking of the various aspects or considerations of quiddity in terms of universals. Yet, this later tendency can explain why the notion of abstractness was, on my interpretation, shifted from pure quiddity to the universal aspect of quiddity. Since these various aspects of quiddity—including what Avicenna himself calls nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and reality (*ḥaqīqah*), and which he painstakingly dissociates from universality—are regarded as kinds of universals by these later authors, then it makes sense that they would extend abstractness to include universals generally. The fact remains, however, that Avicenna himself uses the term *mujarrad* chiefly in connection with pure quiddity to express the fact that it excludes the mental concomitants, including universality.

367 Pre-Rāzian sources, such as Bahmanyār's *The Book of Validated Knowledge* and Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's *The Book of Personal Reflection*, provide little data on the matter.

368 For a useful overview of this development, see Izutsu, *Basic Problems*. Although a useful guide to the topic, Izutsu's analysis is also problematic in that it approaches the problem through a post-classical and decisively idealist—even Kantian—lens. Izutsu's comments on the status of quiddity in itself in the human mind are particularly tantalizing and obscure. He seems at times to ascribe to it a kind of transcendent mental existence free from any kind of consciousness or awareness. Accordingly, when awareness illuminates it, quiddity in itself would exist in another mode and various considerations or mental aspect would become attached to it. While this highly idiosyncratic interpretation may find some traction in the postclassical Arabic and modern sources, I do not think it can be convincingly attributed to Avicenna himself.

expressions *nafs al-amr* and *muṭābiq/muṭābaqah*. The first can be translated alternatively as ‘fact of the matter’ or ‘the thing in itself,’ while the latter appears to refer to a correspondence between the mental and concrete spheres. By the fourteenth century, but reflecting perhaps earlier developments, these terms appear frequently in the debates concerning quiddity, particularly with regard to the issues of its mental existence and of how it relates to the concrete world. Although the exact meaning of *nafs al-amr* is still unclear and calls for a detailed analysis in the works of individual authors, it seems to refer generally to an epistemic and ontological criterion, and perhaps also to an autonomous referential realm, that only partly overlaps with the notion of ‘things,’ but which is inclusive of the things that *truly exist* and constitute *true reality* (regardless of whether these truly existing things are in the mind or in the concrete world).³⁶⁹ In addition, the notion often assumes a theological dimension, in that it can refer to a realm of uncreated quiddities or designate the objects that are reflected by the divine mind.³⁷⁰ What is important is that the domain of *nafs al-amr* is contrasted to the sub-ontological domain of the *i’tibārāt*, whose nature is purely conceptual or suppositional, and which are not grounded in true reality.³⁷¹

The various terminological and theoretical threads described above appear to have been densely interconnected in the mind of medieval thinkers, making the task of modern scholars significantly more challenging. What is noteworthy is that the bulk of the terminological apparatus that was refined over the course of the centuries after Avicenna’s death was intended to address with more pointedness the issue of how quiddity relates to its mental concomitants and its constitutive parts. Before Qushjī, whom Izutsu identifies as the main authority behind the dual interpretation of ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity, the debate centers more forthrightly on the relation of quiddity to its mental accidents or concomitants. Exegetes take it for granted that this issue represents the crux of the problem when it comes to the mental existence of pure quiddity, and they regard this issue as part of Avicenna’s metaphysical legacy. One of the starting points of this controversy is Ṭūsī’s *Abstract of Correct Belief*, whose exegesis, nevertheless, also later inspired ‘the two-system’ theory of quiddity devised by Qushjī and described by Izutsu. Later authors, such as Qushjī, excoriated Ṭūsī for failing to distinguish between the different meanings of *shay’ ākhar*, and they proceeded to elaborate not only on Avicenna, but also on

369 For insight into the notion of *nafs al-amr* and its philosophical implications, see Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 8ff.; Fazlhoğlu, *Between Reality*, 24ff.

370 For a discussion of *nafs al-amr* in the works of the seventeenth-century thinker Kūrānī, see Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, 282.

371 These remarks illustrate the fact that Avicenna’s philosophical language in *Metaphysics* underwent extensive interpretation and adaptation, sometimes to the point that scholars ended up forging new meanings or introducing new nomenclature to elucidate the master’s views. Terminology played a crucial role in this exegetical process. Until these terms have been fully disambiguated and their development mapped, they represent an obstacle to the proper understanding of the reception of Avicenna’s doctrines in the later Arabic tradition.

Ṭūsī himself as an attempt to resolve this tension. But this shows quite plainly that neither Ṭūsī nor his contemporaries, nor even other thinkers before Qushjī, envisaged the problem in quite those terms. Rather, their disquisitions elaborate on Avicenna's fundamental problematic of how quiddity relates to its external concomitants.

Hence, when it comes to Avicenna himself and his immediate followers, there is little doubt—as can be seen by the protracted discussion in the central chapter of *Metaphysics* V.1–2—that the crux of the matter when it comes to mental existence focuses on the mental properties or concomitants of quiddity and, hence, on the mental distinction between quiddity in itself and quiddity taken together with its mental accidents. If anything, then, one should expect the Muslim thinkers active in the period stretching from Avicenna to Qushjī to broadly focus on those issues that had preoccupied the master and, in many cases, to advocate similar theories to the ones he had advanced. Inevitably, however, departures, elaborations, and dissensions also deeply characterize the accounts of Avicenna's followers and commentators. This was due *inter alia* to the ambiguity regarding the criteria required for positing mental existence and to a shifting use of the technical vocabulary Avicenna had implemented in his works. As interesting as these later developments are, it is important to stress that they represent subjective and highly transformative interpretations of the Avicennian sources. The main reason for discussing them here is to provide preliminary insight into how Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity was critically received and appropriated by later authors.

3.1 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 1210 CE) disquisition on quiddity in section I.2 of *Eastern Investigations* is, among other things, a protracted gloss on Avicenna's *Metaphysics* I.5 and especially V.1–2.³⁷² One finds in the Ash'arite scholar's work many of the key ideas that had informed Avicenna's exposition, especially the notion that existence is an external, non-constitutive concomitant of quiddity; that quiddity can be conceived of in abstraction from existence; and that universality attaches to quiddity only in the mind. More specifically, Rāzī was fully aware of the fact that Avicenna had recognized the human capacity to have a pure and fully abstracted mental consideration of quiddity. In *Collection*, for instance, he mentions the master by name and refers to Book I of *The Cure* where, on his view, Avicenna had explained that we can conceive of quiddity in abstraction from both concrete and mental exist-

³⁷² The crucial section is Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, I.2 “*Fī l-māhiyyah*.” For a detailed discussion of Rāzī's interpretation of Avicenna's theory of quiddity and other aspects of his epistemology and metaphysics, see Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*.

tence (*al-wujūdāyn*).³⁷³ In light of this, it is worthwhile to try to understand how Fakhr al-Dīn defines the mental status of pure quiddity.³⁷⁴

Although Rāzī follows Avicenna's doctrines and terminology closely, he also elaborates on his model and seeks to develop his own interpretation of this issue. In this connection, he seems to have been influenced by certain doctrines derived from the Ash'arite camp, to which he nominally belonged. For example, Rāzī describes quiddity in itself as something that is "neither existent nor nonexistent" (*lā mawjūdah wa-lā ma'dūmah*),³⁷⁵ a formula which Avicenna himself does not employ. Presumably, this idea of the neutral ontological status of quiddity is to be connected with Rāzī's Ash'arite background, and more specifically with the theory of the states (*aḥwāl*)—described as lying between existence and nonexistence—as it was developed by some Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite thinkers from the ninth century onward.³⁷⁶ Another noteworthy departure is Rāzī's commentary on Avicenna's statement at *Metaphysics* V.1.201.8 that "the consideration of quiddity in itself is possible [*jā'iz*], even if it is with something else [*wa-in kāna ma'a ḡhayrihi*]."³⁷⁷ Recall that for Avicenna conceiving of pure quiddity as a part in composite things is "permissible" or "possible" (*jā'iz*), and the master appears to hold this of both concrete and mental entities. For Rāzī as well, this consideration of pure quiddity is prior vis-à-vis the consideration of individual and universal animal, in the same way that the simple is prior to the complex. Rāzī also informs us later on that the consideration of pure quiddity is

373 Rāzī, *Collection*, 83.8–21.

374 Given the patchy scholarly understanding of Rāzī's corpus and thought, the following remarks should be regarded as highly tentative in nature. They aim solely at elucidating how Rāzī appropriated and elaborated on Avicenna's terminology and theory of quiddity in his philosophical works. In order to paint a fair picture of his position on this issue, one would have to conduct an analysis of essence that takes into account his various theological and philosophical works, and not just *Eastern Investigations*, a task which cannot be tackled here. For insight into Rāzī's conception of mental existence, see Benevich, *The Reality*.

375 Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 139.6–140.1.

376 The idea of something being neither existent (*mawjūd*) nor nonexistent (*ma'dūm*) is thoroughly un-Avicennian. It implies an intermediary ontological status or state between existence and nonexistence, which finds no support in the Avicennian sources. The only cases that could (and have) been made for it concern the status of the possible (or the contingent, *al-mumkin*) and the status of pure quiddity. For the latter, see the Introduction and the review of the positions of Izutsu and Nuseibeh. The former deserves additional comments. As something that is neither necessary (and, hence, necessarily existent), nor impossible (and, hence, necessarily nonexistent), the possible or contingent could be said to possess an intermediary status; this seems to be the case especially of the future contingents, which do not exist necessarily, but which also are not absolutely impossible, since they can exist. One way to solve this problem is to argue that the Avicennian possible or contingent corresponds to the relative nonexistent, which would, as such, be distinct from the impossible and the absolutely nonexistent. For a discussion of this issue, see Lizzini, Wuḡūd-Mawḡūd, and eadem, *A Mysterious Order*. The trend of describing pure quiddity as something that is neither existent nor nonexistent probably has its origins in the works of Ash'arite theologians commenting on Avicenna. Jurjānī and Rāzī are two striking examples of this practice.

377 Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 141.10.

more general (*a'amm*) than the other considerations of quiddity and that it is common to the other two. This is because, in each case, pure quiddity can be apprehended on its own, even if it exists with other things. Hence, for Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn, pure quiddity is conceivable by the human mind, and this consideration is prior to the consideration of universal quiddity.³⁷⁸ In spite of this, according to Rāzī, the consideration of pure quiddity in the mind will, presumably, not amount to a real (mental) existent. At any rate, Rāzī provides no evidence to this effect. For Avicenna, on the other hand, there are strong reasons to believe that the consideration of pure quiddity *does* amount to a distinct intelligible form and an existent in the human mind.

This important difference between the two thinkers revolves around their divergent conception of mental existence. Avicenna has a broad and inclusive theory of mental existence, which makes it quite difficult for him to deny mental objects any existential status whatsoever. Rāzī, in contrast, and on the basis of what is presently known of his doctrine, appears to have upheld a more selective or exclusive theory of mental existence.³⁷⁹ With that being said, Rāzī's views regarding mental existence and quiddity in itself are difficult to delineate with precision, as is the question of how pure quiddity relates to universal quiddity in his system. This makes any comment on this topic quite tentative. For our purposes, the most interesting feature of Rāzī's discussion, and one liable to shed light on this issue, is his interpretation of the expressions *lā bi-sharṭ shay'* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*, as well as of the term *mujarrad*, as they apply to quiddity.³⁸⁰ With regard to the first expression, *lā bi-sharṭ shay'*, Rāzī follows Avicenna closely and construes it as indicating unconditioned quiddity. According to Fakhr al-Dīn, it pertains primarily to the way quiddity exists in the concrete individuals. As he explains, "unconditioned animal exists in the exterior [world]" (*al-ḥayawān lā bi-sharṭ shay' mawjūd fī l-khārij*).³⁸¹ Rāzī partly associates quiddity in itself with this unconditioned state, in the sense that pure quiddity is considered as dwelling in the particulars in an intelligible and irreducible mode without mixing or fusing with its material trappings. It exists there as an irreducible part. If, in contrast, it is considered *with* these material accidents, then it is conditioned quiddity or quiddity *bi-sharṭ shay'*.³⁸² Finally, and in contrast to these two aspects of quiddity, Fakhr al-Dīn employs the terms *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* to refer to the mental state of quiddity and hence to express the opposite of quiddity *bi-sharṭ shay'*. These terms evoke what is "not existent in the concrete world" and "devoid of the exterior accidents" (*al-'awāriḍ al-khārijīyyah*). By implication, they

378 For the possibility to conceive of quiddity in itself, see, in addition to the previous passages, 145.11.

379 For an overview of this question in Rāzī's philosophy, see Arnaldez, *Fakhr*, 138ff.; Eichner, 'Knowledge by Presence,' 119–121; and Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*.

380 Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 141.17–142.8.

381 Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 141.19–20.

382 This aspect of quiddity in Rāzī is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

apply to quiddity in the mind, which is free of these external—in the sense of extramental and concrete—concomitants.³⁸³

Interestingly, however, on Rāzī's view, the conditions of being abstract (*mujarrad*) and negatively-conditioned (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*) are themselves considerations (*i'tibārāt*) that are added to (*zā'id 'alā*) quiddity in itself and quidditative nature (*ṭabi'ah*).³⁸⁴ This would mean that they characterize *not* pure quiddity, as in Avicenna, who regards the latter as being entirely free of other (added) considerations, but rather the universal aspect of essence or another intermediary consideration between pure quiddity and the universal.³⁸⁵ Rāzī opines that the notions *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*, even though they are negative, are conditions (*shurūt*) and judgments (*aḥkām*) that cannot qualify pure quiddity in the mind, since they themselves

383 Rāzī picks up these various distinctions later on (152.21ff.). There he enumerates three different considerations (*i'tibārāt*): quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay'* (quiddity in itself as it exists in the concrete world, but considered in abstraction from its material accidents and concomitants); quiddity *bi-sharṭ shay'* (quiddity as it exists in the concrete world and taken together with its material accidents and concomitants); and quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*. This last aspect of quiddity is not explained or defined by Rāzī in *Eastern Investigations* and represents the most obscure feature of his exposition of quiddity. I believe this feature of quiddity, which derives directly from Avicenna's discussion in *Metaphysics* V.1.204.1 ff., was not universally endorsed by later thinkers, either due to accidental factors or as the result of a deliberate reflective process, and possibly because they rejected its function in Avicenna's metaphysics. In Avicenna, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* fulfills a dual function: negative, to refute the Platonist position that pure quiddity exists separately in the extramental world; and positive, to establish the doctrine of the distinct existence of pure quiddity in the human mind. But Rāzī in contrast does not ascribe it a specific mental content and status. In this same passage, he proceeds to correlate quiddity *bi-sharṭ shay'* with an existential determination or relation (*qayd wujūdī*) and quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* with a nonexistential determination or relation (*qayd 'adamī*). This only begs the question of what quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* is supposed to refer to in his system. Since Rāzī does not—on some accounts—recognize a class of mental existents on the Avicennian model, one interpretation is that this aspect of quiddity could refer to the universal; another interpretation is that it could refer to the human consideration of pure quiddity, which would be a mere logical aspect deprived of positive existence. But since Rāzī defines existence chiefly in terms of actual, concrete existence (in an Ash'arite way), this in turn begs the question of the ontological status of the universal itself, which would not be attributed a clear ontological condition or status. These are questions that await further investigation. For a discussion of these and other related aspects of Rāzī's philosophy, see Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*.

384 Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 141.19–23.

385 Surprisingly, and unlike Avicenna, Rāzī does not deem it a priority to distinguish quiddity in itself and universal quiddity and to elaborate on the significance of the mental concomitants of quiddity, in spite of their importance for the query of mental existence. This in turn somewhat obscures his views regarding mental existence and especially the issue of how the mental consideration of pure quiddity relates to that of universal quiddity. In Avicenna, these mental concomitants are precisely what differentiate the two aspects of quiddity, 'in itself' and 'universal.' It should be noted that this ambiguity is not proper to Rāzī, but undermines much of the post-Avicennian literature focusing on quiddity and mental existence. In the works of Qushjī and many other thinkers, distinguishing between the considerations of universal quiddity and pure quiddity represents a serious interpretive challenge. See the section on Qushjī below as an illustration of these interpretive difficulties.

amount to “other things” superadded to the raw conception of essence. This position is implicitly delineated in *Collection*, when Rāzī defines conceptualization (*taṣawwur*) as “the apprehension of a reality (*ḥaqīqah*)” that amounts to “our considering it inasmuch as it is itself alone without a negative or positive judgment applying to it.”³⁸⁶ In contrast, *taṣdīq* is the conceptualization of a quiddity with such judgments. Now, it is clear that by reality (*ḥaqīqah*), Rāzī means pure quiddity, as is borne out by his description of it as something considered solely in itself. In fact, the vocabulary Rāzī deploys in this passage (*ḥaqīqah, i‘tabara, min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) is directly indebted to Avicenna’s discussion of quiddity in *The Cure*. So, the important point here is Rāzī’s claim that pure conceptualization focuses on quiddity in itself in abstraction from *positive and negative judgments or conditions*, of which the condition *bi-sharṭ lā shay’* is an instance. On his view, then, this condition cannot obtain at the level of pure quiddity, but represents an aspect of quiddity that is already determined in the mind and hence located at the level of conditioned quiddity. Although Fakhr al-Dīn does not elaborate on this point, the main candidate for this determination in his system would be either universal quiddity or a consideration of quiddity located midway between pure quiddity and universal quiddity. Nevertheless, what is clear is that, on Rāzī’s view, although quiddity in itself is free of all extraneous considerations, the qualities of being ‘abstract’ and ‘on the condition of no other thing’ are considerations (*i‘tibārāt*), conditions (*shurūṭ*), and judgments (*aḥkām*), which, if they are negative, are still added to pure quiddity. This object is therefore something other than the aspect of pure quiddity Avicenna describes in *Introduction*.³⁸⁷

One important upshot of the foregoing is that on Rāzī’s view, *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay’* must refer primarily to the absence of the exterior, material concomitants of quiddity, and not of the mental ones. This is necessitated by the fact that he regards quiddity “with no other thing” as applying either to the universal or to an intermediary state between pure quiddity and the universal, but to one in any case that is intellectually composite, which means that “other thing” here cannot refer to the mental concomitants and must refer instead to the concrete concomitants of quiddity. In other words, the expressions *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay’* count as

386 Rāzī, *Collection*, 25.5–7: *idhā adraknā ḥaqīqah fa-imā an na‘tabirahā min ḥaythu hiya hiya min ḡayr ḥukm ‘alayhā lā bi-l-nafy wa-lā bi-l-ithbāt wa-huwa l-taṣawwur*.

387 One key issue discussed in the postclassical tradition—and a valid question for modern scholars as well—is whether the addition of *negative* considerations and conditions to pure quiddity render it something complex and thus ‘other’ or whether it still remains pure quiddity and only that. This problem is compounded by the fact that it involves objects or notions in the mind, so that the epistemological and ontological planes become completely blurred. The same problem does not apply with equal force to extramental objects; e.g., our various considerations of the First Cause do not entail any multiplicity or compositeness in the First Cause, since It exists independently of our thinking It in a perfectly unitary and simple way. But with regard to mental objects, we are projected back to one of the initial conundrums raised earlier in this chapter: does the multiplication of considerations regarding a mental object introduce intelligible multiplicity or complexity within that mental object? Rāzī’s discussion starkly raises this issue, but does not provide a satisfactory answer to it.

judgments and considerations that apply to quiddity, and hence they *are* other things if construed in terms of mental concomitants. But Rāzī intends “other things” here chiefly in relation to the concrete, material, and extramental concomitants of essence. This explains why he may apply these considerations to universal quiddity or an intermediary state of quiddity, which is a bundle of mental concomitants and conditions, but free of any material attributes. On this point, Rāzī appears to depart markedly from Avicenna, who had devoted much of *Metaphysics* V.1–2 to explaining how the pure, abstract, and negatively-conditioned quiddity is devoid of concomitants, including mental concomitants such as universality or oneness. In the final analysis, it appears that Rāzī interprets the Avicennian distinction between *bi-sharṭ lā* and *lā bi-sharṭ* chiefly or exclusively with reference to the exterior, extramental, and concrete concomitants of quiddity, i.e., to the issue of whether quiddity is conceived in connection with external material and concrete concomitants from which it can be abstracted, in which case it is *lā bi-sharṭ*, or simply in the mind as a universal, in which case it is *bi-sharṭ lā* and *mujarrad*, because it is necessarily free from these concrete concomitants. In brief, for Rāzī, the condition *bi-sharṭ lā* applies to quiddity in itself in abstraction from its concrete concomitants, but *taken together with* its mental concomitants, while for Avicenna it implies the complete absence of concomitants, both material and mental.³⁸⁸

Another important upshot is that, according to Fakhr al-Dīn, either there is no true consideration of quiddity in itself or there is a consideration of pure quiddity, which does not, however, correspond to a distinct mental existent. Rāzī provides little information on this point. In the passage of *Collection* cited above, as well as in *Eastern Investigations*, the author’s view appears to be that we can conceive of pure quiddity, but he does not elaborate either way on whether it constitutes a full-fledged and distinct mental existent. Rāzī’s position on this issue may have amounted to a subtle compromise between Avicenna and *kalām*, or at any rate to have arisen out of his attempt to reconcile various ontological notions stemming from these traditions. In one interesting passage of *Eastern Investigations*, Fakhr al-Dīn argues that it is possible to consider and even to intellect (*‘aqala*) something without being certain whether this intellectual object exists in the mind.³⁸⁹ The crucial concept that underpins his argument is that of an intellectual relation (*ta‘alluq*) between the intellect and the intellected object, which need not imply the entitative existence of this object in the mind. In other words, intellection (*ta‘aqqul*) is an intellectual relation (*ta‘alluq*) between intellect and object that does not in itself presuppose or establish the mental existence of this object. This leaves open the possibility that there

³⁸⁸ Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 142.2–8.

³⁸⁹ Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 115.3ff. This discussion inserts itself in the broader context of Rāzī’s argumentation regarding the idea that existence is exterior (*khārij*) to quiddity. Here he wants to refute the argument that intellection always presupposes the mental existence of quiddities, which would suggest that existence is after all not exterior to quiddity, at least when it comes to mental objects.

can be intellection without mental existence of the object proper. Rāzī proceeds to draw a distinction between mental presence as it “relates epistemically” to our awareness (*li-l-shu‘ūr*) and as it “actually occurs” in the awareness or the mind (*fī l-shu‘ūr*). This conclusion hinges on the quite stark separation of cognition and ontology and suggests that Rāzī held a deflationary position regarding mental existence when compared to Avicenna.

In light of the foregoing, one may tentatively venture the conclusion that for Rāzī, we can consider (*i‘tabara*) and conceive of (*taṣawwara*) pure quiddity, but that this consideration and conception does not amount to a mental existent or even presuppose mental existence in a robust sense. This would explain why this author is reluctant to dwell on the subject of pure quiddity in his metaphysics: it may not correspond strictly to an ontological entity. At any rate, Rāzī seems more interested in the epistemological aspects of the problem. Given that he applies the terminology Avicenna had used with regard to pure quiddity to universal quiddity, it would make sense that, if he holds to a theory of mental existence, he would restrict it to the universal. As a commentator of Avicenna’s metaphysics, Rāzī therefore significantly minimizes the sharp distinction Avicenna had drawn between the conception of pure quiddity and that of universal quiddity, and he also considerably deflates Avicenna’s theory of mental existence. He virtually ignores the ontological vocabulary that the *shaykh al-ra’īs* had invested in pure quiddity or attaches it instead to the universal. On the whole, then, Rāzī takes a different approach regarding the issue of how these two aspects of quiddity relate to mental existence. It seems that his approach is dictated largely by his theory of mental existence, which is, unfortunately, only implicitly sketched out in his works. The two key features that emerge from his argumentation are (a) the distinction between intellectual objects that exist and intellectual objects that do not truly exist, and (b) the dichotomy between concrete extramental existence and mental existence, and the assumption that the former is the stronger and truer mode of existence—hence, his emphasis on the material concomitants of essence, rather than the mental ones. These two qualifications on mental existence, which tacitly underlie Rāzī’s argumentation, are likely to have been informed by theological views emanating from the Ash‘arite and Mu‘tazilite traditions.

To conclude, Rāzī departs considerably from Avicenna. Although he most probably followed *Introduction* I.2, which had defined quiddity in itself as a distinct and fully legitimate consideration, he, on the other hand, discards *Metaphysics* V.1, which had identified it as an existing form and intelligible in the mind. Moreover, he parts company with Avicenna with regard to the terms *mujarrad* and *bi-sharṭ lā*, which the master had reserved for this pristine aspect of quiddity. For Fakhr al-Dīn, quiddity in itself is first and foremost a concept, and it remains unclear at this stage whether he grounded it also in an ontological foundation. Rather, according to Rāzī, quiddity in itself is what he calls a “nature” (*ṭabī‘ah*) and “the divine thing” (*al-amr al-ilāhī*). As he explains, true nature and the divine thing are as such entirely devoid of consid-

eration, at least from the human standpoint.³⁹⁰ What emerges from the previous discussion is that one of the major differences between Avicenna and some of his later commentators—here Fakhr al-Dīn—focuses on how the mental concomitants relate to quiddity in itself. I believe this doctrinal discrepancy between Avicenna and Rāzī had the effect of amplifying what were already serious ambiguities in Avicenna’s philosophy, namely, the relation between pure quiddity and the universal in the mind, as well as how the clause *bi-sharḥ lā shay’* refers to quiddity and its mental concomitants. Later thinkers (such as Ṭūsī) were keen to realize that the mental concomitants of quiddity could be regarded on a par with its concrete concomitants and, therefore, that they also had to be excluded from a consideration of quiddity in itself. For these thinkers, the clause *bi-sharḥ lā shay’* could refer not just to the material concomitants of quiddity, but to its mental concomitants as well, with the result that pure quiddity alone can be described in this manner. This point is not lucidly articulated in Rāzī’s works, and, if anything, he applies this negative condition chiefly to the concrete concomitants, with the result that the various aspects of quiddity in the mind cannot be distinguished clearly on the basis of this condition. Hence, his views on quiddity may have had the unintended effect of nourishing some of the potential misunderstandings that could arise from an exegesis of the Avicennian texts. It is not a coincidence on my view that much of the postclassical discourse about quiddity appears to hinge precisely on the issue of how it relates to its mental and concrete concomitants and how the conditions (*shurūṭ*) can be applied to them.

3.2 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī

Ṭūsī—as the faithful Avicennian interpreter he is often credited to have been, and in contrast to Fakhr al-Dīn—appears to follow Avicenna more closely with regard to how he frames the discussion of quiddity in itself and how he construes the various conditions as they apply to quiddity. His position on this issue, as it is exemplified in his commentary on Avicenna’s *Pointers*, should be regarded as a reaction to some of the ideas put forth by his predecessor Rāzī and as an attempt on his part to return to the correct interpretation of the master’s doctrine.

Ṭūsī addresses these questions in various works. One important exposition appears in *Abstract of Correct Belief (Tajrīd al-ī’tiqād)*, in a section entitled “On the [various] considerations of quiddity” (*ī’tibārāt al-māhiyyah*), a text which had a profound influence on the later tradition.³⁹¹ In this crucial passage, Ṭūsī describes “quiddity freed from all that is other than it” (*al-māhiyyah maḥdhūfan ‘anhā mā ‘adāhā*) as that which is *bi-sharḥ lā shay’*, a formula he borrows directly from *The Cure*. Shortly

³⁹⁰ Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 142.1.

³⁹¹ For a translation and discussion of this crucial passage in light of the postclassical commentarial tradition, see Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 5ff.

thereafter he adds that this aspect of quiddity “exists only in the mind” (*lā tūjad illa fī l-adhhān*). Now, these statements can apply only either to universal quiddity or quiddity in itself, which are the only two aspects of quiddity that could be said to properly exist in the intellect. It is clear, however, that Ṭūsī has the latter in mind, since he goes on to describe universal quiddity some lines below as a different aspect of quiddity. At this point, I will attempt to reconstruct the philosophical rationale behind Ṭūsī’s statements. Ṭūsī’s argumentation in this passage is based on the Avicennian position that the quidditative concomitants can be either concrete or mental, but that they are in either case external to quiddity in itself and not constitutive of it. Hence, “quiddity freed from all that is other than it” will also exclude mental concomitants, and it exists in the mind in this pure, abstract state. It will only become a universal when it combines with universality. As Ṭūsī notes, when pure quiddity combines with accidental universality (*al-kulliyah al-‘āriḍah*), which is also called the logical universal (*kullī manṭiqī*), this produces a composite (*murakkab*), which is the universal intellectual (*‘aqlī*) quiddity. The implication is that universal quiddity is a compound of nature or pure quiddity together with universality—or, to put it differently using Ṭūsī’s nomenclature, of the ‘natural’ and ‘logical’ universals—and that it is distinct from quiddity in itself in the mind.³⁹²

Hence, Ṭūsī follows Avicenna and departs from Rāzī in positing the conceivability of quiddity in itself in the mind and in describing it as quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’*. When regarded strictly in this manner, quiddity in itself is not a *part* of something complex or composite, and it excludes the concrete and mental concomitants associated with intellectual and extramental existents. It exists as a distinct form in the mind, free from all concomitants, including mental ones.³⁹³ This explains why Ṭūsī, having introduced pure quiddity at the beginning of the passage, proceeds to explain that we can add other considerations (*i’tibārāt*) to it. If quiddity in itself were already part of a composite whole, i. e., a universal, then his remark that other considerations (such as universality) can be added to it would be devoid of meaning. It is precisely *because* pure quiddity is *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar* and distinct from—and even separate from—all other things in the mind, that the mind can proceed to attach concomitants and attributes to it. On this point, Ṭūsī has carefully followed Avicenna’s reasoning: like the master, he has conscientiously distinguished quiddity in itself from universal quiddity on the basis of the mental attributes and concomitants. Further evidence for this interpretation can be found in *Commentary on Pointers*. There Ṭūsī mentions two aspects of quiddity in the intellect (*fī l-‘aql*). He writes (in response to the objection of an interlocutor who denies that quiddity exists in the material world)³⁹⁴:

392 Cf. Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 1, 204.14ff. It should be pointed out that some of Ṭūsī’s technical terms and ideas in this key passage are indebted directly to Avicenna’s discussion in *Introduction* I.12, a text that should be regarded as one of Ṭūsī’s models for his exposition of quiddity.

393 It is unclear, however, whether Ṭūsī believes we can truly conceive this form; see below.

394 For a discussion of this point, see chapter III.

The objection is solved as follows: by differentiating between the nature of human to which commonality [*al-ishṭirāk*] or the absence [of commonality] can apply, and between human [necessarily] posited with commonality. The former exists in the concrete world and in the intellect; the latter exists only in the intellect.³⁹⁵

This statement recognizes the presence of two concepts or considerations of human in the intellect: one is pure quiddity envisaged as being unconditioned (which explains why it can be considered with the absence (*‘adam*) of commonality); the other is the consideration of the universal, which necessarily involves positing commonality and universality together with pure quiddity. In another section, Ṭūsī refutes Rāzī’s claim that quiddities in the concrete world can subsist before they acquire existence, and he argues that quiddity can be fully abstracted from existence only in the mind.³⁹⁶ Ṭūsī writes:

Quiddity cannot be abstracted from existence except in the intellect [*fī l-‘aql*]. [This occurs] not in the sense that it [quiddity] is fully disconnected from existence [in every way]—for indeed being in the intellect also amounts to intellectual existence [*wujūd ‘aqlī*], just as being in the concrete world amounts to exterior existence [*wujūd khārijī*]—but in the sense that the intellect envisages it [only] in itself, without the relation to existence. For the absence [or privation] of the consideration of a thing is other than the consideration of its nonexistence [*‘adam i’tibār al-shay’ laysa i’tibār li-‘adamihī*].³⁹⁷

In this passage, Ṭūsī explains that the intellect can conceive (*taṣawwara*) and have a consideration of (*i’tabara*) quiddity in itself in abstraction from existence, but without it (viz., quiddity in itself) being a nonexistent. The key statement supporting Ṭūsī’s argument is that “the absence of the consideration of a thing is different from the consideration of [that thing’s] nonexistence.” This means that the absence of the consideration of existence (together with quiddity) is not the same as affirming the nonexistence of quiddity in itself. We can envisage pure quiddity in our intellect in abstraction from existence, but this does not mean that it does not exist as a mental object. This point suggests that Ṭūsī has pure quiddity in mind in this passage, and not the universal, since the latter *is* envisaged together with existence, both in the sense that the universal is considered together with its concomitants (which condition and determine universal mental existents) and in the sense that the universal is often apprehended in relation to a plurality of concrete existents. So Ṭūsī’s rationale is that, *qua* object of knowledge, quiddity in itself must exist and must be an intellectual existent for the cognitive act centered upon it to be possible in the first place, even though its apprehension excludes the notion of existence. Pure quiddity is not disconnected from existence after all, even if it is not considered in relation to existence. Hence, Ṭūsī wants to maintain an epistemic distinction between quiddity

³⁹⁵ Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 438.9–13.

³⁹⁶ Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 462.22ff.

³⁹⁷ Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 463.1–4.

in itself and the universal, but he can also be read as going further in ascribing to these objects a distinct ontological status in the mind. This approach signals a particular take on the Avicennian texts, which, as I argued, is likely the one Avicenna himself intended. In *Metaphysics* V.1, for example, Avicenna also is keen to emphasize the *difference* between the *existence* of quiddity in itself and the *existence* of universal quiddity. Hence, this passage from *Commentary* concurs fully with the evidence in *Abstract of Correct Belief* according to which we can conceive of pure quiddity in our mind in a manner distinct from the universal. Ṭūsī seems to agree fully with Avicenna on this crucial point.

Nevertheless, there is an important difference between Avicenna's and Ṭūsī's accounts, which concerns the way in which they envisage the status of pure quiddity in the mind. Ṭūsī opens this section with a mention of quiddity in itself, and he follows it immediately afterwards with a discussion of 'the three universals,' an account not found in Avicenna's writings in this combined form. These three universals are the natural universal (i. e., quiddity as it exists in concrete things and as it is abstracted by the mind), the logical universal (i. e., the attribute of universality in the mind that becomes attached to the nature or abstracted quiddity), and the intellectual universal (i. e., the composite of the natural and the logical universals).³⁹⁸ Somewhat surprisingly, however, Ṭūsī ends the passage by concluding that there are only *three* considerations or aspects of quiddity (*fa-hādhihi i'tibārāt thalāthah*), which correspond to these three universals—the natural, the logical, and the intellectual—and not four, as one would expect if a distinct consideration was ascribed to quiddity in itself in the mind.³⁹⁹ While this might strike one as odd at first glance, there is in fact no discrepancy: the natural universal is just another way by which post-Avicennian authors refer to the pure nature or quiddity as it exists in concrete beings (when taken together with concrete accidental concomitants) and in the mind (when divested of these concrete concomitants). What Ṭūsī says about the natural universal broadly corresponds to what Avicenna affirms about the pure nature. Pure quiddity or nature—or here, the natural universal—bridges the extramental and mental spheres and constitutes a point of reference or a constant for both concrete and mental beings by serving as the foundation of the abstractive process. Hence, when Ṭūsī refers to the consideration of the natural universal, he is alluding to pure quiddity, even though this point requires some unpacking due to his slightly different terminology.

With that being said, it is undeniable that a certain doctrinal shift has occurred from Avicenna's account in *Introduction* I.2 to Ṭūsī's treatment of it, as was already noticed in the case of Rāzī. For in Avicenna's account, pure quiddity was described

398 This passage likely builds on Avicenna's *Introduction* I.12 and on the threefold distinction he makes there between 'the natural,' 'the logical,' and 'the intellectual.'

399 Ṭūsī, *Abstract of Correct Belief*, 121.3–12. This passage became the object of extensive commentary in the following centuries and inspired different interpretations concerning the ontological state of quiddity in itself.

as a consideration (*i'tibār*) that was distinct from the considerations of quiddity in concrete existents and the universal. In Ṭūsī's account, in contrast, the inference is that quiddity *qua* nature or natural universal is somehow identical with the consideration of pure quiddity as an object in the mind. In other words, Ṭūsī does not recognize an additional distinct consideration of quiddity in itself in the mind, even though it is implied in the consideration of nature or the natural universal. This tendency is also hinted at earlier in the same work when Ṭūsī affirms that "the true nature [i.e., quiddity in itself] of all things is other than the [various] considerations that occur to it accidentally."⁴⁰⁰ Here as well Ṭūsī employs the term *i'tibārāt* to refer to aspects added to quiddity in itself, but there is no suggestion that we can have a distinct consideration of quiddity in itself. In the case of Ṭūsī, unlike in the case of Rāzī, however, we can be almost certain that he would have posited a consideration of pure quiddity in the mind as a fourth aspect of quiddity. The reason why he does not explicitly do so in this passage is most likely because his account often conflates pure quiddity *qua* nature (*ṭabī'ah*) as it exists in the concrete world and as it exists in an abstracted form in the mind, thus pointing to the dual (concrete and mental) dimension of pure nature or pure quiddity in his philosophy; this complicated point will be discussed in depth later on.

One unfortunate effect of this ambiguity is that later thinkers who commented directly on Ṭūsī's *Abstract of Correct Belief* (and who also likely read Rāzī), such as Qushjī in the fifteenth century, understandably do not associate quiddity in itself with a distinct *i'tibār* or consideration in the mind and prefer to speak of the various considerations *added to* pure quiddity (so that the exact mental status of pure quiddity and whether we can have a true conception of it are points that remain unclear in their accounts). What is more, and perhaps as a result of this practice, the relation between pure quiddity and the universal in the mind becomes blurred and difficult to disentangle. Ṭūsī therefore wittingly or unwittingly sowed the seed for a significant doctrinal departure from Avicenna's original doctrine in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* according to which we can have a distinct and autonomous *i'tibār* of quiddity in itself, which even amounts to a distinct form and intelligible in the mind. In contrast, one commentatorial position that seems to characterize the later period is that we can have various considerations of quiddity in the mind, but that no consideration corresponds expressly to quiddity in itself.

3.3 Taftāzānī

Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd b. 'Umar al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390 CE), in his *Commentary on the Aims of the Science of Theology (Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid fī 'ilm al-kalām)*, delves into the ques-

⁴⁰⁰ Ṭūsī, *Abstract of Correct Belief*, 121.7: *wa-ḥaḳīqah kull shay' mughāyarah li-mā ya'riḍu lahā min al-i'tibārāt.*

tion of quiddity in direct continuation of his predecessors. Like virtually all of them, he identifies ‘the abstract quiddity’ (*al-māhiyyah al-mujarradah*) with ‘the negatively-conditioned quiddity’ (*bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar*), but unlike most of them, he takes a clear stance vis-à-vis the question of the mental existence of this aspect of quiddity. According to him, the abstract or negatively-conditioned quiddity exists *neither* in the concrete world *nor* in the mind.⁴⁰¹ What is important here is Taftāzānī’s rationale for defending this claim. The thrust of his argument relies on the premise that mental existence presupposes mental concomitants and accidents—what Taftāzānī refers to throughout this passage as *‘awāriḍ*—just as concrete existence relies on similar accidents, albeit of a material kind. As Taftāzānī puts it, “being in the mind is also one of the accidents that attaches to the mental form [*li-anna l-kawn fī-l-dhihn ayḍan min al-‘awāriḍ allatī laḥiqat al-ṣūrah al-dhihniyyah*], on account of what is external to it, not [on account] of the abstracted consideration [itself] in the intellect.”⁴⁰² These accidents provide the determination (*taqdīr*) of quiddity and define its mode of existence, which is either mental or concrete. But since ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity by definition cannot possess any of these mental accidents, it cannot possibly exist in any true sense.

Like many of the postclassical thinkers, Taftāzānī’s position reflects the view that some things can be described loosely as ‘mental’ or ‘intellectual’ without nevertheless qualifying as *mental or intellectual existents*. This means that ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity is merely a consideration with no ontological grounding. I believe this view was already expressed *in nuce*, albeit somewhat vaguely, in Rāzī’s works, and that it was subsequently elaborated upon in the long series of commentaries that were spun around Ṭūsī’s *Abstract*, and which includes Taftāzānī’s own commentary. Taftāzānī holds that, even if we may have some kind of conception of ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity, it does not amount to an existent, on the grounds that it bears no correspondence (*muṭābaqah*) to the real ontological order of things. This means, presumably, that it does not correspond to something actually existing in the extramental world, so that it constitutes merely a mental or conceptual consideration. Taftāzānī provides additional information in his commentary, where he relates—interestingly for our purposes—that some philosophers uphold the mental existence of ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity. Their view appears to be based, among other things, on the idea that the possibility of intellecting nonexistent things points to a kind of mental existence of that nonexistent thing.⁴⁰³ Taftāzānī, however, objects to this position and responds as follows:

‘The intellect [has the capacity to] consider the nonexistence of every thing and even nonexistence itself [*‘adam nafsihi*]. Hence, it can consider quiddity abstracted from all accidents and

⁴⁰¹ Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Aims*, vol. 1, 404.1–4.

⁴⁰² Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Aims*, vol. 1, 404.3–5.

⁴⁰³ One wonders who exactly Taftāzānī has in mind here, but in light of the present analysis, I would surmise that he is targeting Avicenna and some of his followers.

even from its being in the mind [*ḥattā ‘an al-kawn fī l-dhihn*], even if it [quiddity] is in itself combined with them [the accidents].’ This is refuted [as follows]: *this does not necessitate its being [i. e., its existing as something] abstract [ḥādḥā lā yaqtaḍī kawnahā mujarradah]*. Rather, the final word on this matter is that the intellect may [merely] conceptualize it in this way as [something] non-commensurate [with the real world, *ghayr muṭābiq*].⁴⁰⁴

Taftāzānī argues in this passage that the fact that we can conceive of pure or ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity as something *epistemically distinct* does not entail that it exists as such in this abstracted state. Its being epistemically distinct does not make it *ontologically distinct*. Rather, it is merely a consideration or conceptualization with no correspondence to true reality. Hence, it cannot even be said to truly exist in the mind. Notice that this argument rests on the important notion of a correspondence or commensurate relation between considerations in the mind and real existents. The upshot of Taftāzānī’s claim would be that only those intellectual considerations or concepts that have a correspondence with true reality or the real world and that are commensurate (*muṭābiq*) with it could be said somehow to exist in the mind. In other words, a true mental existent must reflect an objectively existing reality and therefore express a commensuration between the mental and extramental spheres. This condition in turn necessitates that this consideration have accidents (e. g., universality) that establish a relation between the concept in the mind and concrete reality.⁴⁰⁵ In brief, by denying the mental existence of ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity, Taftāzānī bears down heavily on one side of the debate regarding the relation of the mental concomitants to pure quiddity. According to him, absence of mental concomitants means absence of mental existence, given that these very concomitants and accidents are necessary to establish a relation between the mind and extramental reality. Consequently, given its complete lack of accidents, quiddity *bi-sharḥ lā* exists neither in the mind nor in the concrete world.

3.4 Qushjī

The great polymath ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Qushjī (d. 1474 CE) also contributed to the philosophical discussion about quiddity in his *Commentary on Ṭūsī’s Abstract of Correct Belief*. But Qushjī goes further in exploiting some of the doctrinal discrepancies highlighted above in Ṭūsī’s and Rāzī’s writings and commentaries on Avicenna and departs significantly from these earlier thinkers. He deploys one of the most intricate and original interpretations of how the various conditions apply to quiddity that can be found in the postclassical tradition. Let us begin, however, with the common fea-

⁴⁰⁴ Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Aims*, vol. 1, 404.13–17.

⁴⁰⁵ Although Taftāzānī does not resort to the concept of the fact of the matter (*nafs al-amr*) in this passage, his view appears close to other subsequent thinkers who defined their position on the basis of this notion.

tures in their works. Qushjī, like Rāzī and Ṭūsī, correlates the *māhiyyah mujarradah* and the *māhiyyah bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. For Qushjī, as for these other philosophers, these terms refer jointly to the same aspect of quiddity, which I described earlier as abstract and negatively-conditioned quiddity.⁴⁰⁶ On this point, these thinkers paid heed to Avicenna's pointed remarks in *Metaphysics* V.1–2, even though they did not conceive of this aspect of quiddity in exactly the same way. Another parallel in their approach is that this negative aspect of quiddity is distinguished from both unconditioned quiddity (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) and conditioned quiddity (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*). Finally, Qushjī follows these earlier thinkers—especially Avicenna and Ṭūsī—regarding the issue of the conceivability of abstract quiddity. To this effect, Qushjī puts forth the (by now familiar) argument that the mind can conceive anything, including nonexistence, from which he infers that it can also envisage abstract quiddity. In maintaining this argument, Qushjī makes an important point: the human mind can conceive of pure quiddity in abstraction even of its mental accidents. He writes:

It is not impossible for the mind to intellect [*ya'qilu l-dhihn*] quiddity in abstraction from all the external and mental concomitants, on account of the fact that it [the mind] considers it and perceives it [abstract quiddity] as free from them [these concomitants], even though it [quiddity] can be described by some of them on account of the fact of the matter [*bi-ḥasab nafs al-amr*].⁴⁰⁷

Hence, Qushjī argues that we can have, at the very least, an epistemically distinct concept of abstract quiddity in the mind. As in the works of most other Avicennians, he correlates this mental aspect of quiddity with the state of being abstract and negatively conditioned. Moreover, given that this aspect excludes mental concomitants, it cannot be conflated with the universal in the mind. Rather, it is a distinct consideration of quiddity. With that being said, Qushjī is careful to add that this conception of pure quiddity may actually possess certain concomitants when considered in light of 'the fact of the matter' (*nafs al-amr*), a proviso that lifts the veil on the true complexity of his position.

In this connection, it is Qushjī's differences with these thinkers, rather than his affinities with them, which should be highlighted, particularly when it comes to two distinct issues: first, is abstract and negatively-conditioned quiddity the same as quiddity in itself according to Qushjī? And, second, does pure quiddity possess true mental existence? Whereas Avicenna and Ṭūsī identified abstract and negatively-conditioned quiddity with quiddity in itself in the mind, Qushjī seems to apply these features to yet another consideration of quiddity, which corresponds neither to pure quiddity nor to the universal. What appears to correspond to quiddity in itself for Qushjī is what he calls "absolute quiddity" (*al-māhiyyah al-muṭlaqah*), which he also characterizes as unconditioned quiddity or *lā bi-sharṭ shay'*. According to Qush-

406 Qushjī, *Commentary*, 400.6–7.

407 Qushjī, *Commentary*, 408.7–9.

jī, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* amounts to something more than pure quiddity, since it is in his view already qualified by a condition, albeit a negative one. Recall also that for Qushjī we can conceive of abstract quiddity in complete isolation of its concomitants, albeit with regard to 'the fact of the matter,' quiddity is not entirely separated from them. As such, abstract or negatively-conditioned quiddity is distinct from quiddity taken only in itself in the mind.

Furthermore, and given this definition of negatively-conditioned quiddity as quiddity and something else (namely, the negative condition of abstraction), it follows for Qushjī that negatively-conditioned quiddity does exist in the mind. So Qushjī agrees with his predecessors that abstract quiddity exists in the mind, although he appears to have conceived of abstract quiddity as an aspect distinct from pure quiddity. More surprisingly at first sight, Qushjī also claims that negatively-conditioned quiddity can be said to exist as a "part" (*juz'*) in things.⁴⁰⁸ But for Avicenna and Ṭūsī, what can be said to exist as a part in things is, strictly speaking, the unconditioned quiddity or quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay'*, which is said of the aspect of quiddity that exists in the exterior world, not quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*, which exists only in the mind in abstraction from everything else.⁴⁰⁹ Finally, and even more surprisingly, Qushjī contends that negatively-conditioned quiddity exists not only in the mind, but also in the concrete world. Since it exists as a part, abstract or negatively-conditioned quiddity can also exist as a part of the concrete existents. By the time of Qushjī, a significant semantic shift in the use of these technical terms had occurred, which resulted in a thorough re-interpretation of Avicenna's doctrines.⁴¹⁰

These important doctrinal differences between Qushjī and earlier thinkers stem in part from his idiosyncratic interpretation of the clause *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*. As Izutsu showed in an article devoted to the postclassical reception of Avicenna's theory of quiddity, Qushjī promoted a dual interpretation of negatively-conditioned quiddity, which enabled him to establish its existence in both the mental and concrete spheres. Izutsu explicates how the negative condition *bi-sharṭ lā* came to be construed in two fundamentally different ways from Qushjī onward: either as referring to the external mental or concrete concomitants of quiddity; or as referring to the in-

408 Qushjī, *Commentary*, 406.1–6.

409 Qushjī, *Commentary*, 404.2, 405.8–9.

410 Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, studied Qushjī's commentary in detail and had already concluded that it represents a turning point in the discussion of quiddity in the postclassical period. Izutsu remarked that Qushjī introduces new theoretical approaches to the problem and uses the Avicennian terminology on the various aspects of quiddity in an idiosyncratic manner. Starting from Qushjī, much of the discussion revolves not only around the issue of the relation of quiddity to its external concomitants, including its mental concomitants, but also around the relationship of the various constitutive elements of quiddity, with subtle distinctions being introduced in the process. As was noticed earlier, this aspect was largely lacking in Rāzī, so that with Qushjī one sees a development in the conceptualization of the problem of quiddity.

ternal, constitutive elements of quiddity in the essential definition of a thing.⁴¹¹ This discrepancy in the conception of quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* in turn explains why Qushjī is dissatisfied with Ṭūsī's position and conspicuously puzzled by what he is reading in *Abstract of Correct Belief*. Because Qushjī regards quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* as already existing as an irreducible part in composite beings, he is perplexed by Ṭūsī's assertion that something can be *added to* and *removed from* this quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*. This affirmation strikes Qushjī as contradictory, if (only) the external concomitants are intended. The idea that something can be added to abstract quiddity conflicts with its being devoid of other things. But Qushjī's exegetical ploy and his dual interpretation of the negative condition enable him to read Ṭūsī in a different light and as stating not only that abstract quiddity can be devoid of external concrete accidents (which can be conceptually removed from it)—this corresponds to System A—but also that it can be envisaged as a distinct and irreducible part of the definition—this corresponds to System B. On the latter sense of 'abstract,' other constitutive elements can be added (e.g., rational to animal), while maintaining the former sense. In other words, on Qushjī's interpretation of Ṭūsī, quiddity is always negatively-conditioned according to System A, but not always according to System B.⁴¹²

If my reconstruction of Qushjī's views is correct, part of the disagreement between Avicenna, Ṭūsī, and Qushjī centers on the fact that while the first two ascribe a negative condition to pure quiddity in the mind, Qushjī ascribes this condition to another aspect of quiddity. On my interpretation, Ṭūsī follows Avicenna in attributing the clause *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* to quiddity in itself as a distinct concept or object in the mind. But when external concomitants are added, and quiddity is considered as an irreducible part, say, of the universal, it becomes on their view another aspect of quiddity, and it is no longer abstract or negatively-conditioned quiddity. Consequently, for Avicenna and Ṭūsī, 'adding' something to the negatively-conditioned quiddity (e.g., in order to form the universal) is not inconceivable in the way it is for Qushjī, inasmuch as it ceases to be negatively-conditioned quiddity. On their model, this would involve the addition of an external concomitant, in which case quiddity would cease to be considered and to exist in a state of *bi-sharṭ lā*. Instead, it would assume a new consideration and condition of "with an external concomi-

411 Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 9 ff. The term *shay'*, which appears in these various conditions applied to quiddity could be construed as referring either to the external concomitants of quiddity—both concrete and mental—or to the constitutive elements of quiddity. In the latter case, the thing added to pure quiddity is the differentia, as 'rational' can be added to 'animal' in the quiddity and definition 'human.' Izutsu designates these two interpretations as System A and System B, and he notes that Qushjī was apparently the first thinker to establish this distinction.

412 But Qushjī would probably argue that, strictly speaking, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* is negative on each count and cannot receive or be complemented by something else, lest it stop being *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. Hence, regardless of how one looks at it, Ṭūsī was wrong in adding external things to this aspect of quiddity.

tant,” i.e., it would become a composite universal entity in the mind. In brief, the difference between Avicenna and Ṭūsī, on the one hand, and Qushjī, on the other, revolves around their different conception of what quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā* amounts to: for the first two, it is quiddity in itself as an abstract and distinct existent in the mind; for the latter, it is what exists as a part in an already composite thing.⁴¹³ Yet, Qushjī believes that it is possible to conceive of negatively-conditioned quiddity in abstraction from all other things, including its mental concomitants. So there appears to be a difference in Qushjī’s reasoning between the purely epistemological conceivability of negatively-conditioned quiddity and the fact that it cannot exist in a distinct state, but merely as a part of a whole.

At this juncture, the concept of ‘the fact of the matter’ needs to be addressed, since it can help to explain this distinction in Qushjī’s works. For Qushjī, the abstractedness of quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’*, what Ṭūsī describes as “its being free from all other things” (*maḥdhūfan ‘anhā mā ‘adāhā*), can refer only to the epistemological and conceptual aspects of the problem, which are to be separated from its ontological dimension.⁴¹⁴ For if we can conceive of quiddity as such, according to the fact of the matter, negatively-conditioned quiddity exists as a part in a composite being, and hence not distinctly. As Qushjī notes, it is not devoid of concomitants in its true state and according to the fact of the matter, nor does it exit separately from the things that constitute it. This means that the consideration of negatively-conditioned quiddity as something distinct (whether according to Izutsu’s System A or B) is purely conceptual, conjectural, or suppositional (*i’tibārī*), but it does not reflect a true ontological state. Only the mereological interpretation of the negative condition possesses an ontological thrust. To use the terminology I deployed previously in this study, Qushjī recognizes the *epistemic distinctness* and *ontological irreducibility* of negatively-conditioned quiddity, but not its *ontological distinctness*. In contrast, for Avicenna, *bi-sharṭ lā shay’* refers to an epistemological aspect as well as an intramental ontological reality. This coheres with his view that quiddity in itself, abstract quiddity, and quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’*—all three expressions refer to the same entity—exists as a distinct form in the mind.

Further evidence regarding the conceptual disparities between Ṭūsī and Qushjī focuses on the latter’s belief that quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’* exists *both* in the mind and in the concrete world. Qushjī takes issue with Ṭūsī’s claim that this aspect of quiddity exists “only in the mind” (*illā fi l-adhḥān*).⁴¹⁵ Since Qushjī regards quiddity

⁴¹³ As Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, has shown, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar* also exists in concrete things according to Qushjī. It therefore has a mental and extramental application. Qushjī appears to be one of the only thinkers to uphold the existence of negatively-conditioned quiddity in the concrete world, an option made possible by his particular dual interpretation of *bi-sharṭ lā*. Elaborating on this point, however, would take us too far from our concerns.

⁴¹⁴ Qushjī, *Commentary*, 406.7–9.

⁴¹⁵ Qushjī, *Commentary*, 406.3, which opens the way for a protracted discussion of the mental existence of quiddity.

bi-sharṭ lā shay' as being internally simple and irreducible, but as necessarily existing together with external concomitants (whether of a mental or extramental kind), his position does not prevent quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* from existing both in the mind and in the exterior world. In contrast, for Avicenna, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* can exist distinctly only in the mind. Avicenna and Ṭūsī caution repeatedly that the negatively-conditioned quiddity cannot exist separately in the external world, lest we endorse the theory of the Platonic Forms.

3.5 Tahānawī

Muḥammad A'lā l-Tahānawī's (fl. 1740s CE) *Dictionary* is a general reference work on the terminology used in the various branches of Islamic learning, but its treatment of technical philosophical and theological terms is often quite illuminating. It contains a detailed section on the term 'quiddity' (*māhiyyah*), which is of some interest to the present inquiry, since the author reports the views of previous scholars on this subject and also briefly outlines his own opinions on the matter. He begins by distinguishing between two aspects of quiddity, which he calls 'real or established quiddity' (*māhiyyah ḥaqīqiyyah*) and 'conceptual or suppositional quiddity' (*māhiyyah i'tibāriyyah*). The former refers to the state of quiddity without any connection with human thought and consideration and as it exists in itself in the concrete world. It is, hence, objectively existing quiddity or quiddity according to the fact of the matter (*fī nafs al-amr*). In contrast, the latter is quiddity as it is conceptualized by the human mind, so that, if it possesses any existence, that existence will be in the human mind thinking it, and it will also per force be accompanied by a certain reflexive deliberation and awareness by the mind that is thinking it.⁴¹⁶

With regard to our present concern, the author provides some information on the way in which conditions apply to the various considerations of quiddity in the mind. He repeats accurately the various mental distinctions and conditions of quiddity that have been examined thus far, focusing particularly on 'negatively-conditioned' quiddity and its relation to mental existence. With regard to this specific issue, he informs us that some thinkers have rejected the intellectual existence of pure quiddity on the grounds that existence itself is one of those mental concomitants or accidents of which abstract quiddity is supposed to be devoid. Put differently, quiddity would be abstract in the sense of its being devoid of the material concomitants of the exterior world, but not in the sense of its being absolutely devoid or free (*tajarrudiḥā muṭlaqan*) of all concomitants, including purely mental ones. According to Tahānawī, the disagreement between those for and those against the mental existence of abstract

⁴¹⁶ Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424.

quiddity hinges on this point.⁴¹⁷ In sentences that appear indebted to Taftāzānī and Qushjī, Tahānawī then explains that others in contrast maintain the mental existence of pure quiddity, because the mind can conceive of all things, even purely negative things such as nonexistence. Hence, ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity, in spite of its negative state, can be apprehended by the mind, and no absurdity results from this claim, thereby pointing to its ontological status in the mind as a valid object of conception. In making these various remarks, Tahānawī appears to draw a relatively simple correlation between conceivability and mental existence, and he does not introduce the more subtle distinctions that had informed Qushjī’s analysis. Tahānawī himself appears to endorse this view implicitly and to accept that pure quiddity does exist in the mind in its ‘negatively-conditioned’ state. Interestingly, he asks whether the condition of negativity applied to it also amounts to a mental existent, which would lead to various mental existents being posited. But he replies that it is essentially identical with pure quiddity and that it does not exist accidentally, which, if it were the case, would vindicate the position of those who claim that pure quiddity can exist only with its concomitants.

3.6 Ṭabāṭabā’ī

In his summary work *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*, the great modern Persian scholar Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī (d. 1981) devotes several sections to the notion of pure quiddity. This is surprising at first glance, given the short format of the treatise, but it should be stressed that this work is intended more as an abridgment of the philosophical curricula as it was passed on by the Persian philosophical tradition than as a propaedeutic work proper. At any rate, like many of his Persian predecessors operating within the Avicennian paradigm, Ṭabāṭabā’ī classifies quiddity (*māhiyyah*) into three aspects: (1) *bi-sharṭ shay’*, (2) *bi-sharṭ lā*, and (3) *lā bi-sharṭ*. The first one is also called mixed quiddity (*māhiyyah makhluṭāh*) and the last one absolute quiddity (*māhiyyah muṭlaqah*). According to the Persian scholar, these two aspects of quiddity exist in the concrete extramental world. As for the negatively-conditioned quiddity, it is abstract quiddity (*māhiyyah mujarradah*).

At this juncture, however, Ṭabāṭabā’ī specifies that negatively-conditioned quiddity in turn consists of two different aspects. The author distinguishes between the

⁴¹⁷ Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424–1425, which covers all points made in this section. But there seem to be two closely related points that emerge from the author’s account. Either pure quiddity cannot exist in the mind because it lacks mental concomitants, or the *i’tibārāt* of quiddity are purely suppositional and conceptual and, hence, disconnected from the true existence defined by the fact of the matter (*nafs al-amr*). It is unclear whether these are two distinct arguments or whether they are essentially related and even dependent on one another. It could be that the *i’tibārāt* are not proper mental existents *because* they lack the accidents and concomitants that attach to true mental existents, or simply *because*, being purely suppositional, they are disconnected from *nafs al-amr*.

negatively-conditioned quiddity as (a) a consideration that is both irreducible and distinct or isolated, and (b) a consideration that is irreducible but may be combined with something else, in which case it represents its matter.⁴¹⁸ Whereas the former aspect of quiddity is always ‘in itself,’ the latter one may be combined with other concepts. This is another way of expressing the distinction that was already encountered in Qushjī’s commentary, and according to which pure quiddity can be regarded either strictly in itself or as a component of a conceptual cluster. However, it is interesting that Ṭabāṭabā’ī explicitly describes these three fundamental considerations of quiddity as sub-classes of the natural universal (*al-kullī l-ṭabī’ī*), which, it should be recalled, was one of the expressions used in the post-Avicennian sources to describe quiddity in itself. This makes it quite clear that quiddity is in itself irreducible, regardless of how it is envisaged, and that it possesses real existence. According to the Persian scholar, the physical universal encompasses all of these aspects of quiddity and can refer to essence as it exists in the extramental world (*qua* mixed or absolute) and in the mind (*qua* universal). All in all, then, Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s account conforms in its broad lines with the mainstream postclassical philosophical interpretation of Avicenna’s theory of quiddity according to which quiddity in itself is the same as abstract quiddity and also a distinct consideration in the mind, even though it can also be called ‘the natural universal’ with regard to how it exists in the concrete world. Unfortunately, Ṭabāṭabā’ī does not tackle the more pointed issue of whether abstract or pure quiddity exists in the mind as such or only in a universal state. His account is therefore marked by the same kind of ambiguity that affects many of the postclassical disquisitions about quiddity and mental existence.⁴¹⁹

4 Conclusion

In the foregoing analysis, I attempted to clarify the epistemological and ontological status of pure quiddity in the mind. The general problem of the ontological status of quiddity in itself was narrowed down to the more specific issue of whether it can be regarded as an intellectual or mental existent (*mawjūd ‘aqlī* or *dhihni*) alongside what I called the complex or synthetic universals (i.e., pure quiddity combined with a cluster of mental attributes, including universality). In this regard, some progress has been achieved. The terminological analysis and the investigation into Avicenna’s theory of mental existence furnished valuable evidence that enables one to conclude that quiddity in itself exists in the mind as a distinct object of thought and a distinct intellectual concept. Pure quiddity and universal quiddity, while

⁴¹⁸ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *The Elements*, 47.

⁴¹⁹ Even though Ṭabāṭabā’ī recognizes a category of mental existents in a previous section of his work, in that same passage he does not dwell on the issue of the mental existence of quiddity; see Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *The Elements*, 21–31. This is understandable, given the author’s succinct treatment of philosophical questions in this work.

amounting to two distinct *mental aspects* and *considerations* (as per *Introduction I.2*), also amount to two distinct *intelligible forms* and *mental existents*. These two aspects of quiddity are cognitively and ontologically distinct in the mind as they appear to our awareness and reason. Accordingly, quiddity in itself in the mind is purely abstract (*mujarrad*)—it is also, as I will show in chapter III, ‘abstracted’—, irreducible and distinct (both notions being conveyed by the Arabic expression *min ḥaythu hiya hiya*), as well as negatively conditioned (*bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar*). It exists in the mind in this purely abstract and distinct state. In contrast, the complex and synthetic universal quiddity is conditioned (*bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*) and only ever exists in the mind in a complex state and together with its mental concomitants.⁴²⁰

Remarkably, Avicenna extends this conception of the pure quiddities not only to what, in the concrete world, corresponds to the natural substantial forms (humaneness/*insāniyyah*, horseness/*farasiyyah*, corporeality/*jismiyyah*, etc.), but also to numbers (oneness/*waḥdāniyyah*, twoness/*ithnayniyyah*, tenness/*‘ashariyyah*), geometrical notions (triangleness/*muthallathiyyah*, shapeness/*shakliyyah*), the categories (substanteness/*jawhariyyah*, accidentness/*‘aradīyyah*, relation/*iḍāfiyyah*), specific accidents (blackness/*al-sawād al-muṭlaq*), logical predicates and notions (genusness/*jinsiyyah*, speciesness/*naw’iyyah*), and many other notions. Avicenna’s entire epistemological framework relies, fundamentally, on a process of abstraction and rarefaction of mental objects that results in the immediate intellectual apprehension and cognition of ‘the thing in itself.’ Appendix 1 testifies to the richness and sophistication of the Avicennian vocabulary of abstract quiddity and to the sustained efforts dispensed by the master to elaborate this new essentialist conceptual framework. With regard to epistemology, these purely abstract notions can then be applied to various contexts—logical, physical, mathematical, and metaphysical—depending on the purpose and needs of the analysis. Remarkably, this feature of Avicenna’s logical and metaphysical method finds a counterpart in his approach to mathematics, where, as Roshdi Rashed and others noted, a similar tendency towards abstraction and abstract thought can be detected.⁴²¹ Yet, I believe that the main impetus for the kind of raw conceptualization promoted by Avicenna came from his desire to reform the metaphysical and epistemological framework he had inherited from his Greek and Arabic forebears. In his eyes, they had failed to fully disentangle the whatness, thingness, and quiddity of things from their parasitical external features and attributes, and so had not exploited the full philosophical potential of a purely abstract and theoretical approach to essence. What seems groundbreaking

420 One upshot therefore is that the two qualifications ‘abstract’ and ‘negatively-conditioned’ should be interpreted primarily or even exclusively in Avicenna’s epistemology as applying to pure quiddity as it exists in the human mind in this state of perfect distinctness, and not to other aspects of quiddity, such as the universal. The universal can also be equivocally described as *mujarrad*, although it is certainly not negatively-conditioned. But even then, Avicenna consistently reserves the *j-r-d* root to describe pure quiddity in the key passages dealing with essence in *The Cure*.

421 Roshdi Rashed, *Mathématiques*, 34–35; see also Tahiri, *Mathematics*.

in this regard is not only Avicenna's epistemological contribution and his designation of pure quiddity as a pristine, abstract, and ideal object of scientific knowledge in the human mind, but also the ontological claim that this object exists intellectually in a simple and irreducible way.

Avicenna's views on the status of pure quiddity in the mind represent an important instance of the ontologization of logic that he promoted and that has recently been emphasized by scholars.⁴²² In this connection, it is worth pointing out that the threefold consideration of quiddity expounded in *Introduction* I.2 is fully reconcilable with the discussion that unfolds in *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1–2. In other words, Avicenna's *Metaphysics* provides a picture of quiddity that is fully consistent with the one articulated in this logical text. In a kind of elaboration on the logical texts, Avicenna is intent in *Metaphysics* V.1 to reiterate this scheme and to elaborate on it by clearly distinguishing quiddity in itself from its various concomitants and hence from quiddity taken in its 'universal' and 'particular' contexts.⁴²³ These developments should also be contextualized in light of the reception of Porphyry's *Eisagoge* and Aristotle's *Categories* in classical Islam. Avicenna's interpretation of these texts is one that grants entitative and ontological grounding to logical and conceptual notions, including, I contend, the consideration of pure quiddity. If the consideration of pure quiddity at the cognitive or conceptual level does not involve any awareness of existence as an added intention or attribute, this does not prevent it from existing in the intellect with its own special ontological mode. What renders Avicenna's position complex and also potentially confusing is the fact that pure quiddity also exists *in* the universal concept, that is, *with* its mental attributes and concomitants. In this connection, it is worth invoking the distinction that was established in the introduction between ontological and epistemic irreducibility, on the one hand, and ontological and epistemic distinctness, on the other. Quiddity in itself in the mind is irreducible and distinct and can be apprehended in abstraction from all other things,

422 See notably Bertolacci, The 'Ontologization'; and Kukkonen, Dividing Being. It is important to point out that this trend is already apparent in late antiquity in the works of thinkers such as Porphyry (Chiaradonna, Porphyry, 326–327) and was therefore inherent to the philosophical outlook inherited by Arabic scholars.

423 For the congruence of Avicenna's logical and metaphysical works, see Bertolacci, The 'Ontologization.' *Introduction* I.2 and *Metaphysics* I.5 are texts that are articulated along the same lines and are complementary, and this in spite of the slight shift of emphasis vis-à-vis ontology one finds in the metaphysical work. There is a harmonizing thread running through *Introduction* I.2 and *Metaphysics* I.5 on the subject of quiddity. As Bertolacci has shown, Avicenna's logical and metaphysical works convey a strong impression of argumentative coherence and doctrinal unity. Yet, unlike Bertolacci, I do not believe that *Metaphysics* I.5 encapsulates Avicenna's entire position on essence and existence, although it is admittedly a key text. As was correctly observed by Marmura, the crux of the matter, at least when it comes to pure quiddity, concerns its status in the intellect and its relation to mental existence. Since Bertolacci does not expressly address this point and is more interested in sketching a general picture of the essence/existence distinction, it is normal that he would tend to privilege *Metaphysics* I.5 over other texts.

including mental concomitants. In contrast, quiddity in itself as a ‘part’ of the universal is irreducible, but not distinct, inasmuch as it is synthetically combined with mental concomitants and intellected together with them. This synthetic and complex state determines the mode of universal existence it possesses when apprehended by the mind. What is more, since pure quiddity is both irreducible and distinct, it is *prior* and *simple* when compared to the complex universal object. More specifically, since, for Avicenna, quiddity in itself is not just a logical notion but also a substantive form in the mind, it is both epistemologically and ontologically prior and simple vis-à-vis the universal concept. This, perhaps, is the main result to be emphasized here. Its importance lies in the fact that scholars heretofore have limited pure quiddity either to a divine intellect (Rashed) or to its mereological function as a part of the universal concept (Benevich). Either way, they have not argued for its irreducible and distinct existence in the human mind. Indeed, these various aspects of the mental existence of quiddity (as a distinct entity and as a part of the complex universals) have in general not been clearly distinguished in the scholarship. This factor was in part responsible for the confusion surrounding the mental status of essence. But it should be clear by now that quiddity in itself is firmly anchored in the human intellect as a distinct and irreducible intelligible object and lies therefore at the very foundation of human thought and cognition.

Avicenna’s sustained effort to distinguish the ontological and epistemic aspects of universal quiddity and pure quiddity in the human mind, as well as the highly technical terminology he implements to this effect, are salient features of his theory of mental existence. Not only is it a brilliant achievement on purely conceptual grounds, but it also helps to explain issues in his epistemology that would otherwise remain insoluble. One example focuses on the ontological status of fictional quiddities as valid objects of conception. If actual universality were a condition *sine qua non* of intellectual existence and conceivability, then only those quiddities apprehended by the mind that have an actual counterpart in the exterior world would be thinkable or conceivable and exist in the mind. But then, how is it possible to account for the fact that we can reflect on quiddities that have no known counterparts in exterior reality, such as the heptagonal house, or on quiddities that will never have concrete instantiations, like the phoenix? These things are intelligible to the mind not because they are universals *per se*, either actually or potentially, but first and foremost because they possess a quiddity that is not logically impossible or absurd. In other words, they possess a distinct quiddity that can be apprehended by the mind, which, in addition, may or may not happen to cohere with extramental instantiations.⁴²⁴ Potential universality (of, say, the heptagonal house or the phoenix) itself merely derives from the conceivability of these natures and relates to them as an ex-

⁴²⁴ As I argued, then, the issue of the conceivability and ontological status of these fictional forms does pertain primarily to their possessing potential or actual universality, but to the fact that their pure quiddity is intrinsically conceivable and is, in itself, a valid object of thought.

ternal attribute. Accordingly, these artificial and fictional entities will be conceivable *qua* pure quiddities in the mind, regardless of their relation to universality, potentiality, and actuality. For universality and ‘being predicated of many’ concerns their relation to the extramental world, not their intrinsic conceivability or distinct existence in the mind.⁴²⁵ Avicenna’s theory of pure essence, in effect, allows for a new classification of various types of quiddities and for a flexible interpretation of how mental existents (the pure quiddities in the mind) relate to extramental existents: the relationship may be fully commensurate (e. g., horse), imbalanced (e. g., one heptagonal house built randomly), or simply not applicable (e. g., the phoenix). All of these quiddities, however, *at the very least qua* pure, abstract, and distinct quiddities, will exist in the mind. Only those things that amount to strict logical impossibles or utter absurdities (e. g., a square circle) have neither a quiddity nor existence in the mind and amount only to mere verbiage. Hence, maintaining a robust ontological distinction between universality and essence, between the complex universals and the pure quiddities, has the corollary advantage of opening a new line of interpretation regarding the thorny problem of how the artificial and fictional forms relate to the universals and mental existence.⁴²⁶

Avicenna’s views on pure quiddity and mental existence decisively shaped the later Islamic philosophical tradition, although it is still too early to understand the specifics of this later development. Generally speaking, Arabic thinkers were fascinated by the question of how quiddity relates to its corporeal and mental concomitants. In the case of mental existence, a vivid discussion arose in the Arabic sources concerning the various ways to conceptualize quiddity in the mind and the relation of these various conceptualizations to existence. This discussion was based on the Avicennian texts, as well as on Rāzī’s and Ṭūsī’s interpretations of the master. But these later thinkers departed somewhat from Avicenna’s understanding of these issues, because they invested the Avicennian terminology with other philosophical meanings or nuances, and because they deployed concepts that were not implemented by the master himself. As a result, exploring this later tradition with the aim of either confirming or testing one’s reading of the Avicennian texts is a risky enterprise, as was already noted earlier. This tradition should instead be gauged chiefly on the basis of its own developments and philosophical merit. Yet, it is noteworthy that the pointed issue of whether pure quiddity possesses mental existence, which is an intricate and ambiguous aspect of Avicenna’s doctrine, received a variety of compelling formulations in the postclassical tradition. Many later thinkers followed Avi-

425 At best, one may say that they are *potentially* mental universals; but this, in fact, can be said of all pure quiddities, which have the potentiality of combining with mental concomitants and accidents to form the universal, should the mind attach the conditions of predicability and shareability to them. Given the interpretation of pure quiddity provided here, mental existence and conceivability should be dissociated, strictly speaking, from the notion of mental universality.

426 In brief, universality—construed in the sense of a mental concomitant and attribute of quiddity—is not a definitive criterion of mental existence.

cenna in describing pure quiddity in the mind as abstract (*mujarrad*) and negatively conditioned (*bi-sharṭ lā*), and, starting with Bahmanyār, they also raised the question of whether it can exist as such without its mental concomitants. In spite of this, and the terminological connection notwithstanding, it is still too early to determine whether some of them articulated a solution that overlaps doctrinally with Avicenna's original position.

In spite of having shed some light on the subject, the foregoing considerations have also generated a cluster of difficult questions: Exactly what ontological mode belongs to pure quiddity in the mind? How does the conception of pure quiddity and universal quiddity arise in the mind, and as a result of what causal process? While the problem of localization—i. e., where quiddity in itself exists in a distinct and irreducible manner—has been addressed and partly answered (the discussion will continue in chapters III to V), the issue of its ontological mode awaits full clarification. What is more, there is a residual conundrum that emerges from the previous considerations: if the connections I established between pure quiddity in the mind, abstraction, and the negative condition (*bi-sharṭ lā*) are correct; and if, in addition, the hypothesis of its entitative and ontological status in the mind is seriously entertained; then how can pure quiddity be with 'the condition of no other thing' and yet still be said to exist? For if it does exist in the mind, this would imply that it possesses something else, namely, existence. What is more, mental existence, according to most readings of Avicenna, necessitates mental concomitants, so that pure quiddity would have to be 'with other things' after all. In addition to the insight provided in this chapter, a more complete treatment of this question will be articulated in chapter IV. In the meantime, I intend to investigate how quiddity relates to the concrete existents of the extramental world and, hence, to address the third aspect of quiddity described in *Introduction* I.2. As in the case of mental existence, this topic also raises some epistemological and ontological difficulties that call for elucidation.

Chapter III: Quiddity in Itself in the Concrete World

Another core feature of Avicenna's argumentation in *Introduction* I.2 and *Metaphysics* V.1–2—and one whose implications are at first not easy to grasp—is that quiddity in itself somehow exists in concrete individuals in the exterior world. I write the 'quiddity *in itself*,' and not merely 'quiddity' or 'universal quiddity,' because, as I will explain below, this is the view Avicenna explicitly articulates in his works.¹ This, of course, calls for a clarification of what *in itself* means in this context, since in the concrete world quiddity is always found 'with' other things, namely, material concomitants and accidents. Accordingly, the key issues tackled in this chapter concern how quiddity in itself can be said to exist *in* concrete beings; what *in itself* means exactly in this context when applied to quiddity; what the epistemological and ontological implications of this theory are with regard to other aspects of Avicenna's philosophy; and, finally, how this issue in turn impacts on the essence/existence distinction when applied to the extramental world.

Put differently, the main task of this chapter is to determine whether and in what way Avicenna's ontology of quiddity assumes a realist dimension that extends to the concrete beings. Much of the following discussion will accordingly hinge on how Avicenna's doctrines relate to the ancient philosophical debates about the universals 'in multiplicity' (the *universalia in rebus* of the medieval Scholastics), as well as to the various Neoplatonic endeavors to reconcile Aristotle and Plato on this issue. This element will in turn be connected with an analysis of the set of conditions (*shurūt*) Avicenna attaches to quiddity and of their epistemic and ontological implications.² It should be noted that many points of Avicenna's argumentation were subsequently endorsed by later authors and, in their various doctrinal permutations, came to con-

1 It is important to stress that quiddity is only just quiddity for Avicenna and that there are not different kinds or categories of quiddity, merely different mental aspects associated with it, e.g., the pure quiddity 'horseness' is the same, regardless of whether it is considered in the mind or in the concrete world. Hence, it is always irreducible and 'in itself' in a certain sense, so that the terms quiddity and 'quiddity in itself' are to some extent interchangeable. An ambiguity can arise, however, when quiddity is taken together with its external concrete or mental concomitants. In that case, stating merely 'the quiddity horse' gives no immediate sense of whether one intends 'the universal horse' in the mind or 'the quiddity in itself horseness.' Likewise, the statement 'concrete horse' could refer either to the pure quiddity 'horseness' *in* the concrete horse envisaged only in itself, or to the cluster of quiddity together with the concrete accidents and concomitants of this particular horse, in which case quiddity would be only one part or principle of the composite. These ambiguous cases justify the panoply of terms Avicenna uses to distinguish pure quiddity from everything that does not enter within it.

2 Avicenna's views on the existence of quiddity and the universals in the concrete world have attracted a fair share of scholarly attention: see especially Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, 111–126; Rashed, Ibn 'Adi; Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*; and Faruque, Mullā Ṣadrā. This is probably due to its relevance for the issue of the 'real' distinction between essence and existence.

stitute a recurring feature of the postclassical Islamic discourse on essence. Accordingly, it is rewarding to trace some of the interpretations of, and elaborations on, this issue in the later Arabic and Latin traditions. But unlike in chapter II, where the focus was almost exclusively on cognition and intramental existence, the present inquiry will branch out in two different directions, one epistemological, the other ontological, without it being clear from the outset how these two planes relate to one another. First, there is the question of how and through what means we can apprehend or conceive of quiddity in the exterior world, both with regard to its material accidents and in abstraction from them. On the surface, this is merely an investigation of one of the cognitive aspects of quiddity Avicenna outlines in *Introduction I.2*, when he describes our consideration (*i'tibār*) of quiddity in concrete beings. In this connection, one wonders what cognitive role quiddity plays in the process of abstraction, which is one of two main accounts Avicenna elaborates to explain the acquisition of the universals in the mind (the other being an emanationist account whereby the intelligibles are derived directly from the Agent Intellect). Additionally, the issue revolves around whether we can know pure quiddity when it is embedded in a concrete being together with its material concomitants. In this case, how does it relate to the considerations of universal quiddity and pure quiddity in the mind, as well as to its logical definition? Moreover, the relation between the extramental and mental contexts of quiddity also need to be elucidated, with a particular focus on the process of abstraction as a mediation between these two spheres.

To these primarily epistemological difficulties accrues a set of ontological problems. These pertain to the question of whether quiddity truly or actually exists in concrete beings independently of our thinking about them, and, if so, of the exact ontological mode in which it exists in that domain. What does Avicenna mean exactly when he states that quiddity—and specifically quiddity in itself (*al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya*)—exists (*mawjūdah*) or possesses existence (*wujūd*) in the exterior world? How does this mode of existence compare to its mental mode? This brings to the fore the questions of what demarcates mental existence from concrete existence, the two modes of existence (*al-wujūdāyn*) Avicenna frequently refers to in his works, and how pure quiddity fits in this picture. In spite of ample evidence pointing to the existence of quiddity in concrete beings, some scholars have subjected these ontological considerations to the primacy of the logical and conceptual aspects described above or have ignored them entirely. They have reduced Avicenna's comments on quiddity in concrete beings to the epistemological and purely cognitive considerations he discusses, denying or barely recognizing that quiddity has any extramental reality or existence.³ Recall that in chapter II, I argued that pure quiddity is *epistemically irreducible* and *distinct*, that is, it is an *irreducible* and *distinct* concept

³ Rahman, Morewedge, Pini, and Marmura, whose studies focus overwhelmingly on the 'conceptualist' dimension of the universals and essence in Avicenna, could be mentioned as examples of this trend. They have little to say about the ontology of quiddity in the concrete world.

in the mind thinking it. In addition, I provided substantial evidence to the effect that pure quiddity can also be said to be *ontologically distinct in the mind*, since it amounts to a self-contained intelligible form. At the same time, and according to a mereological interpretation, pure quiddity also ontologically underlies and forms part of the universal concept. One question to be addressed in the present chapter is whether there is any symmetry between the intramental and extramental states of quiddity when it comes to this mereological framework. In other words, can pure quiddity be said to be ontologically irreducible in the concrete world as well? And what kind of arguments does Avicenna articulate to settle these points?

The issue of the ontological status of quiddity in the extramental world intersects with another well-known problem in Avicenna's philosophy: should the essence/existence distinction be construed as a real one or merely as a conceptual or mental one with no repercussions on the extramental world?⁴ These questions—the mode of existence of quiddity in concrete beings, and the essence/existence distinction—were topics that were extensively discussed and debated in the post-classical tradition. Although these issues, and many of the answers articulated by postclassical Muslim thinkers, have their roots in the Avicennian texts, they also represent intricate and thought-provoking elaborations on Avicenna's position. Accordingly, they will receive a tentative and independent treatment in the following analysis.

Before turning to the ontological dimension of the problem, I wish to make a few epistemological comments. The fact that pure quiddity is epistemically and cognitively irreducible suggests that it can be applied neutrally to a variety of ontological contexts, such as the mental and concrete spheres. Indeed, Avicenna holds that quiddity can be equally considered or conceived of in relation to both the universals in the mind and the concrete individuals of the extramental world. With respect to the latter, in *Introduction I.2* he explicates that we can have a consideration (*i'tibār*) of quiddity in the exterior, concrete beings, which is one of three considerations of quiddity the human mind can apprehend. Avicenna's point here appears to be primarily epistemological or logical: we can conceive or consider quiddity in individual, concrete beings, although this consideration tells us nothing about whether—and if

4 This thorny issue has inspired many recent studies, with different interpretations being promoted by scholars; I shall refer to them in the course of my analysis. It is interesting that these modern iterations sometimes echo the extensive philosophical discussions that had unfolded in the postclassical commentatorial tradition on Avicenna. The modern scholarly views on this subject are therefore often traceable to particular schools or movements that flourished in the postclassical period and should be regarded as new developments of an old debate in the Islamic and the medieval Latin world. With regard to the modern literature, two broad interpretive trends may be identified: the first regards the essence/existence distinction as a purely conceptual one with no counterpart in the concrete world (this approach is historically indebted to the 'foundationality of existence' tradition (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) that emerged in the postclassical Islamic world); the second one allows for the ontological relevance of this distinction in the exterior world, which often involves a more or less realist interpretation of these principles and devotes a distinct ontological status to essence.

so, how—quiddity actually exists in those entities. It could very well be that the mind infers essence from the observation of concrete individuals or even projects a conception of essence unto these concrete entities that would allow it to identify individuals belonging to the same species, without quiddity actually existing in a strong sense in those individuals.

The important point here is that Avicenna's comments in *Introduction* I.2 can be construed in abstraction from ontological notions and on a purely logical or conceptual plane. This interpretive openness also means that they can be connected with a rich variety of ontological theories, not all of which are reconcilable with one another. Thus, Avicenna's epistemological comments about quiddity in *Introduction* and in his logical works more generally present a certain flexibility or fluidity and do not evoke a unique and rigid ontological scheme that could be superimposed on this logical account. I already discussed the key passage in *Introduction* I.2 in some detail and concluded that the emphasis there is on the logical and epistemological aspects of the term *i'tibār*, on its mind-relatedness and psychological content, and that this term bears an ambiguous relationship to the notion of existence, both in its concrete and mental states. Hence, ontological considerations notwithstanding, the main claims of *Introduction* I.2 appear to be that we can conceive of quiddity as it applies to exterior existents, either together with, or in abstraction from, the material accidents attached to it in that context, and that the mind can establish a correspondence between the mental universal and the particulars of the concrete world.

This implies that, even though intellectual and scientific knowledge is based on the abstract, universal forms, we can apprehend essence together with its concomitants in particular things, presumably with the help of the senses and the imaginative and estimative faculties. We can apprehend the humanness of 'this' specific individual Zayd *together with* his attributes and accidents (what Black calls the 'determinate' or 'designated individual' (*al-shakhṣ al-mu'ayyan*).⁵ This leads to the formation of a kind of individual essence in the mind, which also corresponds to what Avicenna calls the 'vague individual' or 'vague human' (*insān muntashar*) belonging to a species. So the master seems to believe that both in the mental and concrete contexts, we can to some extent conceive of essence *together with* its accidents and concomitants. In the case of the universal, this apprehension will unfold at an intellectual level only, and essence will be conceived of with mental concomitants exclusively, whereas in the case of concrete individuals or 'vague individuals,' their essence can be considered with their attributes and accidents in a cognitively deficient way and by virtue of the lower psychological faculties, such as sense perception, imagination, and estimation.⁶ This synthetic apprehension of quiddity de-

⁵ Black, Avicenna's 'Vague Individual,' 260.

⁶ The aspect of quiddity that Avicenna connects with physical existence does not exist independently in the concrete world and in a realm of its own, like a Platonic form; rather, it exists embedded in, and entangled with, material and corporeal attributes and accidents, and can only be apprehended intellectually once it has been abstracted from this material 'cluster' or 'complex.'

rived from the lower psychic faculties does not presumably amount to intellectual or scientific knowledge proper. As Avicenna explains, we can consider humanness as it is ‘embedded,’ so to speak, in individual things, “as with the essence [*dhāt*] of this Zayd to whom one points. For [in this case, the essence] cannot be estimated [*tuta-wahhama*] except as belonging to him alone.”⁷ Notice that this essence, together with its concomitants, can be “estimated,” not “intellected” (*uqila*). This is because scientific knowledge proper for Avicenna consists only in the contemplation of the immaterial, universal forms. But Zayd taken together with his accidents does not constitute a valid object of certain and intellectual knowledge. Nevertheless, on the master’s account human reason can somehow consider (*i’tabara*) this particular and concrete expression of quiddity alongside its considerations of universal quiddity and quiddity in itself.⁸

In this connection, the consideration of quiddity *together with* its material accidents and concomitants is what Avicenna elsewhere describes as quiddity ‘on the condition of something else’ (*bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*) or simply ‘with something else’ (*ma’a shay’ ākhar*), since it is quiddity considered not strictly ‘in itself.’ This is the aspect of quiddity as particularized and conditioned by extraneous accidents, which also happen in this case to be concrete, material accidents and concomitants. Here it is quite clear that quiddity *bi-sharṭ shay’* does not amount to an *intelligible form* in the intellect, since the participation of the senses, imagination, and estimation are required for this understanding of quiddity to arise in the soul in the first place, and since this apprehension includes particular accidental things.⁹ With that being said, Avicenna believes that we are also able to reach an abstracted (*mujarrad*) conception or consideration of quiddity as it exists in concrete beings, if and when it is divested from the material accidents and all the other attributes that surround it, i.e., when the mind divests it from the composite being in which it is embedded and apprehends it strictly without ‘another thing.’ This suggests that quiddity never fuses with or is never collapsed with its accidents and remains in a state of epistemic autonomy and irreducibility. Once this process of extracting or divesting has occurred, the mind can envisage quiddity either as ‘unconditioned’ (*lā bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar* or *bi-lā sharṭ shay’ ākhar*, with a similar meaning), that is, ‘not with

7 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 196.4–5. Notice the use of the term *dhāt* in this passage, which is intended to convey the notion of quiddity as individualized in Zayd, or quiddity as existing together with its particular concomitants in Zayd, as opposed to the irreducible quidditative meaning.

8 So it seems that we can form individual and universal considerations of quiddity in the mind, although only the latter will be located at the intellectual level. Both, however, are equally based on the notion of pure quiddity. Because the main challenge, in a psychological context, is to determine whether pure essence exists intellectually or intelligibly, I do not pursue the study of these individual considerations any further. Naturally, their ontological status remains problematic, since they potentially point to a class of sub-intellectual psychological existents in Avicenna’s philosophy.

9 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.6, 359.7–11 sharply distinguishes between the intellectual and imaginative apprehension of quiddity, depending on whether quiddity is taken with its material accidents or not; cf. *Provenance*, 7.1–9.

the condition of another thing,' or, more radically, it can apprehend it as 'negatively-conditioned' or 'on the condition of no other thing' (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*). These two considerations, unlike the first, can be said to be much closer to a fully intellectual kind of apprehension, because they do not imply external 'things' apart from quiddity itself and do not rely on the sub-intellectual faculties.

What stands out thus far is the epistemological and logical dimension of Avicenna's argumentation. Its gist is that all concrete instances of a quiddity share a common definition (*ḥadd*) and a common quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*), which can be extracted or divested from all the other elements that constitute a concrete individual. This meaning can be considered in the mind either 'in itself' or in connection 'with other things.' At first glance, calling quiddity a *ma'nā* severs it somewhat from a putative ontological or substantive foundation and accentuates its role as an epistemic and logical notion and a purveyor of knowledge for the human mind. It enables a starker separation between quiddity *qua* meaning and quiddity *qua* intrinsic existential feature of actually existing things. This becomes particularly salient when the definitional *ma'ānī* are invoked in a logical context or in connection with logic (as in *Introduction*), since in this case Avicenna states explicitly that these *ma'ānī* are considered in abstraction from existence.

Calling quiddity in itself a meaning and stressing its logical and epistemological aspects provides Avicenna with additional options for his theorization of quiddity in the concrete world. It allows him to extend the same quiddity to various particulars without committing himself to an ontological account of how quiddity exists in the concrete beings. By using the term *ma'nā* in a more logical sense, Avicenna can argue that various individual beings belonging to the same species or genus at the very least share a common quidditative meaning and concept and form a certain definitional unity in the mind. The master expresses this point in a passage of *Salvation*, which will be analyzed in detail in a short while (see Text 11 below). In that passage, quiddity, and more specifically quiddity in itself or thingness, is what is described as being common (*mushtarak*) to mental and concrete existents. As Avicenna puts it in other instances, it is a nature (*ṭabī'ah*) common to all things that share a single genus or species. Thus, for instance, humanness (*insāniyyah*) and horseness (*farasiyyah*) are natures common to all individual concrete humans and horses, as well as all the universal concepts 'human' and 'horse' apprehended in multiple minds. These things, regardless of their contexts, do not differ in their fundamental or irreducible quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) and thingness (*shay'iyah*), even though they differ when considered together with their accidents and concomitants. The term *ma'nā* therefore serves the purpose of establishing a strong conceptual connection between various entities by pinpointing what is epistemologically irreducible and common among them, namely thingness, pure quiddity, or nature. It is this semantic and formal quidditative commonness between various beings belonging to different ontological contexts that makes it permissible for us to speak of a certain *definitional oneness* of things in the mind and in the concrete world. The pure quiddity horseness underlies and is common to both the individual concrete horses and the universal

concept 'horse' reflected in multiple human minds. Even then, this definitional and conceptual oneness belong more properly to the universal than to quiddity in itself, since oneness and universality are, strictly speaking, non-constitutive concomitants of quiddity. The definition and universal form 'horse' is one (*wāḥid*) in the human mind thinking it, and so the various relations it bears to individual concrete horses in the exterior world are all unified by virtue of this single intelligible form and meaning.¹⁰ What is more, the meaning and definition of horse is one with regard to each and every instance of concrete horse to which the universal is related. This must be the case, or else it would not be possible for us to predicate horseness of this concrete horse and assert that it is 'a horse' or 'one horse.' Thus, even though pure quiddity is, in itself, neither one nor many, its universal apprehension in the mind enables us to conceive it as one and to predicate it as one of a plurality of individuals. For Avicenna, the universal species 'horse,' which qualifies as a secondary substance in the mind,¹¹ is what is said of many (*maqūl 'alā kathīrīn*), although it cannot be said to be 'present in' or 'exist in' the individual concrete subjects, due to the fact that it is a mental universal, and that mental universals exist only in the mind according to Avicenna's ontology. It is presumably due to similar considerations that some scholars have alluded to the 'definitional being' of quiddity in Avicenna.¹² At any rate, the philosophical thrust of Avicenna's account in *Introduction* I.2, which is later on picked up in *Metaphysics* V.1–2, is that quiddity is, at the very least, *epistemically simple*, *irreducible*, and *distinct* in the mind with regard to its relation to the universals and the concrete beings. Not only is it simple and distinct, because it can be considered in itself in abstraction from all other things, but it is also irreducible in that it logically and conceptually underlies each quidditative being, whether mental or physical, enabling the mind to recognize or identify a concrete horse and the universal horse as sharing a common and underlying quidditative meaning and definition, namely, horseness.¹³

1 The move towards an Avicennian metaphysical realism or formalism

One intricate question is how this logical or epistemic aspect relates to the ontological status of quiddity in the concrete world, a topic that is explicitly broached in Avicenna's logical and metaphysical works. If scholars can agree broadly on the defini-

¹⁰ Avicenna, *Elements of Philosophy*, 56.12, explains that the universal is one on account of its definition (*ḥadd*).

¹¹ See Avicenna, *Categories*, III.1, 95.1–11 and III.2, 100.11.

¹² Geoffroy, in de Libera, *L'art*, 648, note 4; Bahlul, Avicenna.

¹³ Some scholars, e.g., Bahlul, Avicenna, 11, have limited their interpretation of quiddity in Avicenna exclusively to this epistemic, definitional, and logical aspect. In spite of its intrinsic interest and importance, it has to be connected with Avicenna's ontological doctrines.

tional and logical relevance of pure quiddity, they on the other hand disagree starkly when it comes to answering the question of its existence in concrete reality. Avicenna in many instances does not limit himself to describing quiddity as a *meaning* common to the concrete entities, but depicts it as *something that exists in them*. In those passages, he seems reluctant to confine his account of quiddity in the exterior world to a purely semantic or definitional one, where essence would be a mere intentional or subjective aspect of the mind projected onto concrete objects. Avicenna develops a sophisticated doctrine concerning the objective and extramental existence of quiddity in individual beings whose purpose is to mirror his account of how quiddity can be said to exist irreducibly and mereologically in the mental universal. It is to this aspect of his thought that I now wish to turn. In what follows, I begin by gleaning the evidence in Avicenna's works pointing to the ontological realism of quiddity, that is, the view that quiddity somehow exists in concrete beings.¹⁴ Once this premise is established on the basis of the textual evidence, I engage in the task of elucidating and fleshing out his theory of essential realism and his mereology in light of the late-antique discussions about the universals as well as Avicenna's relation to the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions. With regard to the latter, I argue, following Marwan Rashed, that it is mostly in the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Yaḥyā b. 'Adī that the master found the methodological tools to elaborate his doctrine. Avicenna's approach rests heavily on logical and metaphysical distinctions in addition to a mereological interpretation of essence that were devised by his predecessors and that he accessed in part thanks to the Arabic translations of Alexandrian treatises. In the following analysis, I also pay attention to how quiddity in concrete beings relates to the notion of universality and its modulation (*tashkīk*), as well as to the repercussions that Avicenna's essentialist doctrines have on the topic of psychological abstraction.

The trend of ontologizing essence in the concrete world is apparent in *Metaphysics* V.1, where Avicenna makes repeated and perspicuous claims to the effect that quiddity in itself is *present in* and *exists in* both the universal and concrete beings. This, after all, is what enables us to recognize the same quiddity in these various kinds of existents, so that we can ascribe a single definition to these beings. If there was no ontological relation whatsoever between concrete existents and mental universals, then there would be no epistemological correspondence between them as well, and hence no cognitive realization that these things relate to one another in an

¹⁴ Whenever I use the term 'realism,' it is to refer primarily to a moderate kind of metaphysical realism espoused by Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, Avicenna and other thinkers in the Islamic tradition. These thinkers rejected the strong realism entailed by the theory of the Platonic forms, but believed that essence and the universals (with some important qualifications) can be said to exist *in* concrete beings. Their position may be described as moderate realism or formal immanentism, and it is also based on a sophisticated mereology. But it is important to bear in mind that classical Arabic does not have technical terms to refer to these notions, so that their use is somewhat artificial and schematic and calls for a case by case analysis of the evidence.

essential way. As a result the mind would not be able to establish any connection between concrete horses A and B, horseness in itself, and the universal mental horse that is predicable of many. Hence, denying any ontological grounding or reality to quiddity in the concrete world would result in an epistemological gap. So it appears that a minimal degree of ontological continuum is required for the epistemic sharedness or commonality of pure quiddity to hold between these various contexts. What is more, the ontological thrust of this argument can be pushed further: as McGinnis aptly observed, if somehow the same quiddity in itself (e.g., horseness) was not present in mental and concrete existents, then only either the universal horse or concrete horses would exist. But the fact that both exist suggests that they have something in common, which is quiddity in itself.¹⁵ In this metaphysical context, Avicenna goes beyond talking about a mere epistemological connection between mental and extramental objects. He argues for a kind of ontological constancy of pure quiddity as a principle underlying each mental and concrete existent.

That quiddity somehow exists (*mawjūdah*) and has existence (*wujūd*) in concrete individuals is reiterated by Avicenna on numerous occasions in his metaphysical and even in his logical writings.¹⁶ More specifically, the master argues that quiddity in itself somehow exists *in* concrete instances of a species in a way comparable or similar to the way it exists *in* universals in the mind. In *Metaphysics* V.1, he explains that,

Text 10: Animal abstracted ‘without the condition of anything else’ [*mujarrad lā bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*] has existence in the concrete [*lahu wujūd fī l-a’yān*]. For, in itself and in its true reality [*fī nafsihi wa-fī ḥaqīqatihi*], it is without the condition of another thing, even though it may be with a thousand conditions that associate with it externally. Hence, animal, [considered as] pure [or abstracted] animalness¹⁷ has existence in the concrete [*fa-l-ḥayawān bi-mujarrad al-ḥayawāniyyah mawjūd fī l-a’yān*]. This does not render it necessary for it to be separate [or separable, *mufāriq*]. Rather, it is the thing in itself [*huwa alladhī huwa fī nafsihi*], devoid of the attendant conditions, which exists in the concrete, but which has been enclosed from the outside by conditions and states.¹⁸

¹⁵ McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 33–35; idem, *Logic and Science*, 168–170. For Avicenna’s arguments on this point, see *Introduction* I.12 at 65.12–16; a similar argument appears in *Pointers*, vol. 1, 202–205.

¹⁶ The famous passage on the tripartite division of quiddity at *Introduction* I.2 opens with the words (15.1): “the quiddities of things can be [or exist] in concrete things or in the conception” (*wa-māhiyyāt al-ashyā’ qad takūn fī a’yān al-ashyā’ wa-qad takūn fī l-taṣawwur*); this statement echoes many similar passages in Avicenna’s metaphysical writings.

¹⁷ One could also translate this clause as follows: “animal [taken] together with pure animalness has existence in the concrete,” with the same fundamental meaning.

¹⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.6–10, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 155, revised; cf. VIII.6, 355.6–10, where Avicenna explains that, in the case of a human being, ‘humanness’ exists extraneously in other particular human beings, but not so for the First Cause, where “nothing of the genus of His existence [*jins wujūdihi*] is exterior to His existence and exists in another.” When referring to the foundational ontological state of quiddity in itself in connection with extramental existents, Avicenna often uses the terms “nature” (*ṭabī’ah*) and “reality” (*ḥaqīqah*) to describe it. These terms highlight this seminal ontological aspect and differ from the term *ma’nā*, which emphasizes the definitional, epistemic, and intentional aspect of quiddity in itself (notwith-

These statements are echoed in other parts of *Metaphysics* V.1:

Animal [in itself] considered as existing in the concrete [*mawjūd fī l-a'yān*] ... is animal and a thing, and not animal considered on its own.¹⁹

Animal with this condition, even though it exists [*in kāna mawjūdan*] in every individual, is not rendered by this condition a certain animal [*ḥayawān mā*] ... The fact that the animal exists in the individual as a certain animal does not prevent animal inasmuch as it is animal—i.e., not with the consideration that it is in some [determined] state—from existing in it ... Hence, animal [in itself], which is a part of this certain animal, exists [in the concrete].²⁰

Such a stance is replicated in Avicenna's late works, as illustrated by this passage of *Notes*, which refers to the concrete beings:

[The differential] 'rational' makes possible the existence of animalness [in the concrete], but not the true reality of animalness [*al-nāṭiq bihi yaṣṣihu wujūd al-ḥayawāniyyah wa-laysa yaṣṣihu bihi ḥaqīqat al-ḥayawāniyyah*].²¹

Finally, in *Salvation* Avicenna goes so far as to assert the existence of a universal essence in concrete reality:

The universal [*kullī*] can be said of unconditioned humanness [*al-insāniyyah bi-lā shart*] ... the universal according to [this] consideration exists in actuality in [concrete] things [*mawjūd bi-l-fī'l fī l-ashyā'*].²²

standing the fact that, on my interpretation of this term, *ma'nā* also carries ontological implications). Avicenna actively seeks to avoid a Platonic theory of participation and refuses to regard quiddity in itself as a separate existent in the concrete world. However, I believe Avicenna found a way around those problems by developing his theory of quiddity in itself, which should be interpreted as an ontological principle in addition to an epistemic one.

19 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.5–6, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 153, revised.

20 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.15–202.5, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 153, revised.

21 Avicenna, *Notes*, 394, section 697. That this passage deals with concrete beings is made clear by the fact that, in the mind, genus need not at all rely on differentia to exist as a universal notion. The gist of the argument here is that genus in itself or absolute animal cannot exist as such in the concrete and needs to be specified by a differentia into a distinct species. It can thus only be said to exist *with* the differentia and *as* or *in* a species. Whether animal/genus retains any autonomous and distinct existence in that state or is to be fully collapsed with the existence of the species is a difficult question concerning which Avicenna adduces conflicting evidence; for more insight on this point, see sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this chapter.

22 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 537.10–13. Avicenna's use of the term *kullī* in this sentence and his statement to the effect that the unconditioned quiddity exists in the concrete world *in actuality* (*bi-l-fī'l*) are problematic and call for a detailed explanation, which is provided below. Here I merely want to reinforce the point that unconditioned quiddity somehow *exists* in the concrete world.

On the basis of these passages, one may put forth the hypothesis that Avicenna regards quiddity or nature as somehow existing in concrete beings. In this connection, it should be pointed out that he believes that numbers as well have extramental existence, albeit not a separate one. As he puts it, “number has existence in concrete things and existence in the soul.” Their ontological status in the concrete world is therefore comparable to that of the natural quiddities such as humanness and horse-ness: both somehow exist extramentally *in* individual beings, albeit not as separate substances.²³ As in his discussion of quiddity in the mind, Avicenna’s statements regarding the existence of quiddity in the concrete world hinge largely on the various connotations of the term *ma’nā*. I intimated previously that a *ma’nā* in Avicenna’s philosophy can refer either to a notion in the mind or, it appears, to something entitative or real within the concrete existent. It is to this latter aspect of the problem that I now wish to turn.

A good starting point for this analysis is a passage that appears in *Salvation*, in which Avicenna refers explicitly to the existence of *ma’nā* in concrete beings:

Text 11: It is clear that thingness is something other than existence in concrete reality [*wa-farq bayna l-shay’iyyah wa-l-wujūd fi l-a’yān*]. For a quidditative meaning [*al-ma’nā*] has an existence [*wujūd*] in concrete reality and an existence in the soul, as well as something common [*amr mushtarak*] [i.e., common to it in these two contexts]: what is common is thingness.²⁴

Here it is apparent that the term *ma’nā* can lend itself to an ontological or entitative interpretation in addition to a purely conceptual one. Avicenna stresses in that passage that the quidditative meaning or entity *exists* (or has existence, *wujūd*) in mental and concrete beings, with the implication that it is more than a mere meaning and possesses a substantive ontological grounding as well. In fact, it would seem that *ma’nā* in this extramental context can amount to an entity or principle that exists in the concrete object, and that it is not merely a mental attribute predicated of it. Avicenna’s mention of quiddity as *ma’nā* and *amr* in Text 11, two terms which, on purely etymological considerations, can possess entitative implications, seems to go hand in hand with his claim that the pure nature of a thing somehow exists in

²³ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics* III.5; and Tahiri, *Mathematics*, chapter 4.

²⁴ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 520.1–2; translation by Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, 163, with only the translation of *al-ma’nā* modified from the original. This passage should be compared to what Fārābī says in *The Book of Particles*, 101.11: “The intelligible [or concept, *ma’qūl*] of a thing is the thing itself, but the intelligible is that thing inasmuch as it is in the soul, while the thing is that intelligible inasmuch as it is outside the soul.” According to Fārābī, then, there is something common between the intelligible and the extramental thing, or even something identical and constant (“the intelligible of a thing is the thing itself”), which is quiddity. His phrasing to the effect that “the thing is that intelligible inasmuch as it is outside the soul” is intriguing, as it connects terminologically and conceptually with Avicenna’s own views.

the concrete world.²⁵ There can be no doubt that what is common (*mushtarak*) to the mental and concrete instantiations of this *ma'nā* is pure quiddity, which in this passage is referred to as thingness (*shay'iyah*).²⁶ The passage as a whole therefore possesses an undeniable ontological thrust and goes beyond envisaging *ma'nā* merely as a meaning or logical object. Its use in this context establishes the existence of quiddity as a metaphysical principle in beings.²⁷ What is more, this excerpt underlines the fact that thingness or nature becomes an epistemic and ontological bridge linking the two realms of concrete and mental existence.

These various points appear to be borne out by other passages in which Avicenna refers to the pure nature or quiddity in concrete beings as a *ma'nā* and a common principle in these existents. This is the case notably of an excerpt in *Salvation* and another in *On the Soul*, which should be highlighted also because they broach the related topic of psychological abstraction, which will be addressed in depth later on:

Text 12: The first [way in which the animal powers can assist the rational soul] is by extracting for the soul the single universal [notions] from the particulars, by means of [a process of] abstraction of the quidditative meanings [*'alā sabil tajrīd li-ma'ānihā*] from matter and from their material attachments and attributes, and by preserving what is common in it [*murā'āt al-mushtarak fīhī*] and what is distinguished by it. For what is essential has its existence, and what is accidental [also] has its existence [*wa-l-dhāti wujūduhu wa-l-'araḍī wujūduhu*]. The principles of conception [*mabādi' al-taṣawwur*] are produced in the soul as a result of this [process],

²⁵ In Christian and Muslim *kalām* contexts, the terms *ma'nā* and *amr* also often carry an entitative and ontic dimension, whether they are used in reference to the divine attributes, entitative accidents in concrete beings, or to the hypostases of the Trinity.

²⁶ What Zimmermann (in *Al-Farabi's Commentary*, 11, n. 2) says about Fārābī applies just as well to Avicenna: “*Ma'nā* [meaning, point of reference] can mean reference as well as the object of reference. It is frequently reduced to near-synonymity with *shay'*, since a thing becomes a *ma'nā* the moment it is referred to.” This is all the more relevant if one remembers the connection between *shay'/shay'iyah* and quiddity in Avicenna; the *ma'nā* does not merely refer to the thing (taken as a complete substance), but more specifically to the quidditative meaning or thingness *of or in* that thing. In the present analysis, I take thingness and quiddity to be roughly synonymous and do not overly concern myself with the differences Wisnovsky perceives between these two terms and the conjectural development they may have undergone; see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, especially 177–180.

²⁷ A similar use of *ma'nā* appears at *Metaphysics*, I.2, 15.16 ff. (translated by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 12): “If, in this science [metaphysics] one investigates that which is *not* prior to matter [i.e., that which is material], what is being investigated therein is only a *ma'nā*, this *ma'nā* not requiring matter for its existence.” And shortly thereafter, he adds that “the mode of investigation pertaining to them [the various kinds of material and immaterial existents] is from the angle of a *ma'nā* whose subsistence in existence is not through [or by virtue of matter].” In this passage as well, the idea is not that the *ma'nā* does not exist in any way in matter, but rather that it need not be dependent on matter for its existence and can exist intelligibly in the mind; this is an important nuance. It seems that Avicenna is referring here to the pure quiddity of these existents, and that he could have used the term *māhiyyah* or *ṭabī'ah* instead of *ma'nā*, all of which can be abstracted by the intellect.

which occurs thanks to the assistance of the processing power of the imaginative and estimative [faculties].²⁸

Text 13: The hylomorphic form has states and things [*aḥwāl wa-umūr*] that occur to it, not because of its own self and the fact that it is form, but because of matter. Sometimes, the removal [*al-nazʿ*] [of the form] from matter occurs with all or some of these [material] attachments, and other times it is [in contrast] a complete [kind of removal]. This is due to the abstraction of the quidditative meaning [*bi-an yujarrada l-maʿnā*] from matter and the concomitants that belong to it on account of matter. An example is the form of humanness [*ṣūrat al-insāniyyah*] and the quiddity of humanness [*māhiyyat al-insāniyyah*] as a nature that is necessarily shared [*ṭabīʿah lā muḥālata tashtariku fihā*] equally by all the individuals of the species. It is one thing in definition, although it accidentally occurs to it to exist [*wujīdat*] in this or that individual and, hence, to become multiple. Nevertheless, this [multiplicity] does not belong to it inasmuch as its nature is humanness.²⁹

There are three points of interest that can be inferred from these passages. The first is the rough semantic equivalence of the terms ‘form’ (*ṣūrah*), ‘quiddity’ (*māhiyyah*), ‘nature’ (*ṭabīʿah*), and ‘quidditative meaning’ (*maʿnā*). These all point to the same thing, namely, pure quiddity (in this case ‘humanness’) in concrete beings. Second, this nature and quidditative meaning can be removed or extracted from (*nazʿ*, *intizāʿ*) the concrete individuals and thus also abstracted (*yujarrad*, *tajrīd*) from matter and its various attachments and relations. Thus, even though the nature and pure quiddity are *in* the physical object, they can be fully divested *from* it. Likewise, the *maʿnā* of the substantial form is not in itself material, but rather accidentally combined with matter, and in any case not reducible to it. These passages quite explicitly support a doctrine of abstraction as a process by which the quidditative meaning is transferred from the particulars to the mind. Third, and by implication, the *maʿnā* can somehow be said to exist *in* the object and to precede abstraction. This meaning is not projected *onto* the object by a thinking mind once abstraction has occurred. It is the other way around: the existence of the *maʿnā* in the object is what justifies the process of abstraction. So *maʿnā* here also has a strong ontological or entitative sense and not merely an epistemic or gnoseological sense. It “exists” or “is present in” (*wujīdat*) the object, with the corollary that its presence in the object somehow precedes its presence in the mind. What is more, and as a corollary, this quidditative meaning or entity is not merely conceptually common, but also ontologically common in (*mushtaraka fī*) the concrete beings.³⁰ Like Text 11, then, these two excerpts point to a certain ontologization of pure quiddity *qua maʿnā* in concrete beings, thereby also underlining Avicenna’s particular usage of this term and the possible influence of *kalām* theories on his understanding of it. In the case of immaterial beings, it is quite clear that

²⁸ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 372.1–5.

²⁹ Avicenna, *On the Soul of The Cure*, II.2, 58.7–15.

³⁰ It is worth invoking here Avicenna’s distinction in *Introduction* I.12 between what is ‘in multiplicity’ and what is ‘after multiplicity,’ which in the late-antique background was often thought to coincide with two different types of universals.

their *ma'nā* exists independently of human intellection and, moreover, that the mind cannot grasp the true nature of these beings.³¹ In this case, the *ma'nā* and *māhiyyah* of the separate intellects is identical with their immaterial substantial forms, and these things can be known by human beings only in a derivative manner and through influences or impressions (*āthār*). Whereas in the case of concrete material beings, an intelligible *ma'nā* is fully abstracted and contemplated by the mind (*yatajarradu minhā ma'nā yu'qalu*), in the case of the immaterial beings, in contrast, the quidditative *ma'nā* exists intelligibly in itself (*yūjad al-ma'nā ka-mā huwa*), and it is accidentally impressed on the mind, albeit not 'in itself.' This metaphysical use of the term *ma'nā* to describe the immaterial beings further confirms its ontological and entitative dimension in Avicenna's philosophy.³²

One can infer from the foregoing that Avicenna makes a distinctive usage of the notion of *ma'nā* in the context of his ontology, where it designates something real and entitative in the concrete beings. This is true of both the immaterial beings and the composite existents. In the latter case, it becomes closely associated with the master's doctrine of psychological abstraction, to which I shall return in detail later on. In this context, one should not translate *ma'nā* merely as 'quidditative meaning,' but also as 'quidditative entity' or 'quidditative principle,' which points to pure quiddity or pure nature as a kind of *metaphysical principle* of reality.³³ But how unique or idiosyncratic is Avicenna's understanding of this notion in connection with concrete beings?

The *kalām* understanding of *ma'nā* was already sketched in chapters I and II. In the present context, the Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite handling of this term should be em-

31 In fact, Avicenna frequently refers to the *ma'nā* of God as well. In this context, the term *ma'nā* is not only entitative and existent in reality, it exists independently of our thinking it. It is fully identified with the true nature and quiddity of the immaterial beings.

32 See Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, III.8, 143.5–8.

33 In *On the Soul of The Cure*, I.5, 43.9–11, Avicenna provides a definition of *ma'nā* as something derived from sensible objects, but which can be apprehended only by estimation or reason, not by the external senses: "As for *ma'nā*, it is a thing [*shay'*] apprehended by the soul from sensible things [*min al-maḥsūsāt*], which is not first perceived by the external senses." In this connection, Marmura and Hasse have already noted that in Avicenna's psychology, a *ma'nā* can refer to something entitative in the real world, in addition to the impression that thing makes on the soul of the beholder. Thus, when the ewe perceives the *ma'nā* of the wolf, the mental impression or form in its soul corresponds to something that truly exists in the wolf, such as aggressiveness, strength, or stealth; see Marmura, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals, 55, note 36, where he suggests that it refers to "a characteristic" or "entity" in a concrete thing, while Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima*, 127 ff. describes it as a "connotational attribute" and as something in the exterior object that is transmitted to the senses and the internal faculties. When it is related to quiddity, however, *ma'nā* no longer refers to a mere accident or attribute, but rather to a fundamental structural principle of that being, to its very essential form and substance, as is made in clear in Text 11. In that excerpt, then, Avicenna appears to claim that pure quiddity *qua ma'nā* exists in all realized beings, including the composite material beings of the exterior world. The implication seems to be that the *ma'nā* or quidditative meaning of horse exists in the universal and concrete horse.

phasized once more, given that it often refers to something real in the concrete world, and not primarily to a meaning in the mind. By the time Avicenna was writing, there was an already long *kalām* tradition stretching back to the Mu‘tazilite theologian Mu‘ammar in the late eighth and early ninth centuries that regarded *ma‘nā* as something entitative and real in concrete beings.³⁴ Furthermore, as Versteegh has shown, a similar construal of *ma‘nā* seems to have been broadly embraced in Arabic philosophical circles during the eleventh century.³⁵ As he contends, “*ma‘nā* is often used in almost the same way as the *eidos* of Platonism: it is then an abstract correlate of something physical in the physical world. This abstract correlate can be situated within or outside the mind, i.e. in the speaking subject or in the objects.”³⁶ Versteegh, following Gätje, regards Avicenna as an upholder of this kind of theory: “in their theories [Avicenna’s and Averroes’s] *ma‘ānī* are those elements in the objects which are not perceived by the physical senses, but only by some sort of perceiving faculty of the mind.” Thus, he concludes, for Avicenna, a *ma‘nā* “is situated within the physical objects. In that case, the meaning of *ma‘ānī* is close to the Aristotelian theory of ‘form.’”³⁷ Here Versteegh is referring to the immanent forms of concrete beings. It should be pointed out as well that *ma‘nā* was sometimes used by the Syriac and Arabic translators to render the Greek term *πρᾶγμα*.³⁸ There was therefore a rich tradition that had flourished prior to Avicenna’s time that regarded *ma‘nā* either as something physical or, more relevantly in our case, as something non-physical present in a physical object. Just as the Greek term *εἶδος* was used in the ancient texts to refer alternatively to the immanent forms of things, to concepts in the mind, as well as to the Platonic archetypes, so the terms *ṣūrah/ṣuwar* and *ma‘nā/ma‘ānī* in the Arabic philosophical tradition appear to have maintained this dual epistemic and ontological function.³⁹ Avicenna’s application of *ma‘nā* to concrete and mental objects, as well as the close relation he perceives between *ma‘nā* and *ṣūrah*—inasmuch as both

³⁴ See Frank, *Al-ma‘nā*; Daiber, *Das theologisch-philosophische System*; and van Ess, *Theology and Society*, vol. 3, 80–90.

³⁵ Versteegh’s analysis, *Greek Elements*, 184 ff. has the merit of covering the two linguistic/semantic and metaphysical/entitative aspects of *ma‘nā* and also provides some valuable insight into the Greek philosophical background that informed the translations and reception of this term in the Arabic tradition.

³⁶ Versteegh, *Greek Elements*, 187.

³⁷ Versteegh, *Greek Elements*, 189. What is more, Versteegh also notes that some thinkers in the Arabic tradition, such as the Mu‘tazilites, attributed a certain causal agency to *ma‘nā* in this concrete setting. What is particularly significant in this connection is their view that *ma‘nā* can somehow be said to exist in a non-physical mode in a physical object. I think the Avicennian *ma‘nā* should be interpreted in much the same way, since it exists in concrete beings, but is not reducible to their material constituents.

³⁸ For instance, *ma‘nā* appears as a translation of *πρᾶγμα* in the Arabic rendition of *On Interpretation*, I.7.17a39–40, where the Greek term is usually rendered as “thing” in English.

³⁹ See de Libera, *L’art*, 503–504.

terms pertain to the essence—suggest a certain continuity with these ancient Greek and Arabic philosophical trends.

In retrospect, then, the hypothesis of the reality and existence of pure quiddity in concrete beings seems corroborated on textual grounds drawn from Avicenna's works, by an analysis of his use of the technical term *ma'nā*, as well as by the philosophical practices of the time, which frequently endowed this term with an ontological thrust. On this interpretation, quiddity exists in particular entities not only as a quidditative meaning or definitional aspect (the gnoseological plane), but also as a foundational nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and reality (*ḥaqīqah*) (the ontological plane), two key terms that are used interchangeably with the expression 'quiddity in itself.' The notion of *ma'nā*, which encapsulates the semantic, cognitive, and entitative aspects of essence, seems perfectly adequate to sustain this Avicennian doctrine. Accordingly, it is used interchangeably with the terms *ṭabī'ah* and *ḥaqīqah* to designate the essence of concrete beings. Moreover, it is important to stress that it is not merely quiddity that is said to exist in concrete beings, but quiddity *in itself*. Avicenna is keen to insist on this point by using such expressions as *mujarrad al-ḥayawāniyyah*, *al-ḥayawān bi-mā huwa ḥayawān*, *fī nafsihi*, *fī ḥaqīqatihi*, etc., some of which figure in the previous examples.

On the basis of this textual evidence, the main issue appears to be not *whether* Avicenna believes that quiddity exists in the extramental world, but rather *in what sense* and *according to what mode* it can be said to exist.⁴⁰ In spite of this, Avicenna's exact views on the concrete existence of quiddity remain elusive. One faces a host of problems when trying to articulate a clear account of the master's position. One immediate difficulty is understanding exactly how a common mental notion or meaning such as quiddity, which is typically conceived of universally in the mind, can be said to possess an entitative status or exist in the world in a strong sense. In order to clarify this problem, other aspects of Avicenna's essentialist account have to be examined. Apart from the language of being that he explicitly ascribes to quiddity and his rehandling of the term *ma'nā* for his own philosophical purposes, there are three

⁴⁰ Tackling this point in earnest is deferred until chapter IV. The idea that pure quiddity somehow exists in the concrete beings has been strongly opposed in the modern scholarship; for a striking example, see de Libera, *L'art*, 566–567, 575. Other relevant passages drawn from Avicenna's works are admittedly more ambiguous when it comes to this issue, although they still on my view point to the entitative nature of quiddity when they are read in parallel to the evidence highlighted above. In *Logic of Pointers*, vol. 1, 204.5–205.1, Avicenna refers to the “foundational nature” (*al-ṭabī'ah al-aṣliyyah*)—another expression for pure quiddity—that underlies all concrete instances and is “constitutive” (*muqawwimah*) of them, while in *Physics*, I.1, 7.3, and I.7, 5.3, and I.13, 8.5, he refers to the “universal nature” (*ṭabī'ah kullīyyah*) of things, and mentions that the human intellect “extracts the natures of things common in species” (*fa-yantazi'u al-ṭabā'i' al-āmiyyāt al-naw'iyyah*) in order to apprehend them (I.1, 7.7); cf. *Demonstration* III.5 and *On the Soul* II.2. As he explains in *Metaphysics*, these natures are permanent in their concrete reality, as in the case of humanness; for “the nature of humanness is constant” (*baqā' al-ṭabī'ah al-insāniyyah*). Although universality is (primarily) a mental concept for Avicenna, nature on the other hand finds a direct correspondence in concrete beings.

additional features that characterize Avicenna's seeming brand of metaphysical realism: the notion of common nature; the mereological dimension of his argumentation; and the place of hylomorphism.

1.1 Quiddity and common nature

One notion that lies at the core of Avicenna's discussion of quiddity in concrete beings is that of nature (*ṭabī'ah*) or, more precisely, of a common or shared nature (*ṭabī'ah mushtarakah*). This Avicennian theory had a fertile legacy in the postclassical Islamic period, where it is often connected with the discourse on the universals (*al-kulliyāt*). In the later Islamic tradition, one frequently encounters the distinction between 'the natural universal' (*al-kullī l-ṭabī'ī*), which was thought to somehow exist in concrete beings, and the logical and intellectual universals (*al-kullī l-manṭiqī* and *al-kullī l-'aqlī*), which were usually restricted to the sphere of human thought. For these thinkers, 'the natural universal' became another way of referring to Avicenna's doctrine of common nature or essence in the concrete world.⁴¹ It should be noted also that this Avicennian doctrine was transmitted to the Medieval Latin West where it underwent a different but equally rich development. Starting at least with Albert the Great, it was endorsed by numerous medieval Christian thinkers who proceeded to adapt this theory to their own system.⁴²

Like the term *ma'nā*, it appears that Avicenna in many cases uses the term *ṭabī'ah* as a virtual synonym of essence or quiddity. Accordingly, it can refer either to the human cognition of essence as a mental concept or to the reality of essence in concrete existents.⁴³ I showed in chapter II that Avicenna speaks of nature in the context of concept formation, which finds its starting point in the apprehension of the *ṭabī'ah* of a concrete being. Thus, for example, the pure nature or quiddity 'humanness' can be conceived of as such in the mind and distinctly from the universal attribute that can be attached to it. Nevertheless, the main concern in this chapter is nature construed as a common principle existing in concrete beings. Nature is common, according to Avicenna, because it characterizes in the same way all the exist-

⁴¹ See section III.7 for more details. I would argue that the very fact that 'nature' and 'the natural universal' became closely associated in the later philosophical tradition points already to the ambiguity of these notions in Avicenna's works. Much effort will be expended here to disambiguate Avicenna's notion of universality. I will show that it, like many other Avicennian notions, is multifaceted or, rather, modulated.

⁴² The Avicennian doctrine of common nature has been intensively studied in the field of medieval Christian philosophy and in Latin Avicennism; for insight into the vast literature on the topic, see (among many other studies), Owens, *Common Nature*; de Libera, *La querelle*; idem, *L'art*; Erismann, *Immanent Realism*; Galluzzo, *Two Senses*; Pini, *Absoluta*.

⁴³ The more precise formulation would be to say that whereas *ma'nā* expresses the transition from the human intellection of essence to the reality of essence in concrete beings, *ṭabī'ah* expresses the transition from essence as a reality in concrete beings to the human intellection of it.

tents that share it or fall under it, such as humanness in Zayd and ‘Amr. Nevertheless, it is not common in virtue of being a single form or universal entity in the concrete world that could be described as being numerically one (*wāḥid bi-l-‘adad*). Rather, it is a non-numerical principle of commonness that ensures that members of the same species, such as Zayd and ‘Amr, have an identical essence, as well as an identical set of actualized concomitants entailed by this essence (such as particularity, oneness, corporeality, etc.). It can be said to be ‘one’ only definitionally and semantically, with regard to a single definition in the mind that would be predicated equally of each concrete being.

One acute problem that emerges from Avicenna’s works is how nature can be common in concrete beings, while not being strictly a universal. Although Avicenna does, albeit rarely, refer to the common nature as universal (*kulliyah*) or something general (*‘āmmah*) in concrete beings—the relevant passages will be mentioned and discussed shortly—he usually refrains from doing so and prefers to describe it merely as something common (*mushtarakah*).⁴⁴ This would seem to imply that commonness is, in this context, something lesser, or of weaker implication or strength, than universality. More specifically, unlike universality, which is attached to a single, numerically one and determined form in the mind, commonness in the concrete world is not defined by numerical determination. Recall that, for Avicenna, the universal form in the mind is a single and distinct thing or mental existent, which can be described as ‘one.’ Thus, the universal ‘horse’ in the mind is ‘a single one form’ (*ṣūrah wāḥidah*), and oneness is a mental concomitant or attribute of that essence. Common nature, in contrast, refers to the state of pure quiddity as it exists in each individual instance, without it being reducible to a numerically one thing, or without its possessing an accidental unity that would be essentially attached to it. For, as Avicenna is keen to remind us, in itself, pure quiddity is neither one nor many. So the quidditative nature is *essentially common*, or common in a qualified Avicennian sense, while at the same time resisting numerical determination.⁴⁵ This means that it is identical neither

⁴⁴ Avicenna expresses the commonness of the essential nature by resorting to different terms, *mushtarakah* being one of the most frequent. But he also relies on the term *‘āmm*, as in *Physics*, I.1, 8.4, where he mentions that “animal is a common notion” (*ma’nā ‘āmm*). Finally, and much more rarely, Avicenna calls it a universal or universal nature (*ṭabī‘ah kulliyah*). The differences expressed by the terms *mushtarakah*, *‘āmmah*, and *kulliyah*, which for Avicenna can all convey the notion of essential commonness as opposed to other senses of commonness or universality, are subtle and on my reading reflect the gradual transition from ontological commonness (*mushtarakah*) to conceptual or intellectual commonness and universality (*‘āmmah* and especially *kulliyah* primarily refer to the purely theoretical concept of universality in the mind). Nevertheless, Avicenna’s use of these terms is not always systematic, which can lead to tensions in interpretation; for another reading of these terms in Avicenna’s physics, see Lammer, *The Elements*, 165–179.

⁴⁵ For the distinction between the “numerically common” and the “generally common” with regard to forms in concrete beings, see Lammer, *The Elements*, 154–201. Lammer restricts the latter mostly to notions in the mind and thus to an epistemic aspect, and so he does not allow for a

to the concrete particular substance nor to the mental universal, which are each numerically one, delineated, and determined. It should be noted that in setting nature apart from the particular entity taken as a whole and the mental universal proper, Avicenna appears to be drawing on an earlier Greco-Arabic philosophical tradition, which conceived of the nature of concrete individuals as something common (κοινόν), but distinct from the universals in the mind. The closest proponent of this view to Avicenna's time was Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, who was likely building on theories first articulated by Alexander of Aphrodisias.⁴⁶

Emphasizing this notion of nature can help us to better understand how commonness, as opposed to universality proper, can be said to *exist* in concrete beings. Just because quiddity or nature is not a separate and single universal thing in the exterior world does not imply that it does not have any kind of reality or traction in the exterior world. One way of approaching this issue is to say that nature does exist, but in a non-numerical way, since it is, in itself, devoid of oneness and multiplicity. Quiddity, as it is found in concrete beings, cannot be reduced to, or framed in terms of, a numerical oneness or unity, since oneness is a concomitant of essence that is predicated either of the complex existent, e. g., one individual horse, or of universals in the mind, e. g., the genus animal, but not of pure quiddity itself.⁴⁷ Consequently, we speak of 'one human being,' e. g., Ulysses, and not of 'one pure quiddity humanness' in Ulysses. In brief, nature or quiddity has a common existence in concrete beings that evades numerical determination, since the latter is associated only with the external concomitants of essence. Note that this solution, which is based on the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model, and which is therefore firmly grounded in Avicenna's works, anticipates in some ways Duns Scotus's theory of common nature as something 'less than numerical unity.'⁴⁸ By removing the condition of numerical determination or specification, Avicenna is able to maintain two theses that at first might seem mutually exclusive: that pure quiddity or nature exists as a common principle of concrete beings; but that it is also not a single, one, universal form on the Platonic model. He is able to do so by evading the constriction of numerical determination,

sense of 'common' to apply specifically to the nature in itself; at any rate, he says little about the ontological status of nature in the concrete beings.

46 On this notion of nature in Alexander of Aphrodisias and Yaḥyā as something distinct from the concrete particular and the universal in the mind, see Ehrig-Eggert, Yaḥyā, especially 54–56. As I will show below, however, the Avicennian common nature can be regarded as universal on a certain construal of that notion.

47 At *Metaphysics*, III.2, 97, Avicenna sketches the various senses of 'the one' and explains that 'the one by essence' can be said of genus, species, correspondence, subject, and number. The one said essentially of genus and species (or differentia) pertains to the universal concepts in the mind, not to pure quiddity or nature as such. Avicenna stresses this point shortly after (98.6–8), when he explains that the one in species can include the universals that are numerically many (as in the case of human beings) or numerically one (as in the case of the sun).

48 See Tweedale, Duns Scotus's Doctrine; and Cross, *Medieval Theories*, which, remarkably, does not mention Avicenna in this context.

which in his system follows quiddity or nature as an external concomitant (*lāzim*), and which refers to the oneness of the realized existent, of the substance taken as a whole or *sunolon*. This approach fits perfectly with the tenor of Avicenna's polemic against Platonic metaphysics. But it does not amount to a wholesale rebuttal of the existence of quiddity in the concrete world. It consists rather in introducing a set of qualifications regarding its correct mode of existence, which, for Avicenna, is immanent in the concrete beings themselves.

But how is such a view tenable, when the expression 'quiddity *in itself*' evokes isolation, separation or at least distinctness, and, hence, would seem to imply that quiddity exists without anything else being attached to it? Avicenna's position here involves a conceptual subtlety: pure quiddity exists 'in itself' in the sense of 'irreducibly,' as a foundational and irreducible nature for the individual, not in the sense that it is ontically 'separate' from everything else, a view which would smack of Platonism. In other words, in the specific context of physics or the concrete world, 'in itself' does not mean 'ontologically separate or transcendent'—a state that would be the counterpart in the extramental world of its being *distinct* in the mind—but rather irreducible, in the sense that it preserves its core nature even when it is attached to other things in the concrete being. This implies a mereological account of quiddity whereby 'humanness in itself' or 'animalness in itself' amounts to an irreducible part of the composite substance. It is to this aspect of Avicenna's argumentation that I now turn.

1.2 The mereological construal of quiddity

At this juncture, Avicenna's thought-provoking claim that pure quiddity is a part (*juz'*) of the concrete existent needs to be fleshed out. Prior to this, however, a few general remarks about his mereological framework are in order. It should be pointed out that the master applies a mereological reasoning to different topics, which have different degrees of relevance to the notion of quiddity. Some of them are standard and shared by many other ancient and medieval philosophers, such as when he refers (a) to the constitutive parts of the definition, in which case the genus 'animal' and the differentia 'rational' are parts of the definition of the species 'human'; (b) to the species as a part of its genus, where 'human' and 'horse' are parts of the genus 'animal'; (c) to form and matter as parts of the composite substance; and more generally (d) with regard to his discussion of 'whole and part' (*al-kull wa-l-juz'*), which constitutes the field of mereology proper.⁴⁹ However, Avicenna also applies mereological analysis to considerations that are more particular—even idiosyn-

⁴⁹ One important passage dealing with mereology appears at the end of *Metaphysics* V.2 (212.3–16). Although what Avicenna outlines there in a rather schematic fashion is clear, the way in which he proceeds to apply some of these distinctions to his metaphysics and ontology is on the other hand much more nebulous, for it becomes entangled with considerations of existence and causality.

cratic—to him, and which seem to go in the direction of a kind of *metaphysical mereology*. One example is when he speaks of pure quiddity as existing as a ‘part’ of the universal concept and the concrete being. It is especially this latter aspect that is of interest here. Yet, due to the fact that this aspect is often intertwined with some of the other considerations outlined above, especially (a) and (c), it is particularly challenging to distinguish what pertains to logic and what pertains to metaphysics in the master’s argumentation.⁵⁰ Now, I argued in chapter II that Avicenna embraces a mereological construal of pure quiddity with regard to concept formation. He regards it as an integral part of the universal concept. Since the human mind has the ability to analyze and synthesize concepts at will, as well as to consider things under various angles and according to various considerations (*i’tibārāt*), it is not altogether surprising that it can distinguish between pure quiddity and its mental concomitants and ‘deconstruct’ the complex universal concept. This mereological reasoning is, after all, the justification for regarding quiddity either as a unitary, cohesive, and distinct mental entity that can be immediately grasped or, alternatively, as being made up of various constitutive parts that together form the complex definitional concept of a thing. It is also, at the level of conception or *taṣawwur*, what distinguishes the simplicity of quiddity in itself from the composite and intention-laden universal concept, which consists of the nature and various external concomitants—and, hence, of various ‘things’ or ‘parts.’ However, when applied to the concrete world and the realm of composite physical substances, Avicenna’s mereological interpretation of quiddity raises a fresh host of issues it did not carry in relation to thought and mental existence. For if, in the latter context, a part can be construed as corresponding to a conceptual object, an intention, or a consideration in the mind, in the extramental context it is much less clear how pure quiddity can be said to exist as a ‘part’ of the concrete individual.

Before tackling this issue in earnest, we should take note of Avicenna’s various formulations on the matter. Some of his statements pertain to the logical consideration of species and genera and to the ways in which these are related in the definition of a thing. In those cases, it is important to stress that Avicenna has in mind the universal predicates of quiddity, such as universal genus ‘animal’ or universal species ‘horse,’ and not the quiddity ‘animal in itself’ or ‘human in itself.’⁵¹ In contrast, Avi-

⁵⁰ There is very little scholarship on mereology in Avicenna and more generally in the Arabic tradition. Recently, however, this aspect of Avicenna’s argumentation has attracted some attention; see notably De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*; and Benevich, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz.’* Marmura, *Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals*, and idem, *Quiddity and Universality*, also to some extent focuses on the mereology of the universals in the human mind. Beyond its logical foundation, the intriguing feature about the way mereology is employed in the Arabic philosophical sources concerns its application to physics and metaphysics as a tool to explain the constitution of concrete beings. In that context, it lies at the interface of logic and ontology.

⁵¹ Avicenna, *Categories*, 18.15–17; 19.14–15. Thus, when Avicenna asserts that “human is a part of animal,” he means that the universal species human is subsumed under and a part of the universal genus animal alongside other animal species. Alternatively, as in *Notes*, 56, section 41, ‘animal’

cenna in other instances applies a mereological reasoning to explain the status of quiddity within a larger composite whole, where quiddity this time is considered not as a universal logical predicate, but as a metaphysical principle or nature, such as ‘human in itself’ or ‘animal in itself.’ Below are examples of these types of arguments gleaned from *Categories* and *Metaphysics* V.1:

Text 14: ‘Human’ is a subject for ‘animal,’ because ‘animal’ is not an external concomitant of it, but rather constitutes it and is a part of its existence [*juz’ wujūdihi*].⁵²

Text 15: Thus, animal [inasmuch as it is animal], which is a part of this certain animal, exists [*fa-l-ḥayawān alladhī huwa juz’ min ḥayawān mā mawjūd*]. This is like ‘the white’ [*al-bayāḍ*]: although it is not separable from matter, it is in its whiteness [*bi-bayāḍiyyatihi*] existent in matter as something else [*shay’ akhar*], considered [strictly] in itself and endowed with a quidditative reality of its own [*mu’tabar bi-dhātihi wa-dhū ḥaqīqah bi-dhātihi*].⁵³

This point receives a more sustained treatment in another section of the same chapter:

Text 16: As for general animal, individual animal, animal considered in potentiality as either general or individual, animal considered as existing in the concrete world [*mawjūd fī l-a’yān*] or intellected in the soul—this is animal [in itself] and a thing [*shay’*], but not animal considered [in itself] alone. And it is well known that, if it is [considered as] animal and a thing, then animal is in them [i. e., the composite of these two things] as a part [*juz’*]. The same applies to [the pure quiddity] human. Hence, the consideration of the [quiddity] animal in itself is possible [*i’tibār al-ḥayawān bi-dhātihi jā’izān*], even though it is with another [thing], because it [always] remains itself even when it is with another. Its essence, therefore, belongs to it in itself [*fa-dhātuhu lahu bi-dhātihi*], whereas its being with another is [merely] an accidental occurrence or a certain concomitant of its nature [*amr ‘arīḍ lahu aw lāzim mā li-ṭabī’atihi*], as in the case of animalness and humanness. This consideration [of animal in itself] is prior in existence to the animal that is individuated through its accidents or universal, in concrete existence or in the mind, in the way that the simple precedes the composite and the part precedes the whole [*wa-l-juz’ ‘alā l-kull*].⁵⁴

can be conceived of as a part of ‘human,’ i. e., as a part of the definition of human by genus and differentia.

⁵² Avicenna, *Categories*, I.3, 19.13–15.

⁵³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 202.5–8.

⁵⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.4–11; translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 153. This passage is a longer quotation of Text 9 discussed previously. For a discussion of these passages from *Metaphysics* in Avicenna and Rāzī, see Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*. In this excerpt, Avicenna is referring to animal as a ‘part’ of a larger whole, but it is not clear at first glance whether he intends it as a constitutive part, i. e., as genus of the quiddity human, or as part of the composite substance, i. e., quiddity taken together with its external and non-constitutive concomitants. Put differently, is he referring to a part vis-à-vis the other constitutive elements or vis-à-vis the external concomitants that constitute the composite whole? Either way, what is important here and what calls for elucidation is that pure animal is regarded as a part of the concrete being. This mereological argumentation, it should be noted, attracted much attention in the post-Avicennian tradition, with regard to how quiddity could be regarded as a part according to the two aspects outlined above. Qushji in particular dwells at length on this issue; see Izutsu, *Basic Problems*.

How are these passages to be interpreted? More specifically, how do their blatant ontological content and references to existence (*wujūd*) relate to Avicenna's purely logical use of mereology? In what sense do they allow for an additional metaphysical reading that would ground pure quiddity in concrete existence as a principle or entity within the composite thing? In brief, what are, if any, the ontological implications of these passages? Before attempting to shed some light on these questions, I wish to point out that this use of mereological reasoning seems to have been relatively common in the classical Arabic philosophical tradition. Another similar instance of it can be found in a hitherto unstudied and unedited manuscript, which preserves the replies made by Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus to logical questions asked by his pupil Yaḥyā b. 'Adī. Below is a translation of the relevant passage:

It cannot be denied that there can be two things whereby one precedes the other in one respect, but follows it in another respect. Indeed, 'human' precedes Socrates inasmuch as it is the nature of 'human' [*ṭabī'at al-insān*] and a part among the various parts of Socrates [*juz' min ajzā' Sūq-rāṭ*], but it follows Socrates inasmuch as it is a universal [*min ḥaythu kullī*] whose existence [in the mind] is dependent on [or requires] the particulars, while the existence of the particulars does not require the universal.⁵⁵

Noteworthy terminological parallels notwithstanding—this is the case especially of the expression *ṭabī'at al-insān*—the mereological claim that Mattā puts forth anticipates in many ways Avicenna's own application of mereology to the concrete existents. Whereas Mattā intends the second part of the argument to refer to the universal 'human' in the mind, the first section appears to put forth a mereological picture whereby the nature human is literally "a part" (*juz'*) of the concrete individual human, in this case Socrates. What is more, this part *precedes* the composite and complete substance Socrates taken as the sum of its various parts. Apart from Mattā, Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, another preeminent member of the Baghdad School, frequently develops mereological arguments in his works to discuss essence, including how it can be said to exist in the concrete particulars. On the one hand, Yaḥyā appears to hold a realist view of the universals whereby these exist immanently in the concrete individuals. On the other hand, these universals or—more accurately in the context of Yaḥyā's philosophy—these essences or forms exist as parts of the concrete beings.⁵⁶ So members of the Baghdad School—including Mattā and Yaḥyā—appear to have raised similar mereological questions to those discussed by Avicenna in his logical and metaphysical works.

Avicenna appears to apply mereological reasoning to two distinct aspects of quiddity in his works. The first is primarily—if not exclusively—logical and concerns the relationship between quiddity and its essential constituents. In that case, the notion of 'part' refers to the relationship between the various constituents of quiddity

⁵⁵ Janos and Wisnovsky (in preparation), Abū Bishr Mattā's Responses.

⁵⁶ See Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 71–74; and section III.4.2.

and the complete quiddity taken as a unitary and intelligible meaning and concept, as well as a complete definition, such as the relation of the genus ‘animal’ to ‘horse’ or of the differentia ‘rational’ to ‘human.’ Thus, at *Metaphysics* V.6, the master explains that “genus is predicated of species as a part of its quiddity [*juz’ min māhiyyatihi*]”⁵⁷; in *Logic of the Easterners*, he states that ‘animal’ and ‘rational’ are each a ‘part’ of human⁵⁸; and in *Physics* I.1 that genus is a part of the definition of species and that, as such, its knowledge precedes the knowledge of the definition.⁵⁹ As parts of the definition and quiddity, genus and differentia are also constitutive of them. They are constitutive parts (sing., *juz’ muqawwim*).⁶⁰ These various assertions strike one as purely logical in intent. Recall, however, that in Text 14 above, Avicenna had made the exact same statement, but with the specification this time that animal is a *part of the existence* of the human being (*juz’ wujūdihi*). In an even more committal way, he claims that animal in itself exists in the concrete.⁶¹ Furthermore, in yet other instances, Avicenna applies mereological analysis not to the relation between the various constitutive elements of quiddity, but between quiddity and its external concomitants, which pertain to quiddity once it is realized in existence. In these cases, basing himself on the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model, Avicenna contends that quiddity as a part should be contrasted to the other non-constitutive things (*ashyā’*) that attach to it in existence. So when Avicenna describes humanness in itself or animalness in itself as a part of a complex existent, it is presumably this last interpretation that he is promoting.

The last two applications, in contrast to the first, explicitly introduce the notion of existence and represent a metaphysical or ontological use of mereology. They pointedly raise the question of how the constitutive elements and the external concomitants of quiddity relate to one another *in existence*. This problematic was established already in chapter II in connection with mental existence and the complex universal concept, but Avicenna extends this metaphysical mereological argument to encompass the concrete beings as well. In a psychological context, Avicenna had described the concomitants (*lawāzim*) of essence as distinct meanings or notions (*ma’ānī*), attributes (*ṣifāt*), conditions (*shurūṭ*), and things (*ashyā’*) that are added to (*zā’id ‘alā*) the quidditative nature in the mind. In the exterior world, these external

57 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.6, 232.16.

58 Avicenna, *Logic of the Easterners*, 14.19–20.

59 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.1, 5.4–8.

60 Avicenna, *Notes*, section 48, 60, where differentia is called a constitutive part. For the relation between being a ‘part,’ being ‘constitutive,’ and being ‘internal’ in Avicenna’s logic, see Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 106–109.

61 It is possible that Avicenna alludes to this same distinction between a purely logical and an ontological aspect of mereology in *Logic of the Easterners*, 17.8–10, when he explains that the constitutive element (*al-muqawwim*) can be either “the genus of a thing, or the genus of its genus,” or, alternatively, “it can be other than that and yet continue to be a part of its essential reality or the essential reality of its genus [*wa-immā an lā yakūn ka-dhālīka bal lā yazzālu yakūn juz’an min ḥaqīqatīhi aw ḥaqīqah jins lahu*].”

‘things’ or ‘parts’ include both non-constitutive concomitants (e.g., oneness) and material accidents proper, such as blackness.⁶² It is noteworthy that in this physical context, Avicenna’s vocabulary retains some of the terms employed in his psychology (notably *lawāzim*, *lawāhiq*, and *ashyāʾ*), but also resorts to other terms to emphasize the separation or gap between pure nature and its material attachments: the latter are “exterior” or “foreign items” (*umūr gharibah*) relative to nature; they are material (*māddiyyah*); and they occur accidentally (*yaʾriḍu*, *yaṭraʾu*) to nature.⁶³ The principal difference between these concrete concomitants and the mental ones is therefore that they are imposed by, and connected with, matter (*māddah*), whereas the others were imposed by the requisites and conditions of intentionality and universal thought. This point notwithstanding, both accounts—that of the mental concomitants and that of the concrete concomitants—are modelled on the fundamental *māhiyyah-lawāzim* paradigm.

These various aspects of mereological analysis are hinted at in a compressed section of *Metaphysics* V.2, which seems to be a kind of blueprint for the way in which Avicenna conceives of the extramental existence of quiddity:

Text 17: [A] The whole inasmuch as it is a whole exists in [concrete] things, whereas the universal inasmuch as it is a universal exists only in conception [*fī l-taṣawwur*]. [B] Moreover, the whole is enumerated by its parts and each one of its parts enters into its subsistence [*qiwāmihi*]. In contrast, the universal is not enumerated by its parts, nor do the particulars contribute to its subsistence. [C] In addition, the nature of the whole does not cause its parts to subsist, but rather is caused to subsist through them, whereas the nature of the universal causes its parts to subsist. [D] Likewise, the nature of the whole never becomes one of its parts, whereas the nature of the universal is a part of the nature of the particulars [*ṭabīʿat al-kullī juzʾ min ṭabīʿat al-juzʾiyyāt*], either because (1) they are a species and therefore subsist in virtue of two universal natures—namely, genus and differentia—or because (2) they are individuals [*ashkāṣ*], in which case they subsist in virtue of the nature of all the universals [that constitute them], as well as of the nature of the accidents that are embedded in matter.⁶⁴

Segments [A] and [B] are relatively straightforward and cohere with Avicenna’s repeated caveat to the effect that the universals *per se* do not exist in the concrete world. Rather, what exists in the concrete are composite substances, each one of which is a whole (*kull*) that can be divided into its various constitutive parts. It should be pointed out that these parts can consist of the sum of the physical elements that make up a thing, such as the various wooden parts or pieces that make up a table, or they can be conceived of as principles (*mabādiʾ*), such as form and matter, which, Avicenna holds, are also ‘parts’ of the composite whole.⁶⁵ Accordingly, whereas one can provide an exhaustive or enumerative account of the

⁶² See Avicenna, *Salvation*, 344.14–345.5.

⁶³ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 344.14–345.5.

⁶⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2.212.4–12, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 161–162, revised.

⁶⁵ See notably Avicenna, *Metaphysics* VI.1.

various parts of a concrete whole, a universal is never depleted by the enumeration of the particulars that fall under it. What is more (segment [C]), because the parts make up the whole, they participate directly in its subsistence. The whole, in fact, could not subsist or exist without the combined existence of its parts. Thus, when one dismantles the string and limbs of a bow, the bow as such no longer exists actually. And when a wax figure is melted, that specific composite of form and matter no longer exists. In contrast, the universal species human is responsible for the subsistence of the genus ‘animal’ and the differentia ‘rational’ in its definition, since it unifies them into a single definition and concept.

Segment [D] is by far the most relevant to the present query. There it is said that “the nature of the universal is a part of the nature of the particulars” (*ṭabī‘at al-kullī juz’ min ṭabī‘at al-juz’iyyāt*), a statement that immediately brings to mind and chimes with Avicenna’s and Mattā’s comments in the preceding passages regarding the existence of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ in the concrete beings. In fact, the language used here and the ubiquitous reference to the nature (*ṭabī‘ah*) of the universal make it clear that this represents the mereological aspect these thinkers are relying on when they appear to postulate the concrete existence of quiddity. In this regard, Avicenna strategizes two ways of approaching this idea. The first is to regard the particulars collectively as a species—e.g., all individual humans are subsumed under the species human—in which case the universal genus ‘animal’ and the universal differentia ‘rational’ will, as constitutive elements, be ‘part’ of the essence of that species, and by extension of each human being, precisely in virtue of their belonging to that species. In this connection, it is unclear whether Avicenna intends this aspect in purely logical terms or as corresponding to real quidditative parts of the concrete being. But given that he describes them as parts in each particular (*juz’ī*), and that he elsewhere seems to contend that the quiddities exist in them, this mereological aspect appears to transcend the purely logical plane. This in fact seems confirmed by the second way of approaching the issue [D2]: if the particulars (*juz’iyyāt*) are considered as realized individuals (*ashkāṣ*), as composites of the essential principles and individualizing features brought about by matter, then the universals can be considered as essential parts that subsist in them alongside their accidental material parts.

The distinction between [D1] and [D2] seems to boil down, ultimately, to a mereological analysis of the constitutive parts of quiddity vs. a mereological analysis of the constitutive parts of quiddity, on the one hand, and of the non-constitutive concomitants and accidents of quiddity, on the other. To put it differently, there is the mereology of what is internal (*dākhil*) and essential (*dhātī*) to quiddity, and the mereology of what is external (*khārijī*) and accidental (*‘araḍī*) to quiddity, as well as how it relates to what is internal. What is noteworthy is that Avicenna subjects these various aspects to a mereological analysis and deems that both the differentia ‘rational’ and the material non-constitutive accident are somehow ‘parts’ of the concrete and individual existent, albeit in different ways. These parts subsist or exist in the concrete and participate (albeit again in different ways) toward the completion and realization of the composite, whole substance that is Bucephalus or Socrates. It would

seem that Avicenna's understanding of mereology in this specific respect possesses a physical and metaphysical thrust and goes beyond logic, since it serves to account for the ontological reality and constitution of the particular beings.

In light of these points, a few observations pertaining to Text 16 above are in order. Notice to begin with that Avicenna uses a mereological approach in these passages to distinguish pure quiddity—in this case 'animal in itself' and 'human in itself'—from other 'things' (*ashyā*), whose identity or nature nevertheless remains to be clarified. Moreover, Avicenna's examples include not only what corresponds in the mind to a genus ('animal'), but also what corresponds to a species ('human'), so that it is not entirely clear how they can both be regarded as a 'part' of the concrete existent. Avicenna presumably does not intend to say that the universal genus animal exists in 'a certain animal,' since the universal genus animal exists only in the mind. As was just noted, these passages focus on the pure quiddity animalness, not on the mental universal genus animal. The example focusing on the pure quiddity humanness seems equally problematic, albeit for different reasons: for, it would seem, the only 'part' it can occupy is that of a species when subsumed under the genus animal in the mind (such as when it is said that 'horse' and 'human' are species subsumed under the genus 'animal'). But this again has to do with logical classifications and definitions, which do not seem to apply to these excerpts. What this implies is that the kind of mereological reasoning that underlies these passages has no real connection with the mereology of the universal predicates used in logic to explain the relation between species and genera. Limiting the scope of Avicenna's argumentation to the purely logical plane runs into a series of difficulty and seems to miss the point entirely. In this particular case, the focus appears to be on the relationship between quiddity and its *external concomitants*, as well as on the ontological status of pure quiddity in concrete beings. There is, to begin with, the explicit language of existence attached to these mereological claims. Text 16, for instance, locates the mereological status of animal in itself in the concrete existent (among other things) and is therefore to be connected with the many other passages where Avicenna unambiguously asserts the *existence* of pure quiddity *in* concrete individuals. What this passage adds to this basic claim is the mereological nature of this ontological mode: animal in itself exists as 'a part' of each concrete animal. These explicit references to concrete existence befit the framework of *Metaphysics*, but they also suggest a distancing from more traditional and purely logical usages of mereology. This hypothesis coheres with one important sense of 'part' that Avicenna recognizes in his philosophy:

Text 18: Among [the various senses of] 'the part,' there is that [according to which] a thing is divided not according to quantity, but in existence [*lā fī l-kamm bal fī l-wujūd*], like the soul and body in the animal, and the form and matter in the composite, and in general with regard to the various principles [*mabādi'*] by which a composite thing is composed.⁶⁶

66 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, IV.3, 191.3–5.

The idea that something can be divided and possess parts “in existence” (*fī l-wujūd*), combined with the description of some of these parts as principles (*mabādi*), enables one to conceptualize the various parts of quiddity as somehow existing in the concrete *qua* principles. Given that Avicenna otherwise correlates hylomorphic distinctions with logical distinctions in the mind, and in particular that he establishes a strong correlation between essence and form, this hypothesis deserves to be pursued further; it will be picked up in the next section.

What is more, the mereological framework applied in those texts supports the distinction between pure quiddity and the concomitants and accidents that accompany it in realized existence. In this connection, one important gloss on Text 16 above should focus on the term *shay*'. Here it refers not to the individual thing taken as a whole (and thus construed as co-extensional with *mawjūd*), but to the external accidents and concomitants that attach to quiddity and are not constitutive of it, such as universality, oneness, or the various material accidents in the concrete beings. These various extrinsic ‘things’ can accompany quiddity in actual existence, but they do not prevent the essence from being conceivable ‘in itself’ and from enjoying an irreducible and distinct status in the composite thing or whole. Given that the mereological argument at stake here focuses on the relation between quiddity and its extrinsic concomitants and aims to clarify in what sense quiddity can be said to exist in the concrete world, limiting its thrust to the purely logical or definitional plane would be unduly reductionist. One key point that emerges from these texts is that the cognitive distinction between *māhiyyah* and *shay*' is possible precisely because *māhiyyah* is irreducible and remains ontologically distinct vis-à-vis its concomitants and accidents taken as external ‘things.’ The upshot appears to be that quiddity, although an irreducible principle and part in concrete and mental beings, combines with these external things, the sum or synthesis of which yields the actual composite existent. Hence, the nature (*tabī'ah*) and pure quiddity should be regarded as a part (*juz'*) of a larger, composite entity, which is composed of quiddity and other things (*ashyā'*) that derive from it and are related to it *qua* accidents and concomitants. All of this is in line with the Avicennian *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model.

One of the effects of this mereological construal and of a realist, or at least formal, interpretation of essence, would be to ground Avicenna’s theory of abstraction in an ontological foundation. Abstracting the intelligible form from the concrete individuals would be possible on account of the epistemic and ontological correspondence between extramental and universal quiddities. As Avicenna explains in Text 6 above, quiddity in the concrete world is unconditioned (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) on account of the fact that the external things, accidents, and concomitants (*shay'*, *āriḍ*, and *lāzim*) that combine with it *in concreto* do not affect its inner nature and reality. It remains an ontologically constant and irreducible part within the whole, an essential principle that can be distinguished from the composite entity. As Avicenna puts it in Text 16 “it [pure quiddity] itself with another is still itself, and its essence belongs to it by virtue of itself” (*dhātahu ma'a ghayrihi dhātuha fa-dhātuha lahu bi-dhātihi*). Regardless of whether one approaches these passages

primarily from an epistemological or ontological vantage point, their main thrust is that pure quiddity remains *irreducible* even when it exists in concrete beings.

An echo of this claim can be found in a passage of *Notes*, which stresses the difference between two types of intelligibles: the intelligible corresponding to the abstract quiddity that belongs to a thing (*mujarrad māhiyyatihi allatī lahu*), and the kind of composite intelligible that is constituted by the abstract quiddity taken with its concomitants:

The intelligible [*ma'qūl*] of this individual [thing] consists of quiddity taken with [that thing's] accidents and properties, which constitute and individualize it, and not of the abstract quiddity alone. For 'this human' is not what it is [solely] on account of abstract humanness, but [also] of the composite [*majmū'*] of form and matter, as well as of the accidents by which it becomes individualized in terms of quantity, quality, place, etc.⁶⁷

Avicenna's mereological framework establishes the epistemic and ontological irreducibility of essence, whereby the pure quiddity 'animalness' exists as an irreducible part in each concrete instantiation 'animal' as well as in each universal concept 'animal.'⁶⁸ What is more, according to this text, it seems to allow for a kind of modified and complex intelligible apprehension of the individual thing, which would consist of pure quiddity taken with its accidents and concomitants, that is, with 'other things.' When it comes to the apprehension of both the universal concept and of the composite and hylomorphic individual described here, which is perhaps to be identified with the notion of 'vague individual,'⁶⁹ the crux of Avicenna's argumentation hinges on the distinction between pure quiddity and the 'things' external to it. This distinction is crucial, because it allows the master to say not only that humanness can be *said of* Zayd (in a way not dissimilar to how the universal 'human' can be 'said of' Zayd), but somehow also that humanness *exists in* and as *a part of* Zayd. The implicit distinction between pure quiddity and the mental universal that underlies these texts is significant, because it precludes the affirmation that it is the universal genera, species, and differentiae as such that exist in concrete beings, although they can legitimately be *said of* concrete beings. In contrast, the pure quiddities and natures are not, as such, universal differentiae, species, and genera. This distinction opens a new perspective regarding the ontological reality of the pure natures in the concrete world.

One upshot is that the various conditions of quiddity mentioned previously—positively conditioned (*bi-sharṭ shay'*), negatively conditioned (*bi-sharṭ lā shay'*), and unconditioned (*lā bi-sharṭ shay'*)—are all epistemic aspects that ultimately

⁶⁷ Avicenna, *Notes*, 44.2–6, section 26. In some passages, as in this one, Avicenna appears to recognize the human capacity to obtain intelligibles of concrete things that would include concomitants and accidents in addition to the quiddity itself. This point requires further investigation and cannot be pursued here.

⁶⁸ That is, in the various concepts of universal animal reflected by the various human minds.

⁶⁹ See Black, Avicenna's 'Vague Individual.'

refer to a single, irreducible ontological reality and mode of existence of quiddity. Accordingly, what changes is the conceptual consideration of how quiddity relates to its extrinsic concomitants and accidents, to the other ‘things’ that are not itself. By extension, these conditions suggest different ‘contexts’ of existence (concrete or mental), which dictate the presence of a set of concomitants accompanying essence. In the case of concrete beings, quiddity exists unconditionally or in an unconditioned way (*lā bi-shart̄ shay’*), because although (under one aspect) it exists ‘with other things,’ (under another aspect) it remains irreducible and only itself. As a consequence, it may be apprehended by the mind *with or without* its concomitants and accidents, depending on one’s intention. In either case, these external accidents do not affect the quidditative nature in any way, which remains constant, and whose unique ontological status transcends the attributes imposed by positively-conditioned mental and concrete existence. Thus, the idea of the unconditionedness of pure quiddity depends directly on its ontological and epistemic irreducibility.

Let us return to Avicenna’s claim that pure quiddity exists as a part of the composite substance—whether the universal concept (taken as secondary substance) or the concrete and individual being (taken as primary substance)—for some points still remain obscure. The most pressing question focuses on the part or principle of the concrete existent with which pure quiddity should be identified. Thus far, the analysis and the evidence gathered suggest that it is with its form. Form (*ṣūrah*) is defined as a part (*juz’*) and principle (*mabda’*) of the composite, and Avicenna moreover emphasizes its strong connection with essence. Given these parallels, it stands to reason to correlate quiddity primarily with form. But before turning to this issue in earnest in the next section, it is important to dwell on some potential interpretive pitfalls, some of which are acknowledged by Avicenna himself. In this regard, there are two options that should be rejected from the outset. The first is the assumption that pure quiddity exists solely as a *material part or constituent* in the concrete beings and, hence, that it would be limited to their material constitution or represent a material cause of some sort. This view is untenable, because it would reduce essence to a kind of materialism that Avicenna did not embrace. If anything, quiddity and essence are to be associated with form, not with matter, and Avicenna at any rate does not connect quiddity exclusively with the material elements or with prime matter.⁷⁰ Thus, unlike many theologians who were his contemporaries, Avicenna is not a materialist in the sense that he would recognize *only* material principles or irreduci-

⁷⁰ Nevertheless, some qualifications are called for. Avicenna, *Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 441.3–6, connects the material cause with quiddity; thus, the surface and geometrical body of triangle are like (*ka-*) its material cause. Furthermore, matter fulfils one of the definitions of substance for Avicenna, and matter also has its own quiddity, which is pure receptivity for form. But form is substance and essence in a primary way and has priority over matter; more on this shortly.

ble material constituents of reality.⁷¹ Moreover, assuming (for the sake of argument) that quiddity does exist as a concrete or material part of physical beings, then all individuals belonging to the same species would need to have this material part in common. In other words, all human beings would need to share the material part ‘humanness’ in order to qualify as members of the same species. This view would entail a kind of participation in the same material principle. But there is no single and already existent matter that human beings have in common that accounts for their humanness. Rather, what is common on Avicenna’s account is the essential nature and form humanness, matter being what particularizes each and every individual of the species.

Nor should Avicenna’s position be construed as implying a kind of participation in an essence or form that would be separate and numerically one and the same in all concrete instances along the lines of a Platonic form. There is no numerically one and determinate form of humanness shared by all human beings, or in which these instances would all participate, whose source would at the same time transcend and lie outside the sum of these individual instances.⁷² As Avicenna explains in *Introduction*, animalness in the exterior world is not an “individual that can be pointed at” (*shakhṣan mushāran ilayhi*), nor does it exist separately in actuality.⁷³ Accordingly the master is keen to refute the doctrines of the separate extramental existence of essence and of Platonic participation. In spite of this, Avicenna does regard quiddity in itself as somehow existing in all concrete beings. As I will argue shortly, he also conceives of quiddity in itself as something intelligible, yet not in the way defined by the Platonists. The difficulty involved here is therefore to grasp how Avicenna can uphold such a claim and at the same time emerge unscathed from the criticism he levels at the Platonists.

At first glance, the claim that quiddity in itself exists in the concrete individuals would seem to require a theory of formal participation and the postulation of a separate ontological state of essence. But this need not be the case. I showed previously that Avicenna attributes some kind of ontological *mental* distinctness and abstraction to pure quiddity, but rejects the view that it may exist *separately* and *autonomously in the extramental world*. As Marmura, Porro, and Menn have showed, Avicenna mounted an acerbic critique of the Platonic position that relied among other considerations on the distinction between plain and metathetic negation and especially on how this distinction applies to the relationship between quiddity and exis-

⁷¹ Recall, in this connection, that *juz’* is the term favored by the theologians to express the atom: *al-juz’ alladhī lā yatajazza’*. The atom or *juz’* in their systems also coincides with unitary substance or *jawhar*. Avicenna departs radically from these views.

⁷² I already devoted some attention to Avicenna’s rebuttal of the Platonic theories of the forms and participation in chapter II. What needs to be stressed here, however, is that Avicenna articulates this critique in connection with quiddity in itself explicitly, which he regards as an inherent principle in beings, not a transcendent one like the Platonic Forms.

⁷³ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.19.

tence.⁷⁴ One of Avicenna's key objectives is to show that the consideration of quiddity in itself in abstraction from all other things, that is, of 'negatively-conditioned' quiddity or quiddity 'on the condition of no other thing' (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*), does not imply the separate extramental existence of this quiddity, as the Platonists claim. Although this aspect of pure and abstract quiddity can be conceived of in the mind, it does not possess a separate and autonomous being in the extramental world. In the extramental world, quiddity is always combined with material accidents. Even in the latter case, however, the mind can, through its abstractive powers, disentangle essence from these material accidents, isolate it as an object of thought, and conceive of it fully in abstraction from them.⁷⁵ In this state, however, quiddity is not a mental universal, but rather a common nature, in itself irreducible, yet immanent in a composite and concrete substance. This extramental aspect of quiddity is 'unconditioned' or 'not on the condition of another thing' (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*), meaning that essence may be combined with material accidents and conceived in association with them (its actual state of existence in the extramental world) or abstracted from them and conceived in itself. It is this conceptual flexibility that makes it unconditioned. Either way, this aspect of quiddity is markedly different from the *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* aspect, which Avicenna claims exists only in the mind, and which is *never* combined with material accidents—both on the polemical Platonist reading Avicenna provides and on his own interpretation of this negative condition in the frame of human cognition. Hence, and to recap, the main point to which Avicenna objects is that pure quiddity can be 'negatively conditioned' or *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* in *the extramental, concrete world*. On Avicenna's view, Platonists have mistakenly inferred the ontological separateness of pure quiddity in the concrete world on the basis of its purely mental and epistemic distinctness.⁷⁶

Avicenna's refutation of a robust realist position associated with the legacy of Platonism in Islam can be gauged also from another document, which consists this time of a letter he wrote to the scholars (*'ulamā'*) of Baghdad. In that letter, Avicenna asks these scholars to adjudicate between his position and that of Abū l-Qāsim

74 These authors, however, limit their comments to the connection between negatively-conditioned quiddity and the Platonic forms, thereby focusing exclusively on its function in Avicenna's polemic against Platonic metaphysics.

75 As suggested earlier, one may surmise that the epistemic abstractability of pure quiddity is derived from its being ontologically irreducible in the concrete world. Were pure quiddity not to exist at all in the concrete world or to be fully devoid of reality, it would not be possible for us to recognize and apprehend the whatness of individual beings and to abstract their essence.

76 See especially *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VII.2, 314.9ff. Porro in particular emphasizes this distinction, because his focus lies chiefly on the Avicennian attack against Platonism and against the theory of the extramental existence of the quiddities or forms. Understandably, he is eager to show that Avicenna condemned the theory of the extramental separate existence of the pure quiddities. The notion of an 'eidetic' separation also appears in de Libera, *La querelle*, 234. These two authors construe it as referring to the possibility of conceiving quiddity as a form in the mind without this entailing its extramental separation.

al-Kirmānī regarding a set of philosophical issues, one of which concerns the ontological status of universals. This text, which was studied briefly by Yahya Michot, Marwan Rashed, and Rüdiger Arnzen, contains Avicenna's summary of al-Kirmānī's views followed by his responses to them.⁷⁷ Although the *Letter*, which was written in or shortly after 1015, a date which marks Avicenna's debate with Abū l-Qāsim in Hamadhān, precedes by several years the redaction of *Metaphysics of The Cure*, it puts forth a similar argumentative strategy aimed at undermining the thesis of the extramental existence of the universals and at confining their existence to the mind. Now, although this document can be interpreted as a wholesale rejection of the extramental existence of common things and universals, it is important to point out that Avicenna's intention appears to be primarily to clarify in which way these cannot be said to exist in the concrete world. More specifically, anticipating on the anti-Platonic polemic he unleashes in *Metaphysics*, he is intent on showing that the essences cannot exist as *numerically one or single entities* in the concrete world, as well as the fact that they do not exist *separately* like Platonic forms.⁷⁸ In conveying al-Kirmānī's views, Avicenna tells us that the former regarded humanness as "one humanness" (*insāniyyah wāḥidah*), "one essence" (*dhāt wāḥidah*), "one reality" (*ḥaqīqah wāḥidah*), and as "subsisting" in itself (*bāqiyah*), as well as the fact that he held that "the one reality [e. g., humanness] is one essence in [concrete] existence" (*al-ḥaqīqah al-wāḥidah dhāt wāḥidah fī l-wujūd*).⁷⁹ The key points that emerge from the *Letter* are that an essence, say, humanness, is not a numerically one thing or nature in the concrete; that the humanness of Zayd is different from that of 'Amr, even though both are humanness and nothing else; and that humanness as such is not separate and distinct from the particulars that instantiate it. Admittedly, it remains unclear whether Avicenna in this text is polemicizing solely against a Platonic model of separate forms, or whether he would extend that critique to include other more moderate Platonic positions that posit the essences (such as humanness) as a distinct concept in the divine mind. This point notwithstanding, Avicenna's argument seems primarily aimed at the notion that a single and numerically one essence can be said to exist in the world separately from the particulars. Because of its polemical quality and compressed format, however, the *Letter* pro-

⁷⁷ Michot, *Lettre au vizir*, 10–16; Rashed, Ibn 'Adī, 122–129; Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 95–96, 355–370; see also Gutas, *Avicenna*, 503; and Reisman, *The Making*, 166–185. Avicenna appears to have written several short letters or treatises with the express purpose of refuting al-Kirmānī's philosophical positions, and this mindset is also reflected in *Discussions*, which often takes aim at al-Kirmānī's views. Rashed suggests that Avicenna regarded al-Kirmānī as a mediocre (and not so faithful) disciple of Ibn 'Adī, particularly on the topic of the universals, whose position al-Kirmānī distorted and exacerbated in the direction of a more salient form of Platonism. It should be said that the *Letter* is textually problematic and most probably corrupt in many places. It should accordingly be interpreted with care.

⁷⁸ This is also how both Rashed, Ibn 'Adī, 122–129, and Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 357, have understood the text.

⁷⁹ Avicenna, *Letter*, 77–79.

vides a rather schematic outline of Avicenna's position. As such, it does not yield new philosophical insight beyond the information that can be gathered from *The Cure*. What is more, its impression on the reader may distract from the more nuanced position the master articulates in *Metaphysics V*. At any rate, its contents need to be evaluated in light of the chronology of Avicenna's works and of the richer and longer treatment of the universals in *Metaphysics V*.

Returning to the latter text, one important Arabic term underlying Avicenna's discussion is *mufāriq* ('separate,' and by extension, 'immaterial'). When Avicenna uses this term in his works, it is almost always in order to refer to extramental existents that are separate from matter, such as when he refers to the immaterial movers of the orbs as 'separate beings' and 'separate intellects' (*al-mufāriqāt*, *al-'uqūl al-mufāriqah*). In the context of his refutation of the Platonists, a similar meaning seems to hold. It is in this case meant to refer to the autonomous and separate existence of the Forms in the concrete world. Avicenna chastises the Platonists for holding that the quiddities are *mufāriqah* in the exterior world, in the same way in which the separate intellects can be said to be *mufāriqah*. In a similar vein, the master cautions that the universals cannot exist as 'individually separate' (*mufrad*) in the concrete world.⁸⁰ This Platonic background explains why Avicenna virtually never describes the pure quiddities as being *mufāriqah* and *mufradah*. If applied at all to these objects in the context of his own doctrine, the term *mufāriq* conveys the weak sense of 'mentally abstract or distinct' or 'existing distinctly in the mind,' and not the strong sense of 'endowed with separate existence in the concrete world,' which is precisely how the Platonists construe it. For all intents and purposes, Avicenna uses this term as a synonym of *mujarrad* (abstract or abstracted in the mind) when it comes to pure quiddity.⁸¹

In this connection, Avicenna draws a distinction between "separate [or separable] in definition" and "separate [or separable] in existence" (*mufāriq bi-l-ḥadd* and *bi-l-wujūd*) and uses it to stress the difference between a meaning (*ma'nā*) that is separate or distinct in the mind and a being (*mawjūd*) that is separate in existence.⁸² Whereas quiddity in itself is separate or separable in the first sense, it is not separate according to the second sense.⁸³ With that being said, one must remem-

⁸⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 207.7.

⁸¹ Thus, the main difference between Avicenna's and—on Avicenna's view—the Platonists' usage of these terms is both contextual and semantic and focuses on the distinction between the concrete and mental spheres.

⁸² See the discussion at *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VII.2, 311.8ff.

⁸³ One qualification is in order here. The term *mufāriq* is equivocal, and whether it can be applied to the quiddities and forms in Avicenna's philosophy depends on one's construal of it. In the context of the present discussion and of Avicenna's response to the Platonic theory of the forms, *mufāriq* can be applied to quiddity only if one construes it as meaning not only 'separate from matter,' but also 'existing in an intellect,' and not 'separate from matter' and 'existing alone or in itself like a Platonic form.' In this regard, the term *mufāriq* is ambiguous, since immaterial existence can be in the mind (e.g., a concept) or it can also refer to an exterior existent (e.g., a separate intellect); neverthe-

ber that forms and intelligibles in the human mind are existents, so that eidetic or mental abstractness or separation will, on Avicenna's view, constitute *a qualified kind of ontological separation as well*. But the key distinction here is between distinct, separate, or abstract existence *in the intellect* and *in the extramental and concrete world*. Whereas all the human intelligibles and pure quiddities belong to the former category, the latter includes only God and the separate intellects in Avicenna's metaphysics.⁸⁴ Hence, Avicenna intends to refute the view that the pure quiddities can exist *separately in the extramental world*, as well as to deny that the clause *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* can be applied to them in that context (*contra* the Platonic position).⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Avicenna leaves open the possibility that these same quiddities can exist either *abstractly in the human mind* and/or *immanently in concrete beings*. In fact, if he explicitly rejects the extramental separate existence of the pure quiddities, we saw that he endorses their mental existence as distinct intelligible objects. The master believes that the pure quiddities exist in a state of pure abstractedness and distinctness from everything else in the mind. It is in this case, and in this

less, Avicenna opts to designate the former with the term *mujarrad* in the vast majority of cases. When confronting Plato's theory of the Forms, Avicenna's point is that the pure quiddities, unlike the Forms, are not *mufāriqah* in the sense that they exist *separately on their own*. As I shall argue in chapter V, the pure quiddities are *mufāriqah* in that they exist immaterially, but also *in* the separate intellects. It is to avoid this confusion, I believe, that Avicenna in most cases prefers to describe the quiddities as being *mujarrad*, abstract or abstracted, rather than *mufāriq*, separate. He does, however, refer to the separate forms, but this is presumably a reference to the separate intellects themselves. For a discussion of the term *mufāriq* in connection with Avicenna's epistemology and the Neoplatonic sources, see D'Ancona, Degrees of Abstraction; and Hasse, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*.

84 Indeed, the issue is more complicated than it might first appear. For on Avicenna's account, mental objects—and especially the intellectual concepts, such as the form of humanness mentioned in this passage—are full-fledged existents of a mental or intellectual kind. By implication, this means that their separation will not merely be of an epistemic or gnoseological nature—or what Pini and Porro call a “gnoseological distinction” and an “eidetic separation” respectively—but will in addition correspond to an intellectual ontological mode. Insofar as these concepts are *existents*, their separation must by the same token be an ontological one, that is, an ontological separation from what is material, although this separability will be proper to intellectual existence. These considerations are reflected in the ambiguity of the Avicennian terminology, for the master uses such terms as *mujarrad* to refer to existents that are separate or abstract *both* in the mind *and* in the exterior world. In light of this, it becomes difficult, perhaps even moot, to distinguish between a purely epistemic or gnoseological vs. an ontological separation in Avicenna's account. In order to maintain this distinction, one would need to refine it further and differentiate between ‘extramental ontological separateness’ and ‘mental or intellectual ontological separateness,’ or, as I prefer to put it in this case, ‘distinctness.’ The latter refers to a concept as an immaterial and intelligible entity in the mind and as having a distinct ontological status.

85 See, in particular, *Metaphysics* VII.2, 314.9ff. Later interpreters, such as Ṭūsī, will follow Avicenna closely. In *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 463, Ṭūsī, responding to the comments of Fakhr al-Dīn, tries to establish that the pure quiddities do not exist autonomously and separately in the concrete world and that they are not agents or causes of realized existence. This seems to be a veiled criticism of the Platonic forms *qua* causes. Like Avicenna, however, Ṭūsī leaves open the possibility that the quiddities can exist distinctly in the human mind and immanently as forms in concrete beings.

case only, that the clause *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* can be applied to quiddity. To sum up, Avicenna's argumentation in *The Cure* VII.2 may be described as twofold, rather than one-dimensional: (a) inasmuch as quiddity in itself can be considered in abstraction from all other things and constitutes a distinct form in the intellect, it enjoys an eidetic *and* ontological separation (or rather distinctness) *proper to the mind*; but (b) it would be a mistake to infer from this—as the Platonists have—that it also enjoys a separate existence *in the extramental world*.

Now that the polemical aspect of Avicenna's position and the views that he *did not* embrace have been examined, let us focus on the theory he upheld with regard to how quiddity can be said to exist in concrete beings. In this regard, one may ask the following question: how did Avicenna reconcile his critique of the Platonists with the affirmation of the existence of pure quiddity in concrete beings? Although Avicenna's position precludes a separate, autonomous, and entitative existence of quiddity in itself on the model of a Platonic form, the potential problem of participation and of how essence can exist in, and be a part of, each individual existent without it being a numerically single or one thing common to all of them still needs to be addressed. This argumentative nuance—that quiddity in itself does not exist separately in the extramental world, but that it somehow exists immanently in each individual existent—is the key to understanding Avicenna's position on the issue. Significant in this connection is the notion of *ma'nā* as applied to quiddity in itself. As we saw previously, this notion borders on the logical and the ontological, and in its dual meaning as 'idea or meaning' and 'thing or entity,' it expresses the dual epistemic and ontological aspects of pure quiddity in the human mind and the concrete world. With regard to the point being examined here, Avicenna claims that all instances of humanness, i. e., all individual human beings, possess or are qualified by the *ma'nā* humanness, but he refutes the view that there exists a single and numerically one *ma'nā* (*ma'nā wāḥid*) shared by all of them. In other words, he rejects the possibility of a single quidditative meaning in which all the concrete instances of human would participate in the way that, according to Plato, beautiful things all participate in the Form of beauty. As he states in *Metaphysics* VII.2, "when we say that humanness is one, we do not intend by this that it is one meaning [or entity, *ma'nā wāḥid*], which would be the very same one that is found in many and by which it would become many by means of relation."⁸⁶ Earlier in the same work, he had warned against the view that the humanness of Zayd and the humanness of 'Amr are "numerically one [*wāḥidah bi-l-'adad*]."⁸⁷

In spite of this, Avicenna does believe that there is a *ma'nā*, a quidditative meaning, of humanness that is the same in Zayd and in 'Amr and in all the beings that fall under its definition. So that his position is not that quiddity in itself, e. g., animalness, does not exist *simpliciter* in the concrete particulars, but rather (a) that it

⁸⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VII.2, 315.6–8.

⁸⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 198.11–12.

does not exist as a *numerically determined entity or principle*, and (b) that it does not exist *separately* from these particulars. Barring these two misinterpretations, quiddity in itself may be said to exist in the concrete particulars. It is the same meaning in each one of them, just as the meaning of being a father or fatherhood is the same with regard to the various father-son relations existing in the world. So like the Platonists, he believes that quiddity in itself exists in extramental reality. But unlike them, he believes that it does not exist separately from the concrete particulars. In order to articulate his theory, he begins by quoting the following view:

Someone, however, may say: [a] ‘Animal inasmuch as it is animal does not exist in individuals. [This is] because that which exists in individuals is a certain animal, not animal inasmuch as it is animal. [b] Moreover, animal inasmuch as it is animal exists. It is, hence, separate from individuals.’⁸⁸

Having put forth this account, Avicenna proceeds to describe it as “feeble and inane” and to criticize it on a number of counts. What is important for our purposes is that he rejects not only the theory of the separate existence of animal in itself or the transcendent form animal [b], but also the claim according to which it simply does not exist in particulars [a]. In response to [a], Avicenna believes that quiddity in itself—and not merely quiddity in a vague or diffused sense—does exist in concrete reality, but, in contrast to [b], he holds that it exists only in the particulars and not as a separate and independent form. Avicenna’s criticism of the Platonic position is therefore a nuanced one rather than a wholesale one. It is not centered on the issue of *whether* quiddity in itself exists in extramental reality, but of *how* and *in what mode* it can be said to exist. In light of this, much of the contents of *Metaphysics* V.1—in line with its title, “On general things and how they exist”⁸⁹—consist of an elucidation of how pure quiddity can be said to exist in the concrete world, in the same manner that it tries to explain in what sense pure quiddity can be said to exist in the human soul.

1.3 Quiddity and form

In order to make headway on this issue, I wish to examine how the common nature or quiddity in concrete beings relates to form and especially to the theory of immanent forms or forms existing *in* material beings. For Avicenna’s mereological account of quiddity in the concrete world is closely tied to his hylomorphic theories. The latter provide a lens through which to interpret the idea that pure quiddity is ‘a part’ of the composite substance. In this regard, even though form (*ṣūrah*) is, in the context of the concrete beings, one of the foundational principles (*mabādi*) of physics, I will

⁸⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 2029–11.

⁸⁹ Literally, “on the howness of their existence” (*wa-kayfiyyat wujūdhā*), which of course raises the issue of different modes and states of existence.

argue that Avicenna's theory of form, and especially of form inasmuch as it intersects with essence, is more adequately studied within a metaphysical framework.⁹⁰

In line with the Aristotelian tradition, Avicenna frequently correlates essence and form in his works, describing the form (*ṣūrah*) as that which provides an existent with its essential structure, determinateness, and constitutive features. Form is what actualizes matter and also specifies it into a definite kind of existent, whether a rock, tree, or horse. Without form, there would be only generic prime matter, and nothing else. There can be no doubt that Avicenna was familiar with those passages in which Aristotle defines form as essence, such as *Physics* II.3,194b27, which describes the form as “the statement of the essence,” and *Metaphysics*, Book Zeta, where the Greek term *eidos* that is used to mean form is narrowly connected with essence and substance.⁹¹ For Aristotle, as for Avicenna, the essence of a hylomorphic compound is primarily form, not matter, and it is form also that is to be identified primarily with substance.⁹² Nevertheless, I will attempt to show in what follows that Avicenna's approach to this issue is characterized by two important features: first, an ultra-essentialist stance that effectively and fundamentally identifies form with pure quiddity, and, second, a mereological argument according to which form-essence exists irreducibly as a part (*juz'*) of the concrete individual. In order to establish this, several interconnected points will have to be addressed: that quiddity and nature (according to one sense) correspond to form in concrete beings; that form, construed in this manner, is also substance and essence; and that the essential and substantial form can be regarded as a part of the composite hylomorphic existent. The main challenge in what follows is to provide an account of form and pure quiddity that underscores the interface between these notions, but at the same time resists their strict identification and allows for a certain flexibility with regard to how they relate to one another.

⁹⁰ For a recent and informative study of Avicenna's physical theory of form, see Lammer, *The Elements*, especially chapter 3.

⁹¹ Unlike the Arabic term *ṣūrah*, the Greek term *eidos* can mean both form and species. This is relevant, of course, inasmuch as one can speak of the species-form of the individual, such as ‘human,’ which many later interpreters would identify with a substantial form and an effect of the causation of the Agent Intellect. Even though Avicenna distinguishes between species and form (*nav'* and *ṣūrah*) terminologically and conceptually—the former is one of the universal logical predicates in the mind, the latter a physical principle in concrete beings—the two notions are closely related in his discussion of the substantial form and of the issue of how essence can be said to exist in the individual. In his system as well, the substantial form is primarily to be identified with the species-form, and quiddity is at any rate most immediately and cogently connected with species, since the latter includes within it the various constitutive parts of the definition.

⁹² Aristotle neatly sums up the connection between form, essence, and substance at *Metaphysics* VII.7,1032b1: “by form I mean the essence of each thing and its primary substance”; cf. *Metaphysics*, VII.10.1035b32 and VIII.4.1044a35–36, and, for Avicenna, Lammer, *The Elements*, 165–179. The relation between form and substance in Avicenna is discussed below.

The connection, if not the straightforward equation, between quiddity, nature, and form is one that Avicenna makes repeatedly in his works with regard to mental and concrete existents. I showed in chapter II that Avicenna uses the terms *māhiyyah*, *ṭabī‘ah*, *ma‘nā*, and *ṣūrah* interchangeably in *Introduction* in the context of his onto-epistemological analysis of quiddity in the human mind. In his logical and metaphysical works, the master extends this terminological nexus to the extramental world, where the quiddity and nature that exist in concrete beings can be synonymously described as form, and especially as the essential or substantial form of the existent. In this case, form is broadly equivalent to quiddity’s status as a foundational nature (*ṭabī‘ah*) in concrete beings, and, as such, it can be regarded as an essential form (*ṣūrah dhātiyyah*) and a substantial form (*ṣūrah jawhariyyah*).⁹³ In *Physics* I.6, Avicenna explains that the form of a body is “its quiddity by which it is what it is” (*wa-ṣūratuhu hiya māhiyyatuhu allatī bi-hā huwa mā huwa*), and elsewhere he describes form in itself as “a kind of quiddity” (*al-ṣūrah māhiyyah mā bi-nafsihā*).⁹⁴ In *Physics* I.10, the master specifically differentiates the meaning of *ṣūrah qua* the shape (*shakl*) of a thing and *qua* its quiddity. The latter point appears to pertain to quiddity both in the concrete world and in the mind: “form may be said of quiddity [*māhiyyah*], which, when it is realized [*ḥaṣalat*] in matter, constitutes it [*qawwamathā*] as a species, as well as of the species itself [in the mind].”⁹⁵ Approached from this angle, Avicenna’s entire analysis of how quiddity exists in the concrete world revolves around the notion of essential form, which emerges as a key concept in his physics and metaphysics.⁹⁶

One notes also the ambivalence of form inasmuch as pure quiddity is correlated to form both in a concrete and intellectual context. In this manner, the formal nature bears a direct relation to the mental existence of quiddity, inasmuch as the nature is precisely what is abstracted and apprehended by the mind from concrete particulars in its attempt to grasp the universals. In this case, the abstracted essential form, or more precisely the nature in itself, is combined with logical notions such as genus, species, or differentia, as well as with universality or the theoretical predicability of many, to produce the universal logical notions, such as ‘the universal genus animal’ or ‘the universal species horse,’ and, hence, ultimately, an ‘intelligible form’ (*ṣūrah ‘aqliyyah*). Accordingly, in *Definitions*, the master explains that *ṣūrah* can mean uni-

⁹³ Avicenna, *Definitions*, 21, which glosses one sense of *ṭabī‘ah* as *ṣūrah dhātiyyah*.

⁹⁴ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.6, 45.3–4; I.2, 21.5.

⁹⁵ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.10, 70.1–2. The connection between quiddity and form is stressed in many other parts of this work; see notably 21, 45–47, 70, and 104.

⁹⁶ Strictly speaking, *ṣūrah* is a technical term used in psychology and, by extension, in metaphysics, but not in logic, since it conveys—or at the very least inevitably raises—notions of substantiality and ontology. Accordingly, this term appears profusely in Avicenna’s physical and metaphysical writings and—more sparingly—in his logical writings as well (as is the case of *Introduction* I.12) to describe essence in relation to concrete individuals. The extension of *ṣūrah* to the concrete and intellectual contexts is reflected in Avicenna’s philosophy in the role of the Agent Intellect.

versal species (*nawʿ*), as well as refer to every quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and quidditative reality (*ḥaqīqah*), in whichever mode these may be.⁹⁷ In *Notes*, Avicenna uses the terms form (*ṣūrah*) and quidditative meaning (*maʿnā*), as well as specific examples of pure quiddity (such as humanness), to describe the essence of concrete beings.⁹⁸ As he further explains in *Introduction*, it is most fitting that the same quiddity, such as animal in itself (*al-ḥayawāniyyah fī nafsihā*), be called at times ‘natural form’ (*ṣūrah ṭabiʿiyyah*), when one is referring to its ontological status as the form of a natural existent, and at other times, ‘intelligible form’ (*ṣūrah ʿaqliyyah*), when it is being contemplated by the intellect in itself or as a universal.⁹⁹ By the same token, and considered absolutely, nature or pure quiddity is not to be identified strictly either with the hylomorphic form or with the logical species or genus *per se*. The following statement in *On the Soul of Salvation* neatly brings together these various notions and technical terms:

The form of humanness [*ṣūrat al-insāniyyah*] and the quiddity of humanness [*māhiyyat al-insāniyyah*] are a nature [*ṭabiʿah*] that is necessarily shared equally by all the individuals of the species ... It is one thing in definition, although it accidentally occurs to it to exist [*wujīdat*] in this or that individual and, hence, to become multiple, although this [multiplicity] does not belong to it inasmuch as its nature is humanness.¹⁰⁰

As this excerpt shows, *ṣūrah* can, in a physical and metaphysical context, refer to the nature (*ṭabiʿah*) and pure quiddity (*māhiyyah*) in the individuals. What is more, it is apparent that this nature and quiddity, which corresponds to form in the hylomorphic compound, also has a correspondence in the mind, where it coincides with the numerically one universal concept and definition. As such, however, this nature is essentially common, regardless whether it is related to the hylomorphic forms or to the universal logical notions (such as species and genus).

In view of this, it is important to distinguish between the two domains of logic and abstract thought, on the one hand, and concrete reality, on the other. For the interplay between these notions applies primarily to the realm of intellectual conception, that is to say, to the abstract consideration of how quiddity relates to its concomitants. The ‘universal human’ in the mind is, properly speaking, a species, a form, and a quiddity. One might say more specifically that it is a single universal in-

⁹⁷ Avicenna, *Definitions*, 16.

⁹⁸ See Avicenna, *Notes*, 143–144, sections 196 and 197.

⁹⁹ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 68.18–19.

¹⁰⁰ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 344.10–13. The verb *wujīdat* used here can refer either to *ṣūrah* or *māhiyyah* or *ṭabiʿah*, all of which are feminine nouns. The ambiguity could be intentional, and in any case it fully accords with the Avicennian doctrine that form is quiddity and nature in the concrete being. Moreover, there is also the ambiguity of *ṣūrah* as a term expressing the interface of mental and concrete forms, both of which again coincide with quiddity and nature. Cf. *Notes*, 386, section 684, where it is said that the quidditative meaning humanness becomes multiple only as a result of concomitant causes (*bi-ʾasbāb lāḥiqah*).

telligible form referring to a definite species. But these logical notions do not exist actually in the concrete world according to Avicenna. Not only does genus *per se* and species *per se* not exist as an extramental form along the lines of the Platonic ideas, but Avicenna would also not tolerate the claim that the genus ‘animal’ and the species ‘human’ can exist separately and actually in the concrete world as a numerically one generic and specific form respectively. In external reality, therefore, there is a sense in which the universal quiddity and form are dissimilar, since quiddity *qua* species or *qua* genus will not exist as such, with the apparent implication that the essential or substantial forms in concrete beings are not universal.¹⁰¹ Avicenna expounds on this difference in *Metaphysics* V generally, where his main argument throughout relies on the fact that universals cannot exist actually in the concrete individuals. In *Metaphysics* V.8 he justifies this view on the grounds that whereas quiddity encompasses both the differentia-form and the genus-matter in its definition, form is merely a part of the composite substance, and one that is distinct from matter. Definition and quiddity, as analyzed and conceived by the rational soul, cannot therefore correspond strictly to the form in the concrete human being. In spite of this, Avicenna insists that quiddity does exist in the concrete individual and that it can be identified with form. So how can one reconcile these various claims?

Avicenna’s approach to the issue of how the logical predicates in the mind relate to the hylomorphic constitution of concrete beings seems to have relied heavily on the Arabic translations of works by Alexander of Aphrodisias. The latter developed some of the main distinctions that are expounded also by Avicenna in order to address the relation between quiddity and hylomorphic form. As Marwan Rashed has shown in a remarkable study, Alexander articulated an essentialist interpretation of form that enabled him to define it not only as a part of substance, but as substance itself, and as the foundational essential principle in composite beings. Thus, form has ontological priority over the species as a whole and is also the primary principle of substantiality in the individual. What is more, Alexander establishes a close correspondence between differentia and hylomorphic form by conjoining logic and ontology. Thus, there is “a semantic identity between differentia and hylomorphic form,” where both differentia and form can be regarded as substance, although these notions are ultimately kept separate.¹⁰²

101 The issue of the universality of the substantial forms is discussed in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Book Zeta, and also informs much of the medieval discourse of how the logical categories in the mind relate to a hylomorphic framework and to concrete existence. Avicenna’s philosophical system is no exception and brings this same point into focus, with the difference that, in his works, the problematic acquires a special dimension due to the separation of universality from essence. Nonetheless, and in spite of this separation, one may legitimately raise the question of whether the natures and forms that Avicenna posits in concrete beings are universal in their own way; this issue is tackled in more detail below.

102 Rashed, *Essentialisme*, 44–47, 53, 81, 85 ff., 94, 132, 147 (my translation from the French). Some of the key treatises by Alexander used in Rashed’s analysis have been preserved in Arabic. This indicates that Avicenna could have consulted them when elaborating his own doctrines. Rashed’s trans-

It is noteworthy that some crucial features of Alexander's method appear to have been co-opted by Avicenna for the purposes of his own philosophical treatment of quiddity. Perhaps the most striking parallels between these two thinkers are their conception of the intricate relationship between logic and ontology, as well as their intention to discuss form in light of this logico-ontological framework. Among the conceptual tools outlined by Alexander and endorsed by Avicenna are the distinction between genus and matter, on the one hand, and between differentia and form, on the other; the corollary idea that form and differentia have an immediate correspondence, that they are part of substance and a cause of substantiality for the whole substance; and that the universality of form is somehow intrinsic and essential to it and not merely an accidental attribute. Although Rashed's study enables us to highlight the formal and methodological parallels between Alexander and Avicenna in a useful way, the priority with regard to the present analysis is to try to understand why Avicenna would have been interested in Alexander's arguments and what he hoped to achieve by maintaining these distinctions. In what follows, I argue that Avicenna pursued and expanded Alexander's essentialist approach in order to establish pure quiddity at the center of his ontology of composite beings.

Avicenna, following Alexander and some members of the Baghdad School who were directly influenced by the Greek philosopher,¹⁰³ is intent on maintaining a set of distinctions whose immediate function appears to be to delineate what belongs to the domain of logic and conceptual thought and what belongs to the entitative domain of physics and metaphysics. One such seminal distinction focuses on the difference between 'body' or 'animal' *qua* genus and *qua* matter, as well as on the difference between 'rational' *qua* differentia and *qua* form. These distinctions are obviously important to Avicenna, because he returns to them on numerous occasions in his corpus. They are articulated, for example, in *Demonstration* I.10, *Categories* I.3, and *Metaphysics* V.3. If Avicenna dwells at length on these notions in his works, he on the other hand does not explain why they are significant for his philosophical project as a whole. In order to answer this question in a satisfactory way, one should not only acknowledge the Persian thinker's debt to Alexander, but also emphasize in what way he goes further than his predecessor in what Rashed has called an 'essentialist' interpretation of form. Yet again, the crux of Avicenna's method focuses on the notion of pure quiddity, which is arguably one of the main doctrinal differences between these two thinkers, who otherwise adhered to a common set of Aristotelian

lations of two of these texts are by far the most up-to-date and precise renditions into a European language; see notably *That Matter is not Genus* (95 ff.) and especially *On Difference (Fī l-faṣl)* (104 ff.).
103 Yaḥyā b. 'Adī wrote a commentary on Alexander entitled *On the Difference between Genus and Matter (Fī l-farq bayna l-jins wa-l-māddah)*, as well as another text on the distinction between body *qua* substance and body *qua* quantity (on the latter, see Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī and Ibrāhīm ibn 'Adī), both of which show that he was preoccupied by similar questions. Yaḥyā also says relevant things about this in his treatise dealing with the three kinds of existence; see Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*.

theses and shared a similar outlook shaped by *Categories* and *Metaphysics*. In the context of Avicenna's thought, I would argue, these distinctions serve a specific purpose, namely, to explain how quiddity in itself can be said to exist both in the mind (e. g., quiddity combined with genus or differentia and universality) and in concrete beings (quiddity *qua* immanent form). Distinguishing between differentia and form, but connecting both notions with pure quiddity, enables Avicenna to locate the latter in the mental, logical domain, as well as the physical, hylomorphic domain, without strictly identifying these notions and collapsing them into a single plane, which would result in insurmountable interpretive difficulties.¹⁰⁴ If this hypothesis is correct, then, the set of distinctions Avicenna takes over from Alexander would have been designed to buttress his essentialist account of the distinctness and irreducibility of pure quiddity by enabling its localization in the mental and concrete contexts. If differentia or species does not exist as such in concrete beings, since it is a logical universal notion, the pure quiddity that underlies differentia or species, on the other hand, does exist in concrete beings. Thus, Avicenna would not limit himself, like Alexander, to a "semantic identity" between differentia and form,¹⁰⁵ but, I contend, would make a parallel ontological claim: the quiddity of the differentia in the mind is fundamentally the same as the quiddity of the form in the concrete, so that there would be, on his account, an 'ontological identity' between differentia and form if these are considered with regard to their irreducible essential principle, which is pure quiddity. What justifies this elaboration on Alexander's account is the unique Avicennian doctrine of essence, which can be envisaged solely 'in itself.'

The distinctions between logic and physics, between differentia and form, between universal species in the mind and common hylomorphic forms in the concrete, suggest that Avicenna is conceiving of quiddity in two different ways. If conceived of logically in relation to the definition (*ḥadd*), quiddities are universal logical notions or predicates that are parts of the definition and participate in the realization of the complete essence. If conceived of physically as principles of concrete beings, quiddities are substantial forms that can also be regarded as parts of the composite substance, even though they do not inhere in matter the way an accident inheres in a subject. As Avicenna explains in *Metaphysics* V.8, "form is always part of the quiddity in composite [substances]."¹⁰⁶ And in *Metaphysics* VI.5, he mentions "the form of humanness in human matter" (*ṣūrat al-insāniyyah fī l-māddah al-in-*

104 One of these difficulties has already been addressed: how can a universal exist in concrete beings? If the universal genus animal in the mind was identical with an exterior form, then absolute animal would exist in the concrete like a Platonic form.

105 Rashed, *Essentialisme*, 44; cf. Avicenna, *Notes*, 771–5, where it is said that genus "corresponds to" (*yunāsibu*) matter and differentia to form.

106 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.8, 245.6; see also Text 18. That form and matter are 'parts' of the composite substance is a standard feature of Avicenna's physics; see, for instance, Avicenna, *Physics*, I.10–11; and the physics section of *Elements of Philosophy*, 17.

sāniyyah)¹⁰⁷ as an example of this. This implies that the differentia ‘rational’ that is a part of the definition in the mind corresponds directly to a form in the concrete being, which endows it with rationality and, hence, contributes to the substantial realization of its humanness. In both cases, however, it is quiddity in itself that underlies the two sides of the distinction: the pure quiddity ‘rationalness’ *qua* differentia and *qua* form. Likewise, the quiddity in itself ‘animalness’ *qua* genus and *qua* matter.¹⁰⁸ At any rate, Avicenna appears to establish a correlation between the parts of quiddity in the mind and the parts of the actual entity in existence. More specifically, the parts of the definition correspond to causes and principles in the concrete individual. As he explains in *Physics* I.1, “when the causes enter into the constitution of the effects as parts of them—as, for example, the case of wood and shape relative to the bed—then their relation to the effects is that of simple parts to composites.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, the parts of the definition in the mind have a direct counterpart in the causes and parts of the composites in extramental reality. Quite daringly, Avicenna applies the term ‘quiddity’ to all of these principles.¹¹⁰

Here, however, a certain dissymmetry has crept in: for ‘animal’ *qua* genus in the mind is a universal form that is a part of the definition and essence ‘human.’ However, it corresponds to matter or body in the realized concrete substance, since to be an animal in concrete reality means to possess a certain type of body endowed with certain corporeal and psychological powers and functions, such as growth, sensation, and nutrition. The species to which the definition points (say, human) will therefore amount to a composite of matter and form, rather than to form alone. How, then, can the quiddity ‘animalness’ be a universal form in the mind and at the same time correspond to matter or body in the concrete horse or human? This problem is compounded by the fact that, on the evidence of Text 16 above, both ‘human’ and ‘animal’ can be said to somehow exist in the concrete individual, when one corresponds to a species in the mind and the other to a genus. It is true that in the case of composite substances, the definition by genus and differentia will always refer to a composite of form and matter in external reality. This, of course,

107 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VI.5, 294.12.

108 In this fashion, there is a certain symmetry in Avicenna’s mereological thinking: universal differentia and genus are parts of the definition in the mind; form and matter are parts of the composite substance in concrete reality. In each case, however, it is really the pure quiddities *qua* form or universal logical concept that are parts, but in different ways. For the interconnection between these notions, see also *Notes*, 143–144, sections 196 and 197.

109 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.1, 10.2–4. In fact, earlier in that passage Avicenna uses the term “correlation” (*muqāyahāh*) to express the link between these various principles.

110 The relation between quiddity and the four causes is discussed in chapter IV. The notion that form *qua* principle is a part (*juzʿ*) of the concrete composite being is articulated in various sections of *Physics*: I.3, 32; I.6, 46–50; and I.10, 70–72. Ṭūsī neatly encapsulates the correspondence between essence-differentia and essence-form in his *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 1, 203.9–11, when he states the following: “The causes of quiddity are: genus and difference when it comes to mental existence; and matter and form when it comes to concrete existence.”

is another reason why Avicenna is intent on distinguishing between animal *qua* genus and animal *qua* body or matter: the logical, universal notion of genus, which is a form in the mind, corresponds to a corporeal or bodily entity in the concrete world, but for this same reason the two cannot be identical. Here the problem is not only one of universality—i.e., how can a universal genus exist in the concrete?—but also one of materiality—i.e., how can an intelligible form in the mind be identical with, or correspond to, something corporeal or material? Yet, to infer from this that there is a radical ontological disconnect between these two aspects is also misguided, since it fails to appreciate the idiosyncrasies of Avicenna's hylomorphic theory, which are closely tied to this doctrine of cosmological emanation and causation. The principles that ensure an essential link between the two are, first, Avicenna's doctrine of pure quiddity, and, second, his identification of quiddity or essence with form as something emanated from the Agent Intellect. For the purpose of the following exposition, I provide a schematic account of how matter relates to form and refer to forms in the plural (*ṣuwar*), deferring temporarily the important questions of the number of substantial forms in matter and whether Avicenna should be regarded as pluralist on this question.

According to Avicenna's hylomorphic theory, individual concrete existents arise thanks to the information of prime matter by a series of forms, starting with the corporeal form, followed by a series of substantial forms, the generic forms (e.g., animal body) and the specific forms (e.g., two-footed animal, rational, etc.), and ending with the accidental forms (black, etc.). What this means is that even animal body is not pure matter, but will consist, at least conceptually, of a compound of prime matter and several forms that already inhere in it. Thus, that to which genus corresponds to will always, in reality, entail forms in matter or 'informed' matter. Matter itself, strictly speaking, is just prime matter for Avicenna and nothing else. It does not exist actually, and it certainly is not identical with animal body. For this reason, if animal body can be regarded as a genus for human, it, on the other hand, is also a species for generic body, which implies its prior assumption of form. Thus, in spite of the foregoing—or rather, *thanks* to the foregoing—it is also possible to conceive of genus itself as a form rather than matter: not only as a universal intelligible form in the mind, but also as a hylomorphic form inhering in a more undetermined state of matter in concrete reality. Further still, it is possible to conceive of pure quiddity (e.g., animalness) as a form both in the mind (genus) and in the composite substance (substantial form). Since genus is not really matter itself or matter *simpliciter* (which is prime matter), but rather informed matter or, more precisely, forms in matter, it is form that will specify matter into a particular body/genus, e.g., animal or mineral body. In other words, genus corresponds, in the concrete world, to a form that has specified and determined matter to be a certain kind of corporeal entity. What genus corresponds to (*yunāsibu*) in reality will be more appropriately regarded as form.

Hence, if quiddity is conceived of *in itself* as a single, simple, and irreducible thing, that is, if human *in itself* and animal *in itself* are intended, and not the univer-

sal notions to which they give rise in the mind, then there is a sense in which these pure quiddities can be identified with the various forms that inhere in a concrete being.¹¹¹ In that case, as Avicenna himself puts it, the expressions ‘the form of humanness,’ ‘the nature of humanness,’ and ‘the quiddity of humanness’ point to the same ontological and physical principle (*mabdaʿ*) in concrete reality, namely, the form that inheres in matter and provides the existent with its essential identity and structure. This interpretation would apply to both ‘human’ and ‘animal,’ and it would explain why Avicenna is intent on locating the quiddities ‘animal’ and ‘human’ in concrete beings, i. e., quiddities that, in the mind, correspond to different logical predicates.¹¹² For animal-genus in the mind translates, in the concrete world, into animal-form in matter, which is a substantial form specifying a state of undetermined matter or body, while rational-form will also be a form that endows animal body with yet another level of formal specification. This hypothesis has the merit of paying heed to the notion of essential hierarchy or *martabah* in Avicenna’s philosophy, which dictates that one and the same thing, e. g., animal, can be both species and genus depending on what it is related to. Thus, animal is species for corporeal matter, but genus for human or horse.¹¹³ In the concrete being, animal can be seen as species-form for the matter or body it specifies, where undetermined corporeal matter would stand to it as its genus. In this manner, animal-form and human-form can be posited as substantial forms in the concrete individual, inasmuch as their rank and degree of ontological specification would differ. Or, alternatively, they can be posited as quidditative meanings (*maʿānī*) subsumed within a single form, if one intends to shun a pluralist model of the substantial forms. Either way, there is a sense in which the pure quiddities underlie the forms in the concrete. Avicenna seems to imply just this in a passage of *Physics*:

Text 19: In the case of composite bodies, the nature is something like the form [*ka-shayʿ min al-ṣūrah*], but not the true being of the form. [That] is because composite bodies do not become what they are by a power belonging to them that essentially produces motion in a single direction, even if they inevitably have those powers inasmuch as they are what they are. So it is as if [*ka-anna*] those powers [*quwā*] are a part of their form [*juzʿ min ṣūratihā*], and as if [*ka-anna*] their form is a combination of a number of quidditative meanings [*tajtamiʿu min ʿiddat*]

111 Perhaps this is what Avicenna had in mind when he states at *Physics*, I.2, 21.5 that “form, in itself, is a certain quiddity” (*al-ṣūrah māhiyyah mā bi-nafsihā*).

112 See also Text 13, which appears with some variations in *On the Soul*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics of The Cure*, and which presents *māhiyyah*, *ṭabīʿah*, and *ṣūrah* as cognate terms in this context. The distinction Avicenna makes in *Metaphysics* V.8 between quiddity and form is not intended absolutely, but is rather motivated by the context at hand and the aim of his discussion. There he shifts the emphasis toward the epistemological and definitional aspects of essence in the mind in order to clarify how it can be said to differ from form as an ontic principle in beings. This does not mean, however, that form in concrete reality is not related to essence in any way. As was stressed earlier, one meaning of *ṣūrah* in the concrete world is essence, in which case one may speak of the ‘essential form’ of things.

113 For a formulation of this point in connection with genus, see Avicenna, *Salvation*, 14.

ma'ānī], which become unified [*fa-tattaḥidu*]. An example would be humanness [*al-insāniyyah*], since it includes [*tataḍammanu*] the powers of nature as well as the powers of the vegetative, animal, and rational soul; and when all of these are in some way 'combined,' they yield the quiddity of humanness. (The particulars of this manner of combining are more fittingly explained in first philosophy).¹¹⁴

This excerpt aptly shows that the various quidditative meanings (*ma'ānī*) that are necessary for the essential constitution of something to be fully realized can all be said to underlie the form of that existent. What is remarkable in that passage is that Avicenna applies mereological reasoning to the form itself, suggesting that it can be envisaged as a combination of various pure quiddities, among which are animalness and rationality. When all are present or existent *in* the form, they yield the pure quiddity 'humanness.'¹¹⁵

One upshot seems to be that every quiddity in itself, such as animalness, rationality, humanness, horseness, etc., regardless of whether it is considered as a universal genus, species, or differentia in the mind, corresponds, in the concrete world, to a substantial form—or, alternatively, to a *ma'nā* embedded within that substantial form—that inheres in and informs bare three-dimensional matter or generic body to determine and specify it into the class of existent that it is. This form is, in a sense, a pure quiddity, since it is horseness in itself that endows matter and body with

114 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.6, 46.3–8, translation by McGinnis, slightly revised.

115 In this case as well, it is ultimately unclear whether Avicenna regards these various quidditative meanings as being fully unified and indistinguishable from one another in existence, or whether they remain irreducibly existent and distinct from one another in the composite. The former reading is suggested, *inter alia*, by the claim that these *ma'ānī* and *quwā* become unified (*fa-tattaḥidu*), but at the same time, Avicenna maintains a mereological interpretation and a vocabulary of synthesis and addition (*tajtami'u*, *tataḍammanu*) that would seem to exclude that possibility. Another way to approach this problem is through the intramental/extramental distinction, where the mereological and synthetic aspects of Avicenna's argumentation could be said to be purely logical or conceptual and the result of analytical thought. This approach seems vindicated in this text by the locution *ka-anna*, which suggests a mere analogy or image between the conceptual distinctions drawn by the mind and reality. Yet, although these distinctions are definitely—and even perhaps primarily—conceptual, this interpretation would not do justice to the many other related texts where Avicenna's language is more explicit with regard to the extramental realization of these notions. What is more, Avicenna's injunction in this passage that this issue should be addressed in "first philosophy" (i.e., in metaphysics) suggests that its implications transcend the purely logical domain. On my view, and as I argue in this section, the point seems to be that there is no strict identity between the logical notions in the mind and the physical principles of concrete beings, but that they have a certain correspondence or correlation in virtue of the common quidditative meanings that bridge these two realms. This explains the oscillation in Avicenna's language between emphasizing mere correspondence and analogy, on the one hand, and a realist status of quiddity, on the other. This problem to some extent overlaps with the issue of whether only one or several substantial forms should be posited in Avicenna's physics and metaphysics. For positing a single substantial form that would somehow subsume all others would seem to go hand in hand with a conceptualist reading of the various parts, meanings, and powers of quiddity as potentially illustrated in the passage above.

the essential identity, structure, and features that belong to individual horses. These quidditative forms provide determinedness to bare matter. They function as pendants to the logical parts of the definition in the mind. It is in this regard that one can say that quiddity, nature, and even (with some important qualifications) genus, differentia, and species, all correspond to a formal and essential principle in the concrete existents inasmuch as they crystallize in their forms. Summing up these senses, Avicenna at *Metaphysics* VI.4 explains that “form [ṣūrah] is [also] said of a thing’s species, genus, differentia and all of these things [taken together],”¹¹⁶ and at *Metaphysics* V.3 he further notes that “nowadays, in our time and according to the custom in scientific books, species refers only to logical species [*al-naw’ al-manṭiqī*] and to the forms of things [*suwar al-ashyā’*].”¹¹⁷

The implication of the foregoing seems to be that the substantial form ‘human’ in concrete beings and the universal intelligible form ‘human’ in the mind have something irreducible in common, which is the pure quiddity ‘humanness.’ Consequently, it is not the hylomorphic form *per se* that is abstracted by the mind in order to be contemplated, but rather the quidditative meaning and nature that is intrinsic to it. Avicenna says precisely this in a passage of *Notes*:

These existent essences [*dhawāt*] do not become forms [*suwar*] for the soul or the intellect, in spite of what some people claim. Rather, it is their quidditative meanings [*ma’ānī*] that become forms for it [the soul or intellect].¹¹⁸

In light of the foregoing, one better understands why, although Avicenna regards genus and species primarily as logical notions, he at times extends them (especially species) to the concrete world and speaks of generic and specific forms as existing or as being realized or actualized in external reality. Such instances appear in *Metaphysics* V.3–6 when the master states that “the generic nature [*ṭabī’ at al-jinsiyyah*] occurs to the thing that is a species both in existence and in the mind together when the species comes to be in its completion”¹¹⁹; that species is “the nature realized both in existence and in the mind”¹²⁰; and that “genus becomes differentia and species in actual existence [*fī l-wujūd bi-l-fī’l*].”¹²¹ Thus, Avicenna sometimes loosely refers to ‘the form of genus’ and ‘the form of species’ as being realized in existence or in

116 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VI.4, 282.12–13. Cf. *Physics*, I.10, 70, where Avicenna states that “the formal cause might be related to [or in an analogical relation to, *bi-l-qiyās ilā*] either genus or species—that is, the form that makes matter to subsist.”

117 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.3, 213.8–10; translated by Marmura, in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 162.

118 Avicenna, *Notes*, 191.4–5, section 285.

119 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.3, 217.12–13; translated by Marmura, in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 166, revised.

120 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.5, 228.4.

121 Avicenna, *Metaphysics* V.6, 231.1–2. It is not entirely clear, however, how exactly Avicenna conceives of the realization of these principles ‘in existence.’ I return to this point in section IV.3.

concrete beings. It is noteworthy that he identifies species especially with the pure quiddity, nature, and substantial form of a concrete thing. In *Definition*, he glosses one meaning of *ṣūrah* as species (*nawʿ*),¹²² and evidence from *Metaphysics* can be gathered to further corroborate this connection.¹²³ As in Aristotle, then, where the Greek term *eidos* can mean both form and species, *ṣūrah*, when related to essence, designates first and foremost species, which is what corresponds the closest to the realized nature of an individual and to primary substance.¹²⁴

By holding these views, though, the master does not intend to say that there is a single and numerically one form of the genus animal or of the species horse that exists in concrete reality as a Platonic form. Rather, his point is that each horse has a nature horseness and a nature animalness, which are encapsulated in the quidditative meaning (*maʿnā*) (or quidditative meanings, *maʿānī*) of that being, and which can be abstracted by the intellect and made to correspond to the universal logical notions species-horse and genus-animal in the mind. Accordingly, the nature and essential form 'animalness' is what makes it an animal body, as opposed to a generic three-dimensional body. And the nature and essential form 'horseness' is what specifies it as a horse and not an elephant or a lion.¹²⁵ The natures and quiddities of an-

122 Avicenna, *Definitions*, 16.

123 *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*, V.3, 213.8–10.

124 Species, it should be recalled, is also the most direct answer given to the question asked about the quiddity of things, as in the question: what are Zayd and 'Amr?

125 Avicenna's insistence on distinguishing matter and form from genus and differentia respectively may have the aim of establishing the priority of form as an ontological principle. Indeed, it is form that in each case makes the actually existent thing the thing it is, and it is form that Avicenna, following Aristotle and Alexander, identifies as essence and substance. He regards all the constitutive elements of quiddity as being describable in terms of forms inhering in matter in the context of exterior existence. Although there is a sense in which genus corresponds to matter, what exists in the concrete world is really informed matter, not genus. These notions are therefore not interchangeable. Genus and species are universal logical notions that exist only in the mind. Particular, concrete beings are in reality composed of form and matter, not genus and differentia. Since prime matter, or prime matter together with the form of corporeality, needs to be further specified in order to be actualized into a specific kind of existent, every component or part added to matter will be added *qua* form. Hence, in the case of a human being, animal is a form added to matter that specifies generic body into animal body; and human or rational is a form added to animal body to further specify it as a rational animal, etc. Thus, even when Avicenna contrasts body *qua* matter and body *qua* genus, he intends not pure matter, but informed and specified matter. The same distinction can be applied to 'animal.' These distinctions proceed from the same concern to demarcate logical considerations from ontic states or situations. McGinnis calls this the 'synthetic process.' He also points out that, in the concrete world, the more specific ontologically precedes the more general; rational animal precedes animal; and animal body precedes body. In other words, the more informed state of matter precedes the less informed; this is due, among other things, to the actuality and priority of form. In contrast, in logic and in reflection, this order is reversed: genus precedes species; body precedes animal body and animal body precedes rational animal body; see McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, 173–178. Aquinas, following Alexander and Avicenna, also distinguishes between matter and form, on the one hand, and

imalness and horseness do exist as forms in each concrete horse, or else there would only be indeterminate matter or body. But these forms *qua* natures are neither subject to numerical unity nor are they the participated forms of a transcendent and independent archetypal form of animal and horse.¹²⁶ And they are, like the mental universal notions that correspond to them, ultimately reducible to the quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) and nature (*ṭabī'ah*) that exist in the concrete horse.

To be sure, then, one possible reconstruction of Avicenna's view of how the universal predicates relate to the hylomorphic composite beings implies a plurality of substantial or essential forms. On this interpretation, every natural existent would be composed of prime matter combined with a variety of forms: first, the corporeal form, then, the generic and specific forms, and, finally, a plurality of accidental forms.¹²⁷ Each one of these essential forms would have its own pure quiddity and nature (corporeality, animalness, rationalness, humanness, etc.) and would also correspond to a universal predicate in the mind. Moreover, under one aspect, these forms would ontologically precede the logical notions that correspond to them in the mind and that are derived from them through abstraction.¹²⁸

It is on this reasoning that genus, differentia, and species are sometimes loosely identified with the substantial and essential forms in concrete beings. Although Avi-

genus and differentia, on the other, although in his philosophy as well there is a strong connection between these notions; see Galluzzo, Aquinas.

126 Avicenna at times does describe the substantial forms in nature as being one: thus, in *Notes*, 143–144, sections 196 and 197, the substantial form human is described as being “in itself unchanging” (*al-ṣūrah fi dhātiha ghayr mukhtalifah*) and as corresponding to “a single quidditative meaning” (*ma'nā wāhid*). Difference and diversity are said to come exclusively from matter. It is quite clear, nevertheless, that the oneness attributed to form is due to its relation to the mental universal concept, which is a numerically one thing in the mind.

127 It is intriguing that Avicenna, on at least one occasion (*Definitions*, 17), appears to regard even prime matter as a kind of form or as possessing its own special and unique quidditative form (cf. *Notes*, 342.2). Since prime matter possesses a quiddity, as well as a kind of potential existence, and since it is also substance (*jawhar*) according to Avicenna, it is not altogether surprising that it could also be said to possess an essential form in a qualified sense. Prime matter is, after all, “created absolutely” (*mubda'ah*) (*Notes*, 171.7, section 251) and emanated from the Agent Intellect, and so it must be emanated *as a form*, since the Agent Intellect is the ‘Giver of Forms’; see Davidson, *Alfarabi*, 76; Janssens, *The Notions*. But it should be noted that in *Notes*, 135, section 181, Avicenna rejects the literal ascription of a form to prime matter that would be different from its essence or something added to it. So if form there is, it would be the form of prime matter itself and nothing else, i.e., a form identical with its essence as pure receptivity. In contrast, at *Notes*, 142, section 193, Avicenna says that the receptivity of pure matter is not literally form, but something “like form” (*shabih bi-l-ṣūrah*). Nevertheless, all of this is quite tantalizing and not expressly spelled out by Avicenna.

128 As McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, 173–178, points out, form and matter as causes and as real principles in the concrete world precede the logical notions of genus and differentia that exist in the mind. In concrete reality, the more specific precedes the more general, since what exists is the human being with all its forms and not just animal *per se*. This order is reversed in the mind, where the more general (e.g., the genus animal) logically precedes the more specific (e.g., rational animal).

cenna occasionally allows for a qualified sense of universality to be applied to them in this context (see Text 7, Text 17, Text 20, and Text 21), he by far prefers to describe them as common (*mushtarakah*). All of this is not as surprising as it may sound. Because genus and species, or rather ‘genusness’ and ‘speciesness’ (*al-jinsiyyah wa-l-naw’iyyah*), are logical notions and intentions applied to the pure quiddities in the mind, and because, on Avicenna’s view, the pure quiddities do exist extramentally under another aspect, by implication these logical notions will have a correspondence with the ontological principles in the concrete world, namely, the essential and substantial forms of individual beings, which are the extramental instantiations of the pure quiddities. So, “in the composite [*murakkab*],” Avicenna writes, “genus corresponds to [*yunāsibu*] matter, and differentia to form.”¹²⁹ The terms ‘quiddities’ and ‘forms’ thus emphasize the fundamental ontological *symmetry* or *correspondence* between the concrete and mental spheres in Avicenna’s physics and metaphysics, while maintaining a difference in emphasis between logical predication and ontological realization: whereas the universal quiddity-species and quiddity-genus are merely predicated and said *of*, quiddity-form is ontologically real and exists *in* the composite being. As one can see, this metaphysical symmetry or correspondence is, ultimately, predicated on the ontological irreducibility and constancy of pure quiddity.

Another important facet of Avicenna’s argumentation, which also partially harks back to Aristotle and Alexander, is his identification of form with substance. It appears that nature or quiddity, *qua* form, can also be defined in terms of substance (*jawhar*) in the composite thing. Following a well-established philosophical custom, Avicenna upholds a multifaceted definition of substance as consisting either of matter, or form, or the composite of form and matter. However, Avicenna assigns the primary sense of *jawhar* to substance *qua* form, making form in itself substance and also a principle of substantiality for the composite as a whole. One direct source of inspiration for this identification is Aristotle’s discourse on substance, form, and essence in *Metaphysics*, Book Zeta. In Z.4 in particular the Stagiritic argues that essence is substance and—importantly for our purposes—that the substantial forms in concrete beings can be said to correspond to the essences of these beings. Aristotle returns to this topic later on in the same book (Z.17) to contend that the main cause of being a substance is form or essence. As a result, form, essence, and substance are all closely related in Aristotle’s reckoning when it comes to accounting for the substantiality of the concrete individual: Socrates is a primary substance, and his substancehood and his being this kind of substance can be defined in terms of his form and essence. Avicenna broadly follows these lines of reasoning and especially the identification of substance with form and essence. However, and

129 Avicenna, *Notes*, 77, section 72.

yet again, his theory of pure quiddity dictated that he conceive of the ontological ramifications of these notions in a divergent way.¹³⁰

In approaching this issue, Avicenna seems once again to follow Alexander closely. For Alexander, who is building on Aristotle, form is the main principle of substantiality and essentiality in composite beings, and it is what brings the composite to its state of substantial completion; it is, in fact, a cause of substance.¹³¹ Alexander articulates a sophisticated interpretation of the proposition that the parts of substance are substance. He has in mind especially form as a part of the composite substance, which for him is substance in a primary or eminent way and is ontologically prior.¹³² Avicenna adheres to many of these ideas, but the postulation that form is substance takes on an additional dimension in his works, due to his theory of pure quiddity: it is not only form or *eidōs*, which can be said to be part of substance, substance itself, and principle of substance for the composite, as Alexander claims. It is, fundamentally, pure quiddity that assumes this status in his ontology. Although this point will be fully fleshed out in chapter IV, it is important to stress here that Avicenna directly connects the essential form in things with substance, thereby lending even more momentum to the ontological relevance of quiddity-form in the concrete world.

Although Avicenna provides numerous, and slightly varying, schemes conveying these distinctions in his works, he is consistent in regarding form as the primary sense of substance or *jawhar*. According to this sense, form is what endows the composite being with its essential identity, determinedness, and inner structure, as well as part of its substantiality. For example, form—in this case the corporeal form—is what gives body (*jism*) its essential nature and substantiality by virtue of which “it is what it is” (*wa-huwa bi-hā huwa mā huwa*).¹³³ This kind of form subsists in a receptacle (viz., matter), but not in a subject, which validates its status as substance, given that Avicenna defines substance as that which does not exist in a subject (*lā fī mawḍūʿ*). In *Physics*, he describes form as “the disposition of the substance” (*hayʿat al-jawhar*) and what deserves most to be called substance in a composite, because it is what “provides the thing with its substantiality” (*mufidah li-l-shayʿ jawhariyyatahu*) and is itself “in the category of substance.”¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the actuality and existence of form do not depend on and are not derived from matter. This means that

130 The correlation of essence and substance is reflected quite strongly in the early Arabic version of *Metaphysics* Book Zeta produced by Uṣṭāth, except that there the notion of essence is conveyed by means of the term *anniyyah*, not *māhiyyah*; see Averroes, *Great Commentary*, vol. 2, 767ff, which preserves lemmata of this early translation. Interestingly, some of the technical terms that appear in the Arabic text are echoed in Avicenna’s own works; for example, substance-quiddity is what is *bi-dhātīhi, huwa huwa*, and *huwa mā huwa bi-l-anniyyah* (784, 821, 830–831). For *anniyyah* in the sense of essence, see Endress, *Proclus arabus*, 79–109.

131 Rashed, *Essentialisme*, 147, 164.

132 Rashed, *Essentialisme*, 45–53, explains that, for Alexander, parts of substances are substances; in that sense, both differentia and form are substances.

133 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.2, 63.13–14.

134 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.2, 21; I.6, 48–49; and I.11, 72 respectively.

substance is most straightforwardly and adequately definable in terms of essential form in Avicenna's metaphysics. Accordingly, in *Categories* the master argues that form is substance "in an eminent or absolute way" (*hiya jawhar 'alā l-iṭlāq*).¹³⁵ This is also vindicated by his doctrine of the immaterial beings. Where immaterial beings are concerned, their substance and quiddities correspond fully and directly to their forms, since the latter do not include any material principle within them. As such, they are simple, intelligible forms and substances.¹³⁶ Hence, according to Avicenna, pure quiddity not only exists as a nature and form in the concrete thing alongside its material accidents, but it is also a cause of the substance and essence of the thing. The pure essence 'humanness' that somehow exists as a common nature and form in each concrete and individual human being is responsible for their substantiality and essentiality as human. As Avicenna explains in *Introduction* I.5 with regard to the individual human being, "The inner reality of its existence is only through humanness [*ḥaqīqat wujūdihi bi-l-insāniyyah*], and the quiddity of each individual [human being] lies in its humanness, although its individual existence [*in-niyyah*] is realized [*tataḥaṣṣalu*] from quality, quantity, and other [accidental] things similar to them."¹³⁷

The foregoing points to a narrow relationship in Avicenna between essence, substance, and form, which can be traced historically to some passages in Aristotle and especially to Alexander's interpretation of the Stagirite.¹³⁸ But when compared to his predecessors, Avicenna accentuates the prioritization of essence by placing pure quiddity at the very heart of his logico-ontological treatment of hylomorphism and substance. The notion of essence is the thread that connects the various logical, physical, and metaphysical facets of Avicenna's system and lends it remarkable unity and coherence. The master not only follows the essentialist approach of Aristotle in Book Zeta (especially in 4 and 17) and of Alexander's ontology (as reconstructed by Rashed), but builds on them and amplifies them to ascribe a maximalist role to pure quiddity in his philosophy. The latter is the foundational ontological and gnoseological ground connecting logical notions in the mind and ontological principles in concrete reality. As I will further argue in chapter IV, it is also the main criterion of substantiality. The physical, or rather metaphysical, notion of form or *ṣūrah* therefore opens a constructive perspective regarding the issue of how quiddity and nature can be said to exist *in* concrete beings according to Avicenna. The essential

135 Avicenna, *Categories*, I.6, 475. The connection between substance and form is articulated in various passages of *Metaphysics* as well; see, for instance, II.1, 59.15 ff.

136 Avicenna, *Elements of Philosophy*, 48.

137 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.5, 29.11–13; cf. Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, 112.

138 In light of the foregoing, it would appear that Avicenna made a key contribution to the philosophical reflection on the topic of how hylomorphic form relates to essence and substance. Not only did he bequeath (in an Avicennian garb) many of the crucial ideas articulated by Alexander, but he also accentuated the latter's essentialist account by means of his special theory of pure quiddity. Again on this issue, the Latin Scholastics were deeply influenced by Avicenna's account.

and substantial form is, it appears, another manifestation of pure quiddity, this time as it can be said to exist in the concrete world, as opposed to its existing in the mind. This approach allows for the postulation of a *formal existence* of pure essence in the concrete world. This in turn helps to accommodate a variety of claims that Avicenna makes in parallel: that differentia/genus and form/matter are different from one another, but also directly correlated with regard to essence; that pure quiddity exists as ‘a part’ of the concrete being and *in* the concrete being; and that essence-form holds the primary sense of substance. Due to its semantic ambivalence, form or *ṣūrah* is also what corresponds to genus, differentia, and species in the mind *qua* logical predicates, in which case quiddity is this time regarded as a universal intelligible form. The constancy and ubiquity of pure quiddity throughout these various settings is what ensures the symmetry between Avicenna’s epistemology and ontology. As McGinnis showed, it is what provides scientific validation to the correspondence between the ontic reality of a concrete existent and our logical and conceptual apprehension of it.¹³⁹ Admittedly, this makes the term *ṣūrah* somewhat ambiguous or equivocal (as Avicenna himself suggests in *Definitions*)¹⁴⁰ or, better said, yet another modulated term endowed with an array of semantic nuances, a conclusion that was reached already with regard to the notions of universality, oneness, and existence.¹⁴¹

In the foregoing, I attempted to make sense of Avicenna’s mereological construal of quiddity in concrete beings by resorting to a hylomorphic framework and by establishing an essentialist correspondence—and not just a mere analogy—between his theory of logical predication in the mind and his views on substantial form in concrete beings. Perhaps the most remarkable feature to emerge from the previous analysis is the embeddedness of pure quiddity in the various levels of forms that Avicenna posits. Not only do the substantial and intelligible forms have a ‘semantic correspondence’ to one another; these forms are ontologically grounded in pure quiddity, which grants them essential reality and substantiality in the concrete world and in the mind (for Avicenna’s view on the secondary substances, see section IV.4). In this regard, the existence of the natures and quiddities as hylomorphic forms facilitates an understanding of the mereological dimension of Avicenna’s doctrine, whose ontological implication may at first be difficult to grasp. Construed in this light, form, nature, and essence can be regarded as a part (*juzʻ*) of the concrete

139 McGinnis, *Logic and Science*.

140 Avicenna, *Definitions*, 16.5.

141 Is it truly a coincidence that Avicenna regards some of the most fundamental notions of his metaphysics—namely, existence, oneness, universality, and form—as being modulated (*mushakkikah*) or as possessing a variety of senses (*kathir al-maʻāni*)? One interesting realization is that the master does not make this claim on behalf of quiddity. This is not only because quiddity is posited univocally of beings (‘human’ of Zayd and ‘Amr, for the humanness of Zayd is not ‘more human’ than the humanness of ‘Amr), but also, I reckon, because the quiddity ‘in itself’ taken as a unitary and simple intellectual concept is irreducible and therefore does not allow for this kind of ontological modulation. The only exception could be by way of priority and posteriority; see sections IV.1.3 and 1.4.

being, inasmuch as these terms all point to the essential and substantial form and principle of a thing *qua* part of the composite, and without necessarily referring to its matter *per se* or to prime matter as a distinct ontic and substance principle.¹⁴² As the master explains in a variety of texts, such as *On the Soul* and *Metaphysics* II.1, form *qua* substance or *jawhar* is a part (*juz'*) of the composite.¹⁴³ This statement should be tied to his other claims in *Metaphysics* V.1 to the effect that quiddity in itself is 'a part' of each individual existent. The reason why Avicenna is intent on describing quiddity and form in concrete things in a mereological manner is precisely because he is speaking, fundamentally, about quiddity in itself, the quidditative *ma'nā*, which, thanks to its special nature, never combines, identifies, or fuses with its surrounding accidents and concomitants.¹⁴⁴ In this case, 'in itself' means *not* 'separately,' but rather 'irreducibly.'

142 To conclude, the term *ṣūrah* in Avicenna's metaphysical works reflects a semantic ambiguity that locates it midway between logic and ontology. It encapsulates the interface between the logical and conceptual status of intelligible form *qua* genus and species in the mind and its role as substantial and essential form and ontological principle in concrete existents; this perhaps explains why the master describes *ṣūrah* as an "equivocal term" (*ism mushtarak*) in *Definitions*, 16.5. In spite of this statement, it is perhaps better defined, like the other principles of physics, as a 'modulated' notion, as Avicenna indicates in *Physics* I.3, 31. In this fashion, form is tied to the reality of the common natures in concrete beings and at the same time to their conception as genus or species in the mind. This implies the essential and substantial priority and foundationality of pure quiddity in these various domains of formal existence. At *Physics*, I.10, 70.1–2, Avicenna acknowledges this ambiguity by stating that "the form may be said of quiddity [*māhiyyah*], which, when it is realized in matter, constitutes a species, as well as of the species itself," a view also intimated in *Introduction* and *Definitions*, 16–17, where he explains that the term *ṣūrah* can refer to the species and genus as well as to the quiddity of a thing. In the same work, 21, he also identifies nature (*ṭabī'ah*) with the "essential form" (*ṣūrah dhā-tiyyah*). In *Salvation*, 14.7–10, Avicenna begins by providing a standard logical definition of "genus" as "that which is said of many that differ in species as an answer to the question: What is it?," but then proceeds to gloss the term "species" as "forms and essential realities" (*al-ṣuwar wa-l-ḥaqā'iq al-dhā-tiyyah*). These texts not only provide corroboration regarding the linkage of essence, form, and genus and species in Avicenna's analysis; they also reveal that the universals of species and genus used in logical discussions have a counterpart in reality in the substantial forms of concrete beings and that all these notions in turn are in a sense reducible to the pure quiddities.

143 Avicenna, *On the Soul*, I.1, 5.6–7: "form is a part through which the thing [*al-shay'*] is what it is in actuality." In that same passage, Avicenna proceeds to identify the substantial form of human being with the soul (5.8–6.1).

144 For a discussion of mereology in Avicenna and how it relates to essence and existence, see De Haan, *A Mereological Construal*. De Haan, however, limits his statements mostly to the epistemic or logical aspect of the problem and does not delve into its ontological implications. Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*, also recognizes the mereological component in Avicenna's discussion, and he connects the 'divine existence' of pure quiddity Avicenna speaks of in *Metaphysics* V.1 with its existing as a part in things; oddly, however, Benevich insists on calling this existential mode an epistemic (as opposed to ontological) one. The problem, as I have already noted, is that it is highly artificial to separate the epistemic and the ontological in Avicenna's philosophy. Benevich's approach would seem to ascribe an 'epistemic existence' to pure quiddity in the mind, but this in turn raises the question of how this consideration would relate to mental existence, and especially to the universal, which also

In spite of this, some interpretive ambiguities remain. One aspect of Avicenna's account that is left hanging concerns the status of the substantial form. For it is not altogether clear whether he would posit a single substantial form in the individual that would be responsible for all of its essential features or whether he would allow for a multiplicity of substantial forms to accumulate within the same material entity. This issue seems directly related to the consideration of whether, for Avicenna, species is the only quiddity and form that is realized (*taḥaqqāqa*) in the concrete world as a unitary thing, or whether its various constituents can be said to be realized alongside it and in a distinct ontological mode. Conflicting evidence on these points can be drawn from the Avicennian corpus.¹⁴⁵ Recently, this question has received a detailed treatment by Andreas Lammer in the context of Avicenna's physics and, to some extent, of his cosmology.¹⁴⁶ This author concludes quite emphatically that Avicenna was a monist when it comes to the substantial form, and he also provides arguments and textual evidence to undermine a pluralist reading. Although Lammer's discussion of the topic is informative, I am not convinced that the new evidence he adduces is as decisive as he deems it. For one thing, it focuses mostly on physics, so that Lammer's analysis does not sufficiently take into consideration issues related to Avicenna's metaphysics and especially to his views on essence. For instance, one quite straightforward problem with the monist approach is that Avicenna is insistent about the extramental existence of animalness or animal in itself. Now, since animal does not exist as a separate Platonic form in the extramental world, it presumably is to be connected with a substantial form in matter, namely, the form that specifies generic body into animal body, making it in turn a genus for horse, human and other species. It is true that, on one reading, Avicenna can be understood as saying that animalness exists *together with* or *subsumed under* the species-form, e.g., horse, so that animalness would be merely implied by that species-form or realized together with the realization of the species, in a manner I will elucidate below. But it may also very well be the case that animalness and horse-ness are distinct forms inhering in generic body. In fact, given that the Agent Intellect contemplates the forms and pure quiddities (see chapter V) and that it is 'the Giver of Forms' (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*), it would certainly be odd if that separate being did not

exists in the mind. Moreover, it by the same token does not adequately address the issue of how quiddity can be said to exist in concrete existents, if this state is merely 'epistemic.'

145 The issue of whether Avicenna was a monist or a pluralist with regard to the substantial form is of course relevant for the study of his reception in Latin scholasticism, where advocates of both positions can be found. Aquinas, for example, advocated the doctrine of a single substantial form, whereas others, such as Duns Scotus, posited a plurality of substantial forms. What is interesting is that, as in many other cases, evidence to support both positions can be gleaned from Avicenna's works, even though modern scholars have in general tended to regard him as a pluralist, mostly on the basis of his theory of the corporeal form; for insight into this issue, see Stone, Simplicius and Avicenna; Shihadeh, Avicenna's Corporeal Form; and Lammer, *The Elements*, who summarizes much of the past scholarship on this topic.

146 Lammer, *The Elements*, 166 ff.

somehow intellect the form ‘horseness’ as distinct from ‘animalness’—with the implication that it would also emanate the latter to the sublunary world. As Lammer himself acknowledges, there are passages that point to a plurality of substantial forms in Avicenna. Some of these excerpts were cited earlier and refer to the existence or realization of forms in the concrete world that correspond to species, genera, and differentiae in the mind.¹⁴⁷ This alternative pluralist or synthetic narrative would have the merit not only of paying heed to the notion of a hierarchy of forms and stages or degrees of actualization—crucial features also in Avicenna’s noetical and logical accounts¹⁴⁸—but also of contextualizing his comments within a cosmological framework whose premise is that the Agent Intellect encompasses all the forms of nature and emanates them to the concrete world. It would also account for Avicenna’s belief that pure animalness and pure humanness—to give only two examples—both exist in concrete beings, when animalness corresponds to a genus in the mind and humanness to a species. When translated into an emanationist and hylomorphic framework, these various quiddities could be identified with different forms and also with different stages of realization in the process leading to the gradual determination of matter.¹⁴⁹

147 Naturally, a pluralist reading of Avicenna would also dissociate the corporeal form from the other substantial forms, something which Lammer, *The Elements*, strongly rejects. Avicenna speaks of the corporeal form (*al-ṣūrah al-jismiyyah*) that is necessarily added to prime matter to provide it with three-dimensionality. To this initial substantial form, others are presumably added that further specify matter and body into something increasingly definite, e.g., animal, biped animal, etc. to arrive ultimately, in the case of human, at rational animal, where ‘rational’ is the ultimate differentia that specifies animal as human. In terms of a synthetic hylomorphic reasoning, then, a variety of forms would be required to arrive at a definite species such as human. It is the Agent Intellect, in its capacity as universal provider of forms (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*), which would fulfil the task of endowing foundational prime matter with these various layers of forms. This suggests that the genera and differentiae that appear in a logical context in the definition could also have their own ontological realization in the concrete being and could be said to correspond to distinct substantial forms in the individual. Accordingly, Avicenna at times appears to maintain the concurrent realization of genus alongside differentia or species in the concrete entity, which would imply that different substantial forms inhere in matter after the corporeal form. This is because, as Avicenna explains in *Metaphysics* V.7, genus and species have their own distinct quiddities (*māhiyyāt*), so that if these quiddities are hypothesized to exist in the concrete individual, then they presumably also refer to different forms specifying matter and body. Finally, it should be pointed out that even in some passages of *Physics* (I.2, 14.8–10, and 15.1–3), Avicenna refers to many forms in the natural body and seems to envisage two possible scenarios of how the corporeal form relates to the other forms, one of which requires a pluralist account.

148 With regard to noetics, each intellectual level is metaphorically form for the one below it, and substrate for the one above it; with regard to logic, animal can be seen as species for body, but genus for horse. Naturally, this poses questions about Avicenna’s method and of the potential dialectical or analogical use of these frameworks for purely didactic purposes.

149 Allebban, *Conservation*, has recently offered an alternative interpretation of the Agent Intellect. She emphasizes the role of the Agent Intellect in the perfecting of the species and the human rational soul, arguing that this intellect is a cause of species, not a cause of the individuated forms in concrete

On the other hand, there are also compelling metaphysical reasons, and strong textual evidence, to subsume all the constituents of the definition and essence in the mind under a single substantial form in the concrete individual. Avicenna believes that it is the species that is primarily (exclusively?) realized in the concrete world. Thus, in *Metaphysics* he describes species as “the realized nature [*al-ṭabī‘ah al-mutaḥaṣṣilah*] both in concrete existence and in the mind,” and likewise in *Categories* he refers to human as “a realized nature that does not require what constitutes it [once it is realized in existence]” (*al-insān ṭabī‘ah mutaḥaṣṣilah lā taḥtāju mā yuqaw-wimuhā*).¹⁵⁰ In this fashion, the essential nature can be made to correspond most directly to the species-form in the individual, such as the substantial form of humanness in Zayd. In *Notes*, this substantial form is described as being unchanging and one.¹⁵¹ If this is the case, then speaking of the realization of genus-form or differentia-form as real parts of the realized species or the substantial composite would seem misleading or superfluous. They would only be parts of the definition in the mind,

beings. She criticizes the view that this intellect represents a direct cause in the formation of material beings, bringing attention to the fact that its agency is not mentioned in Avicenna’s biological treatises. Her approach therefore departs markedly from earlier accounts, such as those of Davidson, *Al-farabi*, and Janssens, *The Notions*, which depict the Agent Intellect both as a cause of intellectual knowledge and as a cause of the existence of sublunary beings. Allebban states: “I argue that emanation must accordingly be revised, as not some intervention of the Active Intellect in each physical sublunar process of generation, but as a causing of the contingent essences that populate the cosmos which are individuated by material and physical efficient causes and processes” (8). Allebban articulates an engaging analysis of the relation between biological and metaphysical causality in Avicenna’s account of concrete beings. It seems clear, for instance, that Avicenna conceives of individuation as the result of sublunary processes and especially the role of matter, and that the Agent Intellect does not emanate individualized or particular forms. However, my interpretation of pure quiddity in Avicenna and of the fundamentally Neoplatonic structure of his cosmology leads me to conclude that the Agent Intellect has a direct causal role to play in sublunary processes. Given that on my reading this being contains all the forms and quiddities prior to multiplicity (see chapter V), its causality must affect all sublunary instantiations of which the quiddities represent a formal and final paradigm. In addition, there is evidence pointing to its efficient causality as well; see Janssens, *The Notions*, 553. These points seem independently substantiated by Avicenna’s somewhat odd theories of cosmic flooding and spontaneous generation. This theory entails the complete destruction of species at certain intervals in time and the spontaneous generation of individuals through the intervention of the Agent Intellect. This theory therefore indicates that the re-actualization of individuals and of the species *in concreto* depends directly on the causality of the Agent Intellect and that sublunary processes alone are not sufficient for this to occur (on this topic, see Freudenthal, *The Medieval Hebrew Reception*; and Bertolacci, *Averroes*, especially 42). It should also be noted that the fact that the Agent Intellect plays no role in the biological accounts studied by Allebban is not altogether surprising. It would be out of place to discuss metaphysical causality in a work of biology, and Avicenna was indeed quite sensitive about issues of disciplinary consistency in the various genres he explored. But even then, Janssens has found instances where this intellect’s causality intervenes in biological processes and in the information of sublunary matter; see Janssens, *The Notions*, especially 553–554.

¹⁵⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.5, 228.4; *Categories*, 18.15–17.

¹⁵¹ Avicenna, *Notes*, 143.10, section 196: “this form is in itself not diverse and is a single quidditative meaning” (*wa-l-ṣūrah fī dhātihā ghayr mukhtalifah fa-innahā ma‘nā wāḥid*).

but not in concrete reality, where they would be ontologically subsumed under the species-form. This, perhaps, is why Avicenna states that “the generic nature comes to be [*yaḥduthu*] in the thing that is the species both in the mind and in [concrete] existence when the species fully comes to be.”¹⁵² Additionally, he explains elsewhere that “genus subsists in [*fī*] the species and has the subsistence of the species.”¹⁵³ This idea is developed to greater length in a passage of *Notes*:

Genus does not subsist in actuality, for it is differentia that makes it subsistent in actuality. And if differentia is annulled [*baṭala*], the share of the genus [*ḥiṣṣatuhu min al-jins*] that was made subsistent by the differentia is also annulled. For it [genus] is not something subsistent in itself in actuality that could be a substrate for two consecutive differentiae. If [for example] humaneness or rationality [*al-insāniyyah aw al-nuṭqiyyah*] were to become annulled, it is not possible for this share of animalness [belonging to humanness] to remain subsistent [in actuality].¹⁵⁴

This excerpt—as well as other similar sections in *Notes*—indicates that species and differentia—or, rather, what corresponds in the concrete to species and differentia in the mind, i.e., forms—are what exist primarily in actuality, and that what corresponds to genus subsists only derivatively and dependently on the species. Accordingly, it is species and differentia that are to be identified chiefly with the substantial form of the individual being. Finally, in *Metaphysics* V.7, Avicenna expounds on the fact that the distinction between genus and differentia is primarily mental, since it involves the potentiality of the genus to be realized as a species by virtue of this differentia. But once realized, the genus is one with the species. Thus,

This potentiality [that attaches to the species] is not on account of [concrete] existence, but [only] on account of the [operations of the] mind ... and inasmuch as genera and differentiae are natures that refer to a [single] nature [i.e., the species], as you well know, they are predicated of the [same] definiendum. For we state that the definition in reality is a meaning [designating] a single nature [*tabī'ah wāḥidah*].¹⁵⁵

The evidence adduced above seems to confine essential realization (*tahaqquq al-māhiyyah*)¹⁵⁶ in the concrete world to that of the species-form alone, in a way in

¹⁵² Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.3, 217.12–13.

¹⁵³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.2, 208.7–8.

¹⁵⁴ Avicenna, *Notes*, 402, section 712. Cf. 392, section 696. A more ambiguous section is 698: there it is said that “[the differentia] ‘rational’ makes possible the existence of animalness, but not the true reality of animalness” (*al-nāṭiq bihi yaṣṣihu wujud al-ḥayawāniyyah wa-laysa yaṣṣihu bihi ḥaqīqat al-ḥayawāniyyah*). The existence of animalness is presumably to be understood together with the differentia and thus in the species, so to speak, and not as something distinct.

¹⁵⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.7, 240.15–241.7.

¹⁵⁶ As the terminology and ideas of these various excerpts make clear, what is at stake here, and the focus of the discussion, is how the essential parts of the definition and quiddity in the mind can be said to be realized and to subsist in external reality. This is different from the analysis of the way in which existence, as a non-constitutive concomitant of quiddity, applies to the concomitants and accidents of quiddity as well as to the composite substantial entity taken as a whole. In this regard,

which the other constitutive elements of quiddity would be somehow subsumed under it or implicitly included in it, without this leading to ontological multiplicity or a pluralist model of the substantial forms. This would imply that the individual human, for instance, has a single substantial form (humanness), which, together with matter—in this case construed either as prime matter (if one, with Lammer, also subsumes the corporeal form within the single substantial species-form) or matter together with the corporeal form (if one does not)—constitutes the essential core of the individual human being.¹⁵⁷ And just as quiddity-species in the mind (e.g., universal horse) logically combines genus and differentia and points to a single and unified concept, so quiddity-substantial-form in the individual would encapsulate all the essential features of that existent.¹⁵⁸

Let me recapitulate. The previous comments have opened another angle from which to approach Avicenna's mereological construal of quiddity in the concrete world. Avicenna holds that form is a part (*juz'*) of the composite substance; it is a part that inheres in matter, but is not technically speaking in a subject; form is also identified with essence and substance; it is the essential and substantial form of the concrete individual that completes it substantially and ontologically and makes it what it is; this substantial form pertains especially to species, but one should also perhaps take into account the substantial forms that correspond to the various differentiae, for all qualifications, differentiae, and specifications added to prime matter can be regarded as forms and also as pure quiddities. Naturally, this notion of a formal and essential 'part' applies only to corporeal beings, since immaterial beings are not hylomorphic and, hence, do not have parts. In their case, they are pure intellectual substances. In the course of the analysis, a doubt was raised as to whether Avicenna would identify a single substantial form, a species-form that would be realized in the concrete existent and subsume all the other substantial forms, and which would also be identical to the pure quiddity that corresponds to the species in the mind and in definition, e.g., universal horse; or whether he upholds a pluralist model of the substantial forms and reckons that every instantiation of the pure quiddities in the concrete individual corresponds to a distinct substantial form gradually specifying prime matter or corporeal matter, e.g., corporeal form, animal form, rational form. This would imply that each quiddity-form pertaining to that thing would be realized in existence. There seems to be textual evidence in favor of both interpretations, making Avicenna either a monist or a pluralist with regard to

notice that Avicenna in general avoids using the term *wujūd* in these passages; the notions of essential realization and subsistence are typically conveyed by terms deriving from the roots *q-w-m* and *ḥ-q-q*; for a more detailed discussion of this point, see section IV.3.

157 Naturally, the previous comments do not dissipate the need to posit the corporeal form, unless it too be subsumed under the substantial form human.

158 Much of *Metaphysics* V.7 seems devoted to establishing precisely this point and showing the essential unity of quiddity in the mind and its formal unity in the concrete world, at least when it comes to the notion of species.

substantial forms. This would explain to some extent why later interpreters of the master disagreed on this point and ultimately landed on either side of the issue.

One point calls for additional comments. It is perhaps not correct, strictly speaking, to claim that for Avicenna the substantial form in concrete beings is *identical* with the intelligible form in the mind—the former, after all, is a hylomorphic form that exists in matter, the latter a universal intelligible form that exists in the intellect.¹⁵⁹ Yet, there is a direct correspondence between these various levels of forms, inasmuch as pure quiddity is essentially common to them. This ensures their translation from one plane to the other. As Avicenna explains in *Introduction*,

Sometimes the intelligible form [*al-ṣūrah al-ma'qūlah*] is in some manner a cause for the occurrence of the form that exists in external reality [*al-ṣūrah al-mawjūdah fī l-a'yān*]; sometimes the form in external reality is in some manner a cause of the intelligible form, that is, [the latter] occurs in the mind after it has existed in external reality.¹⁶⁰

In *Physics* I.1, Avicenna himself uses the term “correlation” or “correspondence” (*muqāyasah*) to describe the interface between the parts of the definition in the mind and the formal and material causes as parts in the concrete being.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, I would argue that the rationale for this correspondence of form is metaphysical and focuses on the epistemic and ontological irreducibility of the quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) and nature (*ṭabī'ah*) in these two contexts. This implies not that a meaning that exists in the mind is projected onto the world of nature, but rather that this *ma'nā* is a metaphysical principle that exists in concrete beings *and* in the mind.¹⁶² Accordingly, the substantial form and the intelligible form of, say, horse, are equally grounded in, and derive their substantiality from, the same pure quiddity horseness (*farasiyyah*). The pure nature horseness is common to both and also a metaphysical part of the composite that is the individual horse and the universal horse. This, at the very least, ensures a metaphysical correspondence and commonness between the two.¹⁶³

159 Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 46–49, provides interesting comments regarding how this issue plays out in Alexander's works.

160 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 69.7–9; translated by Marmura.

161 See Avicenna, *Physics*, I.1, 10.1.

162 As should be clear by now, my contention relies partly on the hypothesis that Avicenna did not divest the notion of *ma'nā* of all the entitative aspects and connotations that were associated with it from the ancient Greek tradition (through the Arabic translations) and from Christian and Muslim *kalām*. Given that in the theological and philosophical traditions it was the norm rather than the exception that *ma'nā* should be construed in an entitative way, the idea that Avicenna would regard it exclusively as a linguistic or semantic notion would be surprising and strikes me as unlikely.

163 If there was no essential and ontological commonality at all between the concrete world and the thinking mind, then how would it be at all possible to relate our ideas to the concrete entities or vice versa? And how would scientific knowledge be possible? The analysis in McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, proceeds on a similar premise.

What is crucial from the metaphysical and methodological perspectives is that Avicenna's differentiation of pure quiddity from the universal notions in the mind, such as universality, genusness, and speciesness, enables him to posit an ontological reality and presence of the pure quiddities in concrete individuals as well. In this context, quiddity in itself is connected with another seminal feature of the master's philosophical system, namely, hylomorphic form. While building on Alexander and maintaining a distinction between the two sets of notions (differentia/form and genus/matter), Avicenna manages to ground them equally in the theory of pure quiddity and preserve the latter's ontological autonomy. Thus, 'human' is a universal species in the mind and, as such, a purely logical notion, but it can also be said to exist as a formal part of this individual concrete human being, because the foundational nature (humanness) of these two things is common, irreducible, and constant. The pure nature humanness can be either universal species in the mind or substantial and essential form in the concrete individual; the pure nature animalness can be either genus or informed matter, depending on the domain of its existence, etc. It was argued in this connection that Avicenna's sustained effort to distinguish between hylomorphic principles (body, form, matter) and logical notions (genus, species, differentiae)—a project he took over from Alexander and to some extent from the Baghdad Peripatetics—was combined in his works with the intention to establish pure quiddity as a common, irreducible, and foundational principle for these notions. Although it underpins these various logical and hylomorphic notions, pure essence at the same time preserves its ontological and epistemic autonomy and self-identity as 'the thing in itself.' In this manner, Avicenna elaborated on Alexander's essentialist approach to establish pure quiddity as the cornerstone of his logico-ontological system.

2 Is pure quiddity in concrete beings intelligible?

The foregoing raises the question of the mode in which pure quiddity *qua* nature (*ṭabī'ah*), form (*ṣūrah*), and quidditative meaning or entity (*ma'nā*) can be said to exist in concrete beings. At the beginning of *Metaphysics* V.2, Avicenna describes this problem as one that causes doubt in the mind. But the only reply he provides there consists of an implicit rebuttal of the Platonic forms.¹⁶⁴ So although one may take it for granted that the master would not locate these quiddities in an independent and transcendent realm of forms, since they are not ontologically separate (*mu-fāriqah*), the mode of their immanence in concrete beings still calls for clarification. Inasmuch as Avicenna states that the pure quiddities exist in concrete beings; as he

¹⁶⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.2, 2075–9. The question of how quiddities exist in extramental reality is not restricted to natural forms, but concerns also numbers and relations, which, according to the *shaykh al-ra'īs*, exist both in the mind and in concrete reality.

equates the nature and quiddity in concrete beings with substantial forms; as form is distinct from matter and fulfils one—and arguably the most important—definition of substance and essence; and as this form is abstractable from concrete beings and becomes intelligible in the human intellect when contemplated; then it stands to reason to assume that the quidditative forms Avicenna postulates exist intelligibly in the concrete existents. More precisely, there are reasons to surmise that, in themselves, these pure quiddities exist intelligibly and irreducibly in the concrete beings, while at the same time remaining immanent in them and surrounded by their material accidents. This hypothesis seems to cohere with an ontological interpretation of Avicenna's doctrines of pure quiddity as something *intrinsically intelligible*, as well as with the terminological and textual evidence at our disposal that indicates a strong connection between form and essence.

The problem, however, is that Avicenna is also adamant that the intelligible cannot dwell in the material. He sharply distinguishes between 'the sensible' (*al-maḥsūs*) and 'the intelligible' (*al-ma'qūl*) in his works (especially in his accounts of psychological abstraction) and argues that the intelligible cannot actually exist in the material or sensible. This argument is premised on the idea that whatever is in itself and actually intelligible must be a self-thinking intellect (*'aql*). In the concrete world, what is essentially intelligible is also necessarily engaged in intellectual thought. This is the case of the separate intellects. They are immaterial and intelligible forms, and, thus, also by necessity, intellectual beings. But this cannot possibly be the case of the hylomorphic forms, which exist only in a material substrate.¹⁶⁵ It is on these grounds that, in *Pointers*, Avicenna quite explicitly rejects the possibility that hylomorphic forms can be actually immaterial or intelligible and cautions that their extramental existence is of a material kind.¹⁶⁶ Avicenna's metaphysics therefore posits immaterial forms on the one hand—these can in turn be subdivided into the separate intellects of the exterior world and the intelligibles in the human mind—and hylomorphic forms on the other. Yet, the caveat that forms in concrete beings are material would seem to undermine Avicenna's theory of psychological abstraction as a valid intellectual process designed to obtain the intelligibles from physical objects. For if the substantial forms of concrete beings are not in any way intelligible, then how can the intellect ever abstract them and apprehend them as such? And how can the faculties of the soul successfully effect the transition from the material to the intelligible?

In view of these considerations, maintaining a dichotomy between the sensible and the intelligible in such a forceful manner seems oversimplistic. After all, there are two instances or 'moments' in Avicenna's philosophy where the interface between the material and immaterial planes is disrupted. The first is the *cosmological*

¹⁶⁵ For the ontological status of material and immaterial forms in Avicenna, see Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 86–99.

¹⁶⁶ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 2, 398.3, states that "the existence of [these forms] in the concrete is material" (*wa-ammā wujūduhā fī l-khārij māddi*).

transition from the intelligible realm of the separate intellects to the corporeal realm of the celestial orbs (recall that the First Effect is credited with the causation of the first body, viz., the outermost celestial orb, thereby inaugurating the creation of the heavens). The second is the *gnoseological transition* from the perceived sensible to the cognized intelligible (where, on an abstractionist reading of Avicenna, the intellect can ‘extract’ the intelligibles from the concrete particulars). These two cases deter from a schematic account of how the material relates to the intelligible and call for a more subtle interpretation of the evidence.¹⁶⁷ More specifically with regard to the present concern, there is a set of considerations that calls into question the assumption that the quidditative principle could not in any way exist intelligibly in the concrete individual. First, Avicenna’s repeated claims to the effect that pure quiddity (e.g., humanness in itself or animalness in itself) exists in the concrete individuals would seem to go in this direction, since it is not reducible to a material principle. Second, his occasional intimation that the universal—or rather, one kind of universality—somehow exists in the concrete, either potentially or actually. Third, the clear indications in his works regarding the human intellect’s ability to extract (*intaza’a*, etc.) and abstract (*jarrada*, *tajrīd*) the quidditative meanings from the concrete beings, as well as peel away (*yaqshiru*) the various layers of material attachments that surround the *ma’nā* embedded in particulars. Indeed, the claims that pure quiddity somehow exists in the concrete, that one aspect of the universal also exists in the concrete, and that the quidditative *ma’nā* can be extracted from the particulars all point to an intelligible ontological mode of essence. Moreover, one could argue, if there was nothing intelligible underlying the concrete individuals, then it would simply be impossible for the intellect to ever cognize them at the theoretical, universal, and intellectual level, with the result that the disconnect between the corporeal and the intelligible would be fully consummated in Avicenna’s philosophy. But this, clearly, is not the case. So how can one make sense of these various points and harmonize Avicenna’s position on this issue?

I believe it is possible to articulate a nuanced account of how quiddity exists in concrete beings by promoting the distinction between the hylomorphic form and the pure nature—or, more relevantly in this context, the quidditative meaning or principle (*ma’nā*). These admittedly are closely knit notions, but they are not identical. More specifically, it is not as far-fetched as it may seem at first to attribute some de-

167 Avicenna does not adequately account for the transition from the intelligible to the material in his cosmology. More specifically, he does not explain in a satisfactory way how the activity of an immaterial intellect (i.e., theoretical thought) can cause a material or corporeal being. Instead of attempting to demonstrate it, the master seems to have accepted this cosmological postulate on the authority of the Peripatetic and Neoplatonic authors whose systems he builds on. This aspect of Avicenna’s philosophy undoubtedly calls for a certain ‘leap of faith’ on the part of his readers, although much the same can be said about most dualistic philosophical systems that presuppose the causation of the material from the immaterial. Nevertheless, from an interpretive perspective, they represent two interesting problematics that call for additional reflection and study.

gree of intelligibility to the essential forms in concrete beings on account of the *ma'nā* of these forms. For just as the core quidditative meaning is other than the complex universal concept in the mind, so it is not fully identical with the substantial form in the concrete object, although it underlies both and can be associated with both. The point is that while it may be false, strictly speaking, to say that the hylomorphic form is intelligible or that the universal exists in the concrete (without any qualifications), it seems to be the case, on the other hand, that the *ma'nā* of the form is intelligible and that, in virtue of its very self, this *ma'nā* possesses a kind of essential universality. So one may surmise that the substantial or essential form humanness in Zayd is intelligible, because, ultimately, the *ma'nā* humanness in Zayd is intelligible, and because form is the thing that is most closely associated with this *ma'nā* in Zayd. In fact, form is this *ma'nā* as it comes to exist in the object and as a part (*juz'*) of the composite.

I argued previously that the term *ma'nā* in Avicenna's philosophy refers not only to an idea or meaning in the mind, but also assumes an entitative or substantive quality in concrete beings, where it signals the existence of a quidditative nature. One may also say that it points to the existence of the essential meaning in things, inasmuch as a meaning can be reified or objectified. Accordingly, the *ma'nā* in concrete beings exists irreducibly and is essentially intelligible, and in this respect it should be identified with the same *ma'nā* that exists in the mind. Alternatively, one could say that the hylomorphic form is potentially intelligible and universalizable (thanks to this *ma'nā*), inasmuch as it can become an object of intellectual thought and acquire the accident of universality in the mind. These two aspects of *ma'nā*—in the concrete and in the mind—are inseparable and, in the case of Avicenna's doctrine of essence, reflect the irreducible reality of pure quiddity in these two contexts of existence.¹⁶⁸ In this manner, the proposed distinction between the hylomorphic form (which is 'material' or, rather, necessarily inheres in matter and is a part of the form-matter composite) and the *ma'nā* (which is the essential and intelligible core of the form and what is abstracted and intellected from the physical object) enables one to reconcile a set of difficult claims Avicenna maintains alongside one another: that pure quiddity and *ma'nā* exist in the concrete; that they can be abstracted from the physical objects and apprehended as immaterial concepts; that form is eminently essence and substance; and that the hylomorphic forms have a material existence and that, at any rate, what is essentially intelligible cannot dwell in matter. Maintaining a distinction between pure quiddity and the other hylomorphic form is essential to Avicenna's philosophy.

168 At *Pointers*, vol. 2, 402.3–4, Avicenna speaks of a certain preparedness (*isti'dād*) that belongs to the quiddity (*li-l-māhiyyah*) of the concrete object and that precedes its connection (*muqāranah*) with the thinking intellect. This vocabulary is reminiscent of the technical terms he employs to describe the preparedness of matter for form. But here it is applied to essence, so that Avicenna has in mind a kind of intelligible preparedness or disposition, which should be identified with the essential nature or *ma'nā*. What this passage underlines, though, is the objective and intrinsic (potential) intelligibility of pure quiddity in the physical object.

morphic principles Avicenna outlines, as well as singling out quiddity's irreducible mode of existence in the substantial form, appear to solve many of the tensions regarding how form and essence can be said to exist in a concrete being. Ultimately these views define the true essence of a human being—the *ma'nā* humanness—as an intelligible principle. This, it should be noted, also fits with Avicenna's substance dualism and definition of the human rational soul as an immaterial principle dwelling in a concrete body.¹⁶⁹

This interpretation of *ma'nā* as an intelligible meaning and principle that dwells in the forms of concrete beings facilitates an understanding of Avicenna's epistemology and theory of psychological abstraction. Indeed, his theory of abstraction is predicated precisely on the intrinsic intelligibility of pure quiddity in the concrete world, and not merely on the mind's ability to identify and universalize the quidditative *ma'nā*.¹⁷⁰ In this connection, it was already pointed out that the master occasionally refers to pure quiddity as a universal or common thing *in the concrete world*, which makes it clear that—on the assumption that one gives credence to this claim and attributes a special kind of universality to pure quiddity—its only possible mode of existence in this context would be intelligible.¹⁷¹ These considerations in turn should be connected with the fact that nature *in itself* is described as irreducible (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) and also as intelligible (*ma'qūlah*) when it is contemplated by an intellect.¹⁷² Admittedly, this last feature, i.e., of contemplation *by an intellect*, could be deemed *a sine qua non* that prevents us from regarding quiddity as something intelligible *in itself* in the concrete beings. However, this condition seems tied primarily to the criteria of intelligibility, intentionality, and universality in the mind, i.e., with re-

169 Kaukua, *Self-Awareness*. Kaukua writes (24): “Avicenna opts for a full-blooded substance dualism: the individual human essence is an immaterial substance, which is not strictly speaking a form of the human body, although it does perform the functions of a form, animating and using the body for its own ends.”

170 I develop this point in greater detail below; see also McGinnis, *Logic and Science*.

171 See notably Text 7, Text 17, Text 20, and Text 21. At *Metaphysics* V.2, 207.12–13, the master states: “as for the universality in the exterior [world] [*al-kulliyah min khārij*], it occurs according to another consideration [*i'tibār ākhar*] [i.e., from the one regarding mental universality], and we discussed it previously.” This is a hint that Avicenna does indeed recognize one aspect of universality in the concrete. Overall, then, one finds the same ambiguity with regard to the intelligibility of quiddity as the one that characterizes Avicenna's views on its universality in concrete beings: the *ma'nā* is essentially universal and intelligible, but not in the sense in which these terms are typically used to designate mental objects.

172 Thus, if Avicenna in some texts is keen to stress the chasm between ‘the sensible’ and ‘the intellectual,’ pure quiddity can be said to represent an exception to this general rule, since its existence in concrete things is intelligible or at least potentially intelligible. This explains why *Introduction*, I.12, 68.18–19 describes humanness as a natural form and an intelligible form; why the term ‘nature’ (*ṭabi'ah*) can be applied both to concrete beings and to essences in the mind; and why this nature can be intellectually ‘extracted’ and ‘abstracted’ from concrete individuals in the first place. On my view Neoplatonic doctrines inflected this aspect of Avicenna's philosophy; they will be discussed in more depth in chapter V.

gard to the mental universal as a constructed concept, which is different from the issue of the quidditative *ma'nā* as it exists in itself in the concrete. Thus, whenever Avicenna speaks of the *potential* universality and intelligibility of the universal in the concrete (as he does implicitly in Text 20 below), this statement pertains primarily to human thought and mental universality—i. e., the *ma'nā*'s potentiality to be abstracted and conceived as a universal in the mind. This mode of universality should be differentiated from the essential intelligibility and universality of *ṭabī'ah* and *ma'nā* as it exists in the concrete. In contrast to the mental universal, the latter can be described as something intrinsically or essentially universal or common. Indeed, one could argue, even if no human intellects were present to apprehend the universal concept 'horse' and predicate it of individual instances, there would still be something essentially common in these concrete horses, namely, the pure nature or *ma'nā* horseness. This explains why it remains identical at all times, even when it coexists with matter and material accidents, as well as why this mode of existence seems to be fundamentally unconnected to the issue of universality in the mind. These points suggest a modulated construal of universality in Avicenna's system. At any rate, if the *ma'nā* were material, its irreducibility and cognitive separability through abstraction would not be possible, and quiddity would simply fuse or collapse irreversibly with its material substrate.

As I already showed in chapter II, the master goes through great pains to distinguish the meaning or *ma'nā* of quiddity in itself from the meaning or *ma'nā* of universality with which it is potentially connected, and he regards the universal as a synthetic combination of these two meanings. The same would seem to apply to the concrete existents, where the meaning or idea of quiddity in itself is present in them *qua* foundational nature. It can be abstracted from these concrete beings and also from the other things (accidents and concomitants) that accrue to it in that context. It is this process of abstraction that enables us to recognize things for what they are, e. g., Zayd for human.¹⁷³ As Avicenna explains in *Introduction*:

Animalness [*al-ḥayawāniyyah*] does not become an individual that can be pointed to except through its connection with something that makes it [a thing that can be] pointed to. Likewise with regard to the intellect: it [animalness] becomes such [a definite thing] only when the intellect attaches [another] specifying meaning [*ma'nā*] to it.¹⁷⁴

173 Avicenna's belief that quiddity in itself can be abstracted engenders some epistemological complications. There is at present a debate as to the place and importance of abstraction in Avicenna's epistemology and how abstraction relates to the emanation of forms coming from the Agent Intellect. What is significant in this connection is that the evidence from *Metaphysics* V.1, on my analysis, suggests that quiddity in itself represents the utmost degree of mental abstraction. Hence, I claim that Avicenna regards abstraction as pertaining to the intellectual state of quiddity in itself, although the issue of whether abstraction also expresses a *process* leading to this state should remain open for the time being. Suffice to say here that several statements in *Metaphysics* V.1 seem to support this view: 204.6–8; 205.5–6, and especially 8–13. This point is discussed in more detail below.

174 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.19–66.1.

This passage attests that the core meaning of mental and extramental existents derives from the same intelligible nature. Furthermore, it stresses that these existents exist as individuals or numerically one things as a result of their *ma'nā* combining with external attributes and concomitants that condition or qualify them. However, even though this synthetic process ultimately results in composite or complex existents, the irreducible meaning that constitutes their quiddity, viz., animality, remains a constant throughout these ontological and epistemological processes. As a result, it always remains conceptually abstractable, even when these entities possess a plurality of material attributes attached to them. Avicenna's views on psychological abstraction provide additional evidence concerning the intelligible existence of the essential *ma'nā* in concrete beings. Although this point will be addressed in detail later on (see section III.6), one example is called for here to illustrate this connection. In *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, the master explains that the intellect can “unbind” (*tašarrafa*), “extract” (*tanzi'u*), and “abstract” (*jarrada*, *tajrīd*) the “essential reality” (*ḥaqīqah*) of things, as well as “peel away” (*yaqshiru*) the various layers of material attachments and accidents that surround this essential reality in the composite thing.¹⁷⁵ Avicenna's language in that passage is highly evocative and points to the existence of the *ḥaqīqah* or *ma'nā* as an intelligible principle in the concrete that is divested from matter by the powers of the intellect. Moreover, pure quiddity, Avicenna tells us elsewhere, is related to the composite in the way that the simple is related to the complex and the part to the whole. It is prior and, so to speak, a principle for the existence of what follows, with the implication that it can also be conceptually separated from it, just as the simple or the part can be conceived of in isolation of, and as being prior to, the multiple or the whole.¹⁷⁶

There is furthermore a cosmological aspect to the problem, which lends additional support to the view that the forms of concrete beings remain somehow intrinsically intelligible. The fact that the substantial and essential forms in concrete individuals have their origin in the Agent Intellect and are emanated by this immaterial being suggests an intelligible state of immanence of these forms in their material substrate.¹⁷⁷ Recall that Avicenna describes the Agent Intellect as the ‘Giver of Forms’ (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*)—the *Dator formarum* of the Latin Scholastics—in reference to its role as a purveyor of forms to the sublunary realm. If the pure natures and quiddities exist in this being as well—a reasonable assumption, which will be substantiated in chapter V—then it is clear that they possess an intelligible state that would essentially precede their instantiation ‘in multiplicity’ or ‘in matter.’ Anticipating slightly on chapter V, the ontological and epistemic status of these forms in the Agent Intellect corresponds roughly to the Neoplatonic class of universals that are

175 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 40.

176 For the priority of pure quiddity, see Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.8ff.; see also sections IV.1 and 3.

177 See Lammer, *The Elements*, 170, and note 200, for a brief discussion of this topic and relevant secondary sources on the Agent Intellect; cf. Janssens, *The Notions*; Allebban, *Conservation*.

‘before matter’ or ‘before multiplicity,’ and which are also described as ‘theological’ in some Greek sources. Now, on the Neoplatonic account, the hylomorphic forms are directly related to these divine archetypes and participate in them. Although Avicenna shuns a theory of participation, it is not outlandish to presume that in his cosmological system as well the hylomorphic forms are essentially related to the forms in the Agent Intellect (via the notion of pure quiddity), which are emanated from It unto the realm of nature. Quite tellingly, the master in *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle* describes in a Neoplatonic way the forms in matter as “imitations of the true intelligible forms” (*muḥākīyyāt li-l-ṣuwar al-‘aqliyyah al-ḥaqqah*) that belong to the super-intellec-tuals. Although these forms in themselves cannot be identical, they nevertheless share the same essential *ma‘nā*.¹⁷⁸ What is more, he refers elsewhere to “the pure intelligible notions and the intelligible notions that become material particulars” (*al-ma‘ānī l-‘aqliyyah al-ṣīrfah wa-l-ma‘ānī l-‘aqliyyah allatī taṣīru juz‘iyyah māddiyyah*) as existing in the divine intellects.¹⁷⁹ Finally, he argues that the corporeal world is “engraved” by the *ma‘ānī* it receives from the intellectual world.¹⁸⁰ These passages explicitly stress the essential and ontological continuity between the *ma‘ānī* in the Agent Intellect and those in concrete beings. Moreover, they suggest the fundamental intelligibility of all forms in nature when these are related to their divine causes and archetypes. This is true *a fortiori* of the human souls, which are immaterial forms whose pure quiddity or *ma‘nā* is emanated by the Agent Intellect to material substrates predisposed to receiving it and that participate directly in Avicenna’s substance dualism.¹⁸¹ The evidence adduced above also indicates that the essential *ma‘ānī* could be said to transcend their individual concrete instantiations, not in the manner of the Platonic forms proper, but in the manner of intelligibles dwelling in the divine intellects. This hypothesis would lend additional momentum to the idea that quiddity in the concrete object possesses a special intelligible mode of being, which mirrors its divine origin and status. The intelligible nature of the forms, acquired at their originative source in the Agent Intellect, would endure in the concrete individual. Admittedly, however, this interpretation rests largely on the most Neoplatonic work by Avicenna, namely, his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, whose exact relation to the rest of the Avicennian corpus requires further exploration.

In retrospect, when Avicenna notes in *Introduction* I.12 (Text 24) that nature and quiddity are best referred to sometimes as “natural form” and other times as “intelligible form,” I believe his intention is not to establish a hard ontological distinction between these two aspects of form, but merely an epistemological one. Nature and pure quiddity always remain ontologically the same in these two contexts. After

178 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 40 and 46.

179 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 48.7–8.

180 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 58.12–13. This hypothesis would be particularly compelling if one presumes that it is the pure quiddities themselves that exist in the Agent Intellect, not the universals. This point is discussed at length in chapter V.

181 See Kaukua, *Self-Awareness*, 23–25, 43–61. Cf. Allebban, *Conservation*, especially 218–219.

all, it is the same nature (*ṭabī‘ah*) that lies at the root of the mental and concrete forms and endows them with their essential reality. Nature in the concrete being is not another meaning (*ma‘nā*) or quiddity (*māhiyyah*) than the one in the mind. By implication, it is not the case that the former is material and the latter immaterial. The pure nature in concrete beings is also intrinsically intelligible and is merely transferable to the mind through a process of abstraction. It is this same nature and form, which, when abstracted, is ‘intentionalized’ and ‘universalized’ and connected with the logical notions of genus or species in the mind so as to be predicated in relation to many things. Hence, the potentiality that attaches to pure quiddity in concrete beings is not a potentiality for a state of intelligible existence *per se*, since it is already characterized by it, but rather a potentiality to become a universal form in the mind and be logically predicated of many, i.e., acquire the accident of mental universality. This means that the pure quiddities in concrete beings are already essentially universal and intelligible. They are only potentially the synthetic universals that are predicated of many in the human mind.¹⁸²

What is more, if generic and specific nature and quiddity are identified with the substantial forms in concrete beings, then they will per force be ontologically prior to pure matter, given that Avicenna is keen on the actual priority of form over matter.¹⁸³ In actual existence, form precedes matter, which, by the same token, makes form *qua* nature and quiddity essentially and ontologically prior to matter. This applies even with regard to the composite substance, where the hylomorphic whole consists of

182 One may perceive here an echo of the Neoplatonic theories of form or common thing as it exists in multiplicity, where the forms in beings are always related somehow to the transcendent forms. This hypothesis seems corroborated not only by the fact that Avicenna, following the Neoplatonists, sometimes refers to the nature and quiddity in concrete beings as common (*‘amm*) and even as universal (*kullī*), but also by the intrinsic ambiguity of the term *ṣūrah* in his philosophy, which can mean hylomorphic form, mental intelligible, or immaterial existent; this point should be regarded as more than a mere Neoplatonic residue in his philosophy and represents a key aspect of his treatment of essence. In this connection, it is fascinating to realize (together with Jolivet, Aux origines) that the Arabic term *ṣūrah* (pl. *ṣuwar*) was used in some of the translations of Greek works to render Aristotle’s immanent forms as well as the Platonic transcendent Forms or archetypes. That there is at the very least a remnant of a Neoplatonic interface between these planes and senses of ‘form’ in Avicenna’s treatment of essence and the universals seems likely to me and can account to some extent for the ambiguity of his phrasing and views. This has put some modern interpreters in an awkward situation. For example, Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, stresses the purely Aristotelian background of Avicenna’s account of the universals and quiddity, going so far as to ascribe to Avicenna a strand of “radical Aristotelianism” (123) and stating that “there are no elements of Neoplatonism in the ontology of *al-Shifā’*” (125). Yet, at the same time, he feels compelled to highlight other elements, such as Avicenna’s view that the natures or quiddities exist in the divine intellects and that the Agent Intellect emanates forms on the sublunary world, which are undeniably of Neoplatonic origin. Unsurprisingly, Booth says little about these points and how they fit in Avicenna’s “radical Aristotelianism.”

183 This is true, even though, in the case of material beings, there is a qualified sense in which matter can be said to precede form due to its potentiality for existence and its receptivity for form; see *Metaphysics*, IV.2. This possibility (*imkān*) associated with matter can be said to temporally precede the existent.

a combination of these two principles, since it is always form, in the end, which actualizes and grants reality and existence to matter.¹⁸⁴ In this case, the priority of form as a part of the composite also has to do with the fact that, as Avicenna explains in *Salvation*, the part essentially precedes the whole.¹⁸⁵ Finally, form and especially species-form is what is most closely and immediately predicated of concrete individuals and primary substances. It is on these grounds that, on Avicenna's mind, form is substance in a primary or even absolute sense (*muṭlaqan*).

The intelligibility of the essential *ma'nā* of the substantial forms of concrete beings ensures the correspondence Avicenna so eagerly seeks to establish between these substantial forms and the intelligible forms in the mind. Another relevant passage that should be mentioned in this connection is *Introduction*, I.12, 69.7–18 (Text 45). This passage, which will be analyzed in more depth in chapter V, stresses the correspondence and common metaphysical origin of these forms: sometimes the substantial forms in concrete beings are causes of the intelligible forms in the mind; other times it is the intelligible forms in the human and divine intellects that are causes for the hylomorphic forms in nature. Avicenna's oft repeated claims that the universal intelligible in the human mind can be derived from any particular concrete object to which it relates; that the pure quiddities and natures are sometimes found in concrete beings and other times in the mind; and that the same form is sometimes better described as 'intelligible' and other times as 'natural,' should all be taken quite literally as emphasizing the fundamental epistemic and ontological correspondence of these forms in virtue of the quidditative *ma'nā*. These statements are coherent precisely because they presuppose that the substantial forms are constituted, in their core, by the pure quidditative *ma'nā*, whose transferability to the intellect is ensured by its intrinsic intelligibility and irreducibility. Thus, the intelligible form (*ṣūrah ma'qūlah*) can flourish in the intellect as a result of the apprehension of any concrete instantiation (Zayd or 'Amr), or, conversely, it can arise in the mind in abstraction from any concrete instantiation and then cause a corresponding substantial form to exist in the exterior world (e. g., the architect who conceives a heptagonal house), because the pure *ma'nā* is constant, irreducible, and common and thereby ensures the epistemological and ontological symmetry between the concrete and mental planes.¹⁸⁶ In this fashion, Avicenna's metaphysics bridges concrete and men-

184 For Alexander as well, form has ontological priority; see Rashed, *Essentialisme*.

185 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 552.

186 Additional evidence for the possibility of the existence of an immaterial principle in matter, or rather, in close relation to matter and body, can be derived from Avicenna's theory of the human soul, which is described as an immaterial substance inhering in a body or at the very least co-existing with a body; either way, this leads to a substance dualism. However, the difference, in that case, is that the human soul is an intellect reflecting intelligibles, which, on Avicenna's account, inevitably makes it an intellectual substance in actuality. In contrast, the substantial and essential forms of non-rational beings, such as horse or granite, are not in themselves intellectual for Avicenna. In spite of this, they must be seen as possessing an intelligible principle, which is their essential *ma'nā*.

tal existence by making essence in itself or the irreducible *ma'nā* the common denominator of the concrete and intelligible *ṣuwar*. If approached from this angle, forms are all fundamentally intelligible quiddities, regardless of whether they exist in the mind or in the concrete world. If reduced to their pure *ṭabī'ah* and *ma'nā*, the substantial forms in concrete beings and the intelligible forms in the mind are the same. The *ṣūrah ṭabī'iyyah* and *ṣūrah jawhariyyah* are not, fundamentally, a material form. They are just a *ma'nā* that happens to exist in concrete beings and that is surrounded by a cluster of material accidents.

Accordingly, in *Metaphysics* III.8, Avicenna explains that the meaning and existence of quiddity in the concrete and in the mind are fundamentally identical, on the assumption that one intends pure quiddity and not quiddity taken with the accidents and concomitants that follow it. What changes, on the other hand, is the way in which this quiddity becomes realized and fulfills its perfections. Thus, if the *ma'nā* of motion, for example, is fundamentally the same when contemplated in the mind and existing in the concrete, the actualization and completion of motion only ever actually takes place in the physical beings. Yet, motion in itself as a quiddity exists both in the mind and the concrete and its true nature (*ḥaqīqah*) is identical. As Avicenna explains, the essence of motion

Is, in the intellect, a quiddity [*māhiyyah*] that is in the concrete the perfection of something in potentiality. But its being in the concrete and its being in the intellect do not differ [*laysa yakhtalifu kawnuhā fī l-ʿyān wa-kawnuhā fī l-ʿaql*]. For it is in both according to a single mode [or judgment, *ḥukm wāḥid*] and it is in both a quiddity [*māhiyyah*], which exists in the concrete as a perfection of what is in potentiality.¹⁸⁷

Although Avicenna provides us here with a specific example (another one he resorts to in this section is the power of the magnetic stone), the more general point he seeks to establish in this chapter is that the pure quiddities of all substances exist in the intellect and in the concrete, even though the definition of what a substance is ('to exist in the concrete not in a subject') is obviously realized only in exterior reality. As the above example illustrates, this position implies that the *ma'nā* and *ṭabī'ah* that correspond to a pure quiddity are in a sense identical in the mind and in the concrete and, hence, constant and irreducible. These passages should be collated to the assertion that appears at *Metaphysics* I.5 according to which "an essential reality [*ḥaqīqah*] exists [*mawjūdah*] either in the concrete extramental world, or in the soul, or absolutely [*muṭlaqan*] [in a way that] is common to both" (see Text 25). Since Avicenna in that same passage had just glossed *ḥaqīqah* as meaning *māhiyyah* and *wujūd khāṣṣ*, it appears that these texts seek to make an identical argument regarding the mental and concrete equivalence of quiddity.

Now, although the foregoing applies to all the forms, natures, and quiddities of concrete beings, Avicenna makes it a point at the end of *Metaphysics* III.8 to exclude

¹⁸⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, III.8, 141.4–6.

the separate intellects from this picture.¹⁸⁸ In their case, *and in their case alone*, the intelligible forms in our minds cannot possibly correspond to the substantial forms of these intellects as they exist in the exterior world. On account of the ontological remoteness and immateriality of these intellects, we cannot even acquire these intelligible forms in the first place. So there is a discrepancy here between the *ma'nā* and *māhiyyah* of these intellects as they exist in the concrete world, and our derivative and imperfect cognition of them, which consists rather of traces, images, or derivative forms that in any case cannot be identified with their substantial forms proper. This particular case study stresses once again, albeit in a negative way this time, the identity of the substantial and intelligible forms in Avicenna's philosophy: it is *because* the substantial and essential forms of the separate intellects are identical with their intellection and thus with all the intelligible objects they contemplate—and which we would also intellect as a result of acquiring their *ma'nā*, *were it possible*—that there is a disconnect between the existence of these immaterial beings and the human knowledge concerning them, between their intelligible essences and the imperfect impression of them we acquire in our minds.¹⁸⁹

To recap: although in Avicenna's metaphysics there is no ontologically separate form of animalness or humanness that could be identified with a transcendent Platonic archetype, the foundational nature of each individual thing exists formally, immanently, and intelligibly within it. In parallel to his rebuttal of the theory of the Platonic forms and of a strong realist position, Avicenna appears to broadly endorse the Aristotelian theory of immanent forms. What is more, he also grounds his theory of essence in an Aristotelian hylomorphic framework, which, by building on Alexander, allows him to maintain the autonomy and priority of essence-form over pure matter. However, Avicenna's theory of immanent formalism and his hylomorphism are combined with the postulation of the Agent Intellect, which, in the final analysis, connects the sublunary forms with a heavenly intelligible principle acting as a paradigm

188 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, III.8, 132.8 ff.

189 The main reason Avicenna deploys to justify this exclusion is that if it were possible to apprehend the pure quiddities of these intellects as they really are *in themselves*, then human beings would possess all the intelligible forms at once, given that the intelligible forms dwell in these intellects. So the argument here does not hinge on a distinction between the substantial form and the intelligible form—on the contrary, it is premised on their identity: both are identical in the separate intellects, given their immaterial nature—but rather on the fact that human beings cannot acquire these substantial/intelligible forms directly as they truly exist outside the mind. At 143.5 Avicenna explains that what is realized in the human mind is not the essence (*dhāt*) of the separate intellect, or the separate intellect itself, but rather the *ma'ānī māhiyyātihā*, “the notions [derived from] their quiddities.” In this particular case, the term *ma'nā* is obviously not synonymous with ‘quiddity in itself,’ but rather refers to various meanings ‘associated’ with quiddity, and so should perhaps be taken more in the sense of ‘concomitants’ (*lawāzim*), which is another possible translation of *ma'nā* (such as when Avicenna describes the external concomitants or *lawāzim* of quiddity as *ma'ānī*). It is in this qualified sense that Avicenna believes that we can know the concomitants and effects of the separate beings, but not their true reality and quiddity, a point which he applies especially to God.

or blueprint for the realm of nature below it.¹⁹⁰ The substantial and essential form is what provides an individual with its common essence (such as horseness), whereas matter provides the individuating characteristics proper to it. In this regard, the essential form can be said to inhere in each existent like a ‘part,’ and in this capacity it contributes to the actualization of the form-matter composite that is the complete substance. This implies a strong correlation between essence and form, which Avicenna inherited from Aristotle and the Aristotelian-Alexandrian tradition, but which he adjusted to fit his new theory of quiddity. Not only does Avicenna employ the terms *māhiyyah* and *ṣūrah* in virtually the same sense when discussing essence in concrete beings, but his theory of the immanent existence of pure quiddity implies that the hylomorphic form is what comes to be most closely associated with the essential *ma‘nā*. Quiddity in itself, nature, and substantial form are *roughly* equivalent in the concrete existent, even though these notions can convey different nuances depending on the context. This in turn explains how the human mind can effect the transition from the extramental to the mental consideration of quiddity. The intrinsic intelligibility of quiddity establishes an ontological and epistemological correspondence, even a continuum, between the concrete form and the mental form. The quidditative *ma‘nā* emerges as a constant of concrete and mental existence.

The foregoing remarks have addressed some Avicennian passages that present quiddity in concrete beings as something existent (*mawjūd*), abstract or potentially abstract (*mujarrad*), unconditioned (*lā bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*), and even—in a qualified sense—universal (*kullī*). By attaching these epithets to pure quiddity, Avicenna does not intend to say that it is separate from the concrete individuals, but rather that it is an immanent formal principle in those beings on account of its essential irreducibility and intelligibility.¹⁹¹ Approached from this angle, pure quiddity can be described as an irreducible substantial part of composite beings, which also correlates with their common nature (*ṭabī‘ah*), essential reality (*ḥaqīqah*), and quidditative meaning (*ma‘nā*), as well as, in a looser sense, with their essential form (*ṣūrah*). We saw that in Avicenna’s cosmology these principles are emanated from the Agent Intellect unto the realm of sublunary beings. In view of this, it is important to emphasize, over and against recent interpretations, that Avicenna’s mereological account is not only epistemic or logical and intended to lay the ground for his epistemology (which it undoubtedly does), but also amounts to a variant of ontological formalism or realism. In effect, Avicenna embroiders this feature of quiddity with a rich vocabulary of being. Even in his logical exposition at *Introduction* I.2 and I.12, he speaks not merely of our consideration of pure quiddity in the extramental world (an epistemic

190 The role of the Agent Intellect is discussed further in other sections of this book. Avicenna’s theory of immanent formalism bears some resemblance with other such theories developed in the medieval Latin context; see Erisman, *Immanent Realism*.

191 Interestingly, the theory that quiddity or nature somehow exists intelligibly in concrete beings and in an unconditioned state became a hallmark of the later Arabic philosophical tradition from Ṭūsī onward, and it also underwent a parallel development in the Latin West; see below.

or logical point), but more precisely of our consideration of its existence (*wujūdihā*) in concrete beings (an ontological point), expounding on the issue of how this pure quiddity exists in the world. He pursues and amplifies this approach in *Metaphysics*, as illustrated in the proposition that “the nature to which universality occurs exists in the concrete world [*mawjūdah fī l-a’yān*].”¹⁹² In brief, Avicenna’s mereological interpretation is intended also to amount to an *ontological account* of how quiddity exists in the concrete world, and one which provides an alternative to the Platonic theories of the Forms and participation.

In retrospect, arguing for an *inherent, formal, intelligible, and irreducible* mode of existence of essence in concrete beings represents perhaps the only viable option at Avicenna’s disposal, if he intends to convincingly maintain the following set of propositions: (a) that quiddity exists as forms and parts of these existents; (b) that it does not exist as a material part; and (c) that it does not also exist separately from these concrete beings in the exterior world like a Platonic form, with an ensuing theory of participation. Avicenna’s solution to this problem, which he fashions in contradistinction to the views adopted by some of his predecessors, displays elements of Aristotelian hylomorphism interpreted in light of Neoplatonic noetical and causal theories as well as—as we shall see shortly—Ibn ‘Adī’s legacy. The mode of existence he ascribes to quiddity is adequately conveyed by the expression ‘in itself’ (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*). One should distinguish here between the mode of existence of pure quiddity and the existence that pertains to the composite substance made up of form and matter. Compared to quiddity taken ‘in itself,’ the existent taken as a whole is posterior and complex, i. e., a composite of form and matter. As Avicenna notes, pure quiddity precedes it in the way that the part precedes the whole, and the way the simple precedes the complex or multiple. One may also add that it precedes it in the way the intelligible precedes the material. Notice that Avicenna is not claiming by the same token that the mode of existence of pure quiddity precedes the complex substance *temporally* (*bi-l-zamān*). In other words, he does not believe that pure quiddity can exist in the concrete world on its own and without being a part of a larger ontological structure in which it inheres. This is a point to which the master returns time and again in the works of his middle and late period. In concrete reality, nothing precedes the efficient cause and the existence of primary substance, so that there cannot be any autonomously pre-existing essences floating around that await realized existence. Rather, the kind of priority Avicenna intends in this context is primarily essential, logical, and conceptual and is to be connected also with the notion of final causality.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 211.9–12.

¹⁹³ Nevertheless, these notions are closely connected with a sense of ontological priority as well for Avicenna; these points are discussed in more detail in chapter IV. A useful example to illustrate the foregoing focuses on the human soul. The human rational soul, according to Avicenna, does not pre-exist the human body, but it exists immaterially and represents its essential and formal principle. It also participates in the process of reversion and the final causality of human life by orienting human

In any case, Avicenna's mereological theory of quiddity amounts to a formalist or realist position, in that essence turns out to be a fundamental principle of reality and a foundational concept of his ontology of concrete beings.¹⁹⁴ Not only does he believe in the mental existence of quiddity as something irreducible *and* distinct, but he also advocates the existence of quiddity as something irreducible (albeit not separate) in concrete beings. What is more, the ontological irreducibility of quiddity in the universals in the mind is comparable to its ontological irreducibility in the concrete world. In both cases, pure quiddity preserves its ontological distinctness, identity, and inner reality, although it exists 'with' other things, which are its material or mental accidents and concomitants. In either case, it remains the fundamental nature and *ma'nā* of beings. As McGinnis noted, this essentialist doctrine makes Avicenna a "scientific realist" in addition to a metaphysical realist, because it establishes logic as a tool that adequately reflects the real order and structure of the world.¹⁹⁵ It postulates a strict ontological and epistemic symmetry between the quiddities that exist truly and actually in the concrete world and those that exist in the mind. On my analysis, Avicenna's 'scientific realism' is premised on a kind of 'ontological realism' or 'formalism.'

By virtue of its sheer ontological scope and depth, Avicenna's formalist or realist theory of quiddity also lays the ground for some of the core features of his epistemology, a fact that has not been fully appreciated thus far due to the resistance facing such a reading of his metaphysics.¹⁹⁶ What has not been sufficiently insisted upon in particular is the crucial role that Avicenna's theory of unconditioned quiddity in the concrete world—and the terminology attached to it—plays in his account of the processes and operations underlying abstraction and human thought. The crucial terms that connect Avicenna's theory of quiddity in the concrete world and in the mind are nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*). These two notions bridge the ontological and epistemic spheres in Avicenna's philosophy. The intelligible nature (*ṭabī'ah*) existing in physical things is also described as a quidditative meaning or entity (*ma'nā*) that exists in each one of them. These two terms explicitly

beings back to their originative source and the divine principles of knowledge and being. Hence, even though it is not temporally prior to the body, the soul is essentially prior and simple when compared to it.

194 This conclusion agrees in part with Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; De Haan, A Mereological Construal; and Benevich, Die 'göttliche Existenz,' especially 111–112. Benevich in particular articulates this mereological interpretation of pure quiddity in composite beings. It is in fact the only mode of existence of quiddity that he recognizes. Benevich accordingly limits Avicenna's descriptions of the existence of quiddity—including the tantalizing reference to its 'divine existence'—to this aspect. To use my terminology, Benevich recognizes only the irreducible existence of pure quiddity (as a part in other things), but not its distinct existence (whether in the mind or elsewhere).

195 McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, 165.

196 For some insight into the intersections between ontology and epistemology with regard to essence, see McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 33–35; and especially idem, *Logic and Science*; and Benevich, Die 'göttliche Existenz.'

refer to pure quiddity in those beings as well as to the abstracted concept in our minds.¹⁹⁷

What is more, Avicenna's brand of metaphysical formalism or realism should be connected not only with Aristotle's doctrine of formal immanence, but also with Neoplatonic antecedents. On the one hand, the Persian master adopts and modifies the Aristotelian view that forms exist inherently in individual beings, and he also pursues Aristotle's battle against Plato's theory of transcendent forms. On the other hand, and in spite of his polemical engagement with Platonism, it is apparent that Avicenna's position stemmed from a direct acquaintance with Neoplatonic sources. For the master correlates these essential forms with the natures of things, which can be regarded as special kinds of universals in the concrete and also as intelligible principles.¹⁹⁸ These points, especially when they are connected with the theory of the Agent Intellect, mark an important departure from Aristotle's doctrine. As Nicholas Heer pointed out, this particular position reflects one of the various interpretive options available to Arabic scholars that was outlined by Porphyry in the notorious passage of *Eisagoge* concerning the existence of the universals in the concrete world.¹⁹⁹ There Porphyry asks—among other questions—whether the universals exist in concrete things, and, if so, whether they exist in an intelligible or physical mode. But while Porphyry follows a late-antique philosophical convention and speaks of 'universals' and 'common things,' Avicenna reframes the same questions with regard to the various aspects of quiddity. In spite of this terminological and conceptual difference, I would contend that Avicenna had Porphyry's passage in mind when addressing these seminal questions and especially that of the ontological mode of quiddity in the concrete world in *Metaphysics* V. More specifically, the Persian master intended to tackle in that text the set of conundrums that Porphyry had raised in connec-

197 For the overlap of these technical terms, see *Introduction*, I.5, 28.13; *Pointers*, vol. 1, 202–205, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1 *passim*. Due to its semantic elasticity, the term *ma'nā* in particular emphasizes the dual state of essence as a principle existing in concrete individuals and as a meaning existing in the mind.

198 It is interesting that Albert the Great, *Metaphysics*, XI.2.10, places Plato and Avicenna in the same group of thinkers on account of how they explain the nature of the sublunary forms and trace their origin back to a supernal intellect. Albert apparently perceived Avicenna's theory of the Giver of Forms as Platonic or Platonizing in nature.

199 Heer, *The Sufi Position*, 1–2. For a recent study of the reception of Avicenna's views on the universals in the later tradition, see Faruque, Mullā Ṣadrā. The Avicennian doctrine of formal immanence and the existence of nature in concrete beings were endorsed by many thinkers of the post-classical tradition. These thinkers—whether philosophers, theologians, or even Sufis—often identify quiddity *qua* nature in concrete existents with the natural universal (*al-kullī l-ṭabī'ī*), which, on their view, exists in the external world in a robust or real sense. In contrast to 'the natural universal,' both 'the logical' and 'intellectual' universals exist only in the mind. Although Avicenna himself usually refrains from applying the term 'universal' to quiddity in the external world, it is clear nonetheless that (a) the commentators' identification of the natural universal with nature and unconditioned quiddity, and (b) their belief in the existence of this nature and unconditioned quiddity in concrete particulars represent an amplification of Avicenna's position.

tion with universal natures, that is, whether and how they can be said to exist in the concrete world, or, as Porphyry himself put it, “(a) whether genera and species are real or are situated in bare thoughts alone, (b) whether as real they are bodies or incorporeals, and (c) whether they are separated or in sensibles and have their reality in connection with them.”²⁰⁰

Avicenna adopts a relatively committal stance vis-à-vis this set of questions, although he modifies the terminology in the process, speaking of pure quiddities and natures instead of species and genera (‘speciesness’ and ‘genusness’ being according to him attributes of the mind). With regard to questions (a) and (c), he believes that pure quiddities and natures do exist in the concrete world, not as separate archetypes, but *in* concrete beings. With regard to question (b), he holds that they exist in an intelligible manner and are not in themselves corporeal, although they may also be considered *together with* their corporeal accidents and concomitants in the mind. What is more, these essential *ma‘ānī* have their origin in the separate intellects, as will become clear in chapter V, so that their ontological source is purely intelligible. What led to this position is to a large extent Avicenna’s original rehandling of the notion of *ma‘nā*. In addition to the Mu‘tazilite sources, I would suggest that his particular conceptualization and implementation of this notion was shaped to some extent by Neoplatonic theories of form and the universals. As a result, his doctrine reconciles a kind of formal immanentism with the theory of the existence of quiddity in the human and divine intellects. On my reconstruction of the evidence, Avicenna himself embraced the threefold model of the universals he mentions at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12, adapting it to his theory of pure quiddity and his *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* paradigm. While it may appear baffling at first that he would combine these various Aristotelian and Neoplatonic theories, which historically belonged to incompatible or, at the very least, competing philosophical systems, the synthesis he achieves is rendered coherent by his subjective and innovative theory of pure quiddity. It should be said also that the trend of harmonizing Platonic and Aristotelian views was one of the salient characteristics of the late-antique Neoplatonic legacy Avicenna tapped into. Building on this legacy, he elaborated a highly integrated and creative theory of essence that enabled him to answer Porphyry’s conundrums in a new way.

3 Is pure quiddity in concrete beings universal?

The analysis deployed thus far has designated the common nature in concrete beings as the cornerstone of Avicenna’s brand of metaphysical formalism or realism. But, one may ask, inasmuch as it is common to several individuals, why is this nature

²⁰⁰ Porphyry, *Eisagoge*, 1.9–14, transl. by Paul Vincent Spade, reproduced in Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 157.

not in itself a kind of universal? And for what reasons would Avicenna want to insist on distinguishing common nature from universality in concrete beings?²⁰¹ Avicenna in general insists that it is pure quiddity, nature, and reality that exist in concrete beings, not the universals themselves. He relies on the term *mushtarakah* to express the idea of an essential commonness of nature in multiple concrete beings, which he distinguishes from universality proper. The rationale for this distinction can be approached from different angles. First, Avicenna regards universality (*al-kulliyah*) and, consequently, the universals (*al-kulliyāt*) primarily as mental or intellectual objects, which arise and are actualized in the mind or intellect. Although the natures and realities can be regarded *potentially* or *theoretically* as universals, given that they can be abstracted and apprehended by the mind in relation to their extramental instantiations, the universals as such exist only on the mental plane. For example, Avicenna would say that it is ‘pure animalness’ or ‘the nature animal’ that exists in concrete, particular animals, not ‘universal animal’ or ‘the universal genus animal.’ These universal notions exist only in the mind, since they are the product of logical ratiocination. As Avicenna explains:

Text 20: If we then say that the universal nature exists in external things [*al-ṭabī‘ah al-kulliyah mawjūdah fī l-a‘yān*], we do not mean inasmuch as it is universal in this [mental] mode of universality [*bi-hādhihi l-jihah min al-kulliyah*]. Rather, we mean that the nature to which [mental] universality occurs exists in things external [to the mind]. Hence, inasmuch as it is a nature, this is one thing; and, inasmuch as it is something from which it is likely that a universal form is intellectually apprehended, this is something else.²⁰²

Hence, in order to be truly regarded as universals, or rather, as mental universals, these natures have to be actually conceived by the human mind or combined with the intention of predicability of many, whereby a relation between the universal and individuals (whether actual or potential) is established. This means that a relation to a certain multiplicity (*kathrah*) is necessarily implied. Universality (*al-kulliyah*) is, as Avicenna explains in *Salvation*, “a condition added to [the pure quiddity] human” (*sharṭ zā‘id ‘alā annahu insān*). It is a logical consideration added to the pure nature in the mind.²⁰³ On this point, there is a marked terminological distinction between Avicenna and his later exegetes, since they will speak routinely, and rather systematically, of the ‘natural universals’ (sing. *kullī ṭabī‘ī*) as another way

201 These questions are compounded by the seemingly conflicting state of the textual evidence, which at times seems to support the concrete existence of universals, and at others seems to reject this option entirely. They are also rendered more complicated by Avicenna’s use of different technical terms and notions to qualify nature, such as commonness (*mushtarakah*), generality (*‘āmmah*), and universality (*kulliyah*) whose nuances are not always easy to disentangle and whose senses seem to overlap to some degree.

202 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 211.9–12, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 161, revised; cf. *Introduction*, I.12, 66.4–11.

203 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 536.11.

of referring to the natures and quiddities that exist in concrete beings. For Avicenna, *sensu stricto*, it is pure quiddity and nature that can be said to exist in its irreducible, simple, and intelligible mode in the concrete particulars, not the universal. The latter are formed through a process of intentionality and discursive rationality in the human mind, and they are epistemically and ontologically distinct from pure quiddity.

In contrast to the logical and universal notions present in the mind, the natures and realities in concrete beings are primarily ontological principles that exist independently of human ratiocination and intentionality. This distinction is important, inasmuch as it introduces a sharp distinction between the entitative dimension of common nature, on the one hand, which truly exists in each concrete individual, and the epistemological and intentional dimension of universality, on the other, which is a notion that exists only in the human intellect. Whereas the commonness of nature or pure quiddity is intrinsic to it and arises out of its ontological indifference to external circumstances, its universality is an intention and meaning added to it in the reflective mind. Naturally, the two aspects coincide and overlap, but they should nevertheless be distinguished if one intends to do justice to Avicenna's argumentation.²⁰⁴ With that being said, and in spite of Avicenna's insistence on this intellectual context, intellectuality does not ultimately represent the main or, for that matter, the only, criterion of universality. For Avicenna, the universal is fundamentally something that can be predicated of many things, and it is this predicative capacity that appears to trump intellectuality and make it universal. As he notes, "its universality is not due to its being in the soul [*fī l-nafs*], but to its relating to many individuals, existent or imagined, whose judgment about them is a single judgment [of universality]."²⁰⁵ In spite of this, it is clear that predicability of many and intellectuality in theory go hand in hand, since it is the rational powers of the human soul that predicate a single idea of many things and hence conceive it as a universal. The chief characteristic of the universal, such as the universal genus 'animal,' as opposed to pure quiddity, is that it can be logically predicated of many in the mind.

204 Although scholars of Avicenna have sometimes conflated the two notions of common nature and universality, or discussed them as if they were one, it is clear that they need to be differentiated. Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*, 117–125, recognizes the gap between these notions and articulates his analysis around it. At the same time, however, he regards the common nature as a kind of universal. As he explains (119), "the most important aspect [associated with Avicenna's theory of nature] is the acceptance of the presence of the universal in things. The analysis provides a structural account of the quality of common-ness in a common, which it distinguishes from the subsequent intellectual formation of a universal." Although perceptive, Booth sometimes goes too far in his merging of the two notions (120): "the nature, present in things as their common, is the nature indifferent in itself, but determined to universality." It is hard to see how the same thing could be at the same time indifferent and determined. *Pace* Booth, the nature in itself is not more determined to universality than it is to individuality, if universality is construed here as a mental intention.

205 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.2, 209.6–8.

The main arguments Avicenna puts forth to reject the concrete existence of universals are negative and concern the impossibility for a single and numerically one universal form and universal essence to exist in many material beings. In *Metaphysics* V.2, Avicenna explains that a single essence (*dhāt wāḥidah*) cannot exist simultaneously in many concrete beings, lest it exist with contradictory accidents and lest these accidents enter into the quiddity and definition of the thing. Moreover, Avicenna insists that a numerically one universal nature or essence (*dhāt wāḥidah bi-l-'adad*) cannot exist separately in actuality (*bi-l-fi'l*), since, if it did, it could not at the same time be shared by different beings (Avicenna rejecting the Platonic theory of participation), nor could it be reflected by a plurality of human souls. Rather, numerical oneness is something that attaches to the nature or universal in the mind thinking it. In a nutshell, then, universality and oneness are notions superadded to essential nature in the mind, a determinate and conditioned state that precludes it from existing in this manner in the concrete world.

In spite of these various arguments, Avicenna does concede that there is a special sense or kind of universality that can be applied to the concrete natures. Some of the crucial texts in this regard have already been studied (Text 7, Text 17, Text 20, and Text 21), but at this juncture additional evidence can be adduced. Before proceeding further, however, it is important to emphasize that the kind of essential universality Avicenna ascribes to quiddity in the extramental world is related to his mereological interpretation of the universals and focuses on quiddity as a part and principle of concrete beings. It does not rely on the assumption that quiddity can exist separately in the concrete world.²⁰⁶ With regard to the former, the master sometimes loosely refers to the quiddities and natures that exist in concrete reality as universals and also reserves a sense of universality for this external context. Thus, in *Metaphysics* V.2, for example, he states that “universality [*kulliyah*] may attach to it [the conception of nature or pure quiddity], but there is no existence for this kind of universality except in the soul. As for universality in external reality [*al-kulliyah min khārij*], it obtains according to another consideration, which we have previously explained.”²⁰⁷ Further

206 The distinction is crucial, but it has sometimes been misrepresented. One example is *Physics*, I.7, 51, when Avicenna says about the nature (*ṭabī'ah*) that is predicated universally of species (*kulliyah bi-ḥasab naw'*) and in an absolute sense (*kulliyah 'alā l-iṭlāq*)—the latter is possibly a reference to nature ‘in itself’—: *kullāhumā lā wujūda lahumā fī l-a'yān dhawāt qā'imah illā fī l-taṣawwur*. In his translation of this work, McGinnis renders this segment as “neither of these has an existence *in concrete particulars* as subsisting entities, except in conceptualization” (my emphasis). But this translation is misleading, because Avicenna’s intention here is to contrast the separate existence of the essences in the extramental world on the model of the Platonic forms (an option he rejects) with their distinct existence in the mind (an option he allows). Accordingly, *fī l-a'yān dhawāt qā'imah* is better translated simply as “as subsistent entities [or essences] in the concrete world,” and not in “concrete particulars.” For as should be clear by now, Avicenna does recognize a qualified sense in which they can be said to exist *in* the concrete particulars. The only thesis he consistently rebuts in his works is that the quiddities or natures exist as *separate* substances.

207 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.2, 207.11–13.

on he adds regarding the nature in itself (*min ḥaythu hiya ṭabī'ah*) in concrete beings: “If this consideration is taken in the sense of universality, then this nature with universality would be in concrete beings [*kānat hādhihi l-ṭabī'ah ma'a l-kulliyah fī l-a'yān*].” Hence, on Avicenna’s own admission, *there is a sense* in which the universals can be said to exist in concrete reality, and *there is a consideration* according to which the universals exist in concrete beings. This aspect of universality corresponds to the notion of essential commonness (*mushtarakah*) that was highlighted previously. In this case, then, Avicenna’s reference to universality in concrete beings would be more than a simple manner of speech, a *façon de parler*, and it would point to a deeper ambiguity or tension in his philosophy. The master himself acknowledges this ambiguity at the very end of *Metaphysics* V.1, when he concedes that “the general things [*al-'umūr al-'āmmah*] in one sense exist in the exterior world [*mawjūdah min khārij*], and in another sense do not.” These comments, for all intents and purposes, make universality a modulated (*mushakkik*) notion alongside oneness, existence, and many other core notions in Avicenna’s philosophy. Although the master does not state this himself, it is clear nevertheless that he regards universality as possessing different senses and aspects and as applying differently to things.²⁰⁸

Regarding the pure nature as *a kind of universal in the concrete* appears to be validated on two additional grounds: the distinction between potential and actual universality, and the distinction between numerical existence—or existence according to numerical determination—and non-numerical existence. With regard to the first point, the evidence in Avicenna’s works appears to warrant the conclusion that the essential natures exist in concrete beings *qua* actual and potential universals.²⁰⁹

208 Avicenna’s position is comparable to the way Aristotle’s theory of forms has sometimes been construed. According to Galluzzo, Aristotle regards the forms in concrete things as universal, although they do not correspond to what he usually refers to as ‘universals.’ As Galluzzo, *Universals*, 209, explains, “Aristotle’s realism about universals comes down to the view that while the ordinary objects of our everyday experience are particulars, their forms are universals. Forms are universals because they are repeatable entities, i.e. entities that exist as one and the same in different particulars: all individuals belonging to the same species have the same form, which exists as one and the same in different parcels of matter.” Yet, “forms are universals (for they are repeatable and shareable entities) but are not the kinds of things that Aristotle refers to by the word “universals” or equivalent expressions” (247). Likewise in Avicenna’s system, pure quiddity is in a sense universal or can be loosely described as such, because it is essentially common to many and is in itself intelligible. But Avicenna usually refrains from describing it as such in the human mind, and, *a fortiori*, in the concrete world, and he reserves this term for the complex universal concept in the mind.

209 One pointed issue should be addressed at this juncture, namely, Avicenna’s claim in *Salvation*, 538.10–13, to the effect that unconditioned quiddity exists ‘in actuality’ (*mawjūd bi-l-fi'l*) in the concrete world. The problem here is compounded by the fact that Avicenna in this passage uncharacteristically speaks of quiddity in concrete beings as a universal (*kullī*). The difficulty can be framed as follows: how can unconditioned quiddity, which by definition is not qualified by anything specific or determinate, be said to be actual? Since ‘the actual’ is one of the conditions and concomitants that Avicenna itemizes as being extrinsic to quiddity in *Metaphysics*, how can he claim that pure quiddity exists in concrete beings in an actual state? The foregoing analysis on the mereological

They are in themselves and essentially actual—especially in their immediate connection with the principle of form (*ṣūrah*), with which they are closely associated in the concrete—but only potentially universal with regard to the mental universality characteristic of human thought. This potential universality is what enables them to be abstracted and contemplated by the rational soul *qua* actual universal notions. Thus, like matter, which is potentiality for form, the nature is potentially an actual universal in the soul (see Text 7 and Text 20). The second qualification was discussed previously and amounts to the claim that nature, in spite of being common, does not possess numerical determination and so has a mode of non-numerical existence: it is not a single or one universal nature of horseness that exists, but simply horseness. In that sense, it differs from the universal concept in the mind, which possesses numerical determination and is a single ‘one’ meaning or intention predicated of many.²¹⁰

Hence, there are two ways to approach the notion of universality in the concrete world. On the one hand, the pure quiddities and essential forms of the concrete world result, through a complicated psychological process, in the logical universal notions that exist in the mind, so that they can be regarded as ‘potential universals.’ On the other hand, and in a certain sense, the substantial forms and pure quiddities in things are already universal, since they are essentially common to many concrete beings in abstraction from predication, without this common nature being numerically determined in any way. The pure quiddity humanness is in actuality common to many individual human beings, even though it cannot be subjected to numerical qualification, and regardless of whether it is predicated of many by the human mind.

and irreducible mode of existence of quiddity in concrete beings can help us to address this difficulty and provide tentative answers. In addition to the interpretation deployed in the main text above, which ascribes a kind of qualified actual essential universality to the nature in concrete beings, another approach is to surmise that Avicenna is referring primarily to the actuality of form or of the complex being *in which* quiddity is embedded, and not to the mode of existence of quiddity *itself*. As he points out in Text 10, pure quiddity exists in the concrete, but “has been enclosed from the outside by conditions and states,” one of which is the actuality and realization of its concomitants and accidents. This would mean that quiddity can be said to exist in actuality only by extension, because it exists in the hylomorphic form or in the composite that exists in actuality. At any rate, in this passage, Avicenna’s main intention is to contrast quiddity as an essential principle of concrete beings to quiddity as a universal predicate in the mind. Whereas the former is actual (in that quiddity is present in an actual being), the latter is only potential, in that quiddity or nature needs to be abstracted and intellected by a thinking mind for the mental universal to become actually existent in the mind. What Avicenna is contrasting, then, is not two different modes of existence of pure quiddity, but rather two different aspects of universality vis-à-vis the human mind.

210 This explains one important feature of Avicenna’s disquisition in *Metaphysics* V.2 concerning the impossibility for universal nature to exist in the concrete world. Throughout this passage, Avicenna refers to a single or one essence (*dhāt wāḥidah*) or to a nature that is numerically one (*wāḥidah bi-l-‘adad*). Hence, in this passage he has something else than pure quiddity in mind, since the latter is unconditioned and cannot be numerically determined in any way; furthermore, Avicenna does not usually refer to pure quiddity by means of the term *dhāt*, which designates instead the realized and actually existing entity.

In light of this, although Avicenna usually restricts the term ‘universal’ (*kullī*) to mental aspects and objects, he sometimes, as in the salient passage of *Salvation* discussed above (Text 7), treats the quiddities and forms in concrete things as special kinds of universals.²¹¹ To put it differently, the quiddities in concrete beings can be regarded as being somehow *universal*, without however being *universals* or *universal objects* on Avicenna’s intellectualist and intentionalist definition of this term.²¹² Alternatively, one can say that nature is *potentially* a universal with regard to human intentionality. This underlines the foundational commonality of the nature *in concreto* and in the mind as well as the fact that universal concepts only actually exist in the human intellect.²¹³

The foregoing illuminates to some extent Avicenna’s rationale for distinguishing between common nature and the universal while at the same time reserving a qualified sense of universality for the former. This daring move enables Avicenna to preserve a gnoseological link between concrete entities and the mind that justifies scientific knowledge and cognition, which are based on universal concepts, as well as to explain how nature can be common and even universal and yet exist in a plurality of individuals. From a historical perspective, Avicenna’s ambiguous handling of the term ‘universal’ betrays his indebtedness to the philosophical debate about universals and common things that had begun with Plato and Aristotle and extended all the way to the works of the late-antique philosophers of the sixth and seventh centuries CE. As I show below, it might also bear a connection to the rich discussion of similarity and commonality he inherited from Mu‘tazilite sources. One finds in those traditions a similar ambiguity concerning the questions of whether, and if so, how, universals and common things can be said to exist in concrete things, as well as their relationship to the thinking mind.

211 In that passage, Avicenna, *Salvation*, 539.10–13, he proposes another, more daring, distinction focusing on the “general universal” (*al-kullī l-‘āmm*), which exists only in the mind, and, one infers, the non-general universal, which, on the basis of what precedes this passage, can be said to exist in concrete beings.

212 This tension is at its most visible if one compares *Metaphysics* of *The Cure* V.1 and the section on universals in *Salvation* (536–539). With that being said, the passage in *Salvation* is somewhat unique in its ambiguity on this point and should hold a secondary place in our analysis on account of the fact that this work is derivative of *The Cure* and was not intended by Avicenna to hold the same status. Nonetheless, it reflects various aspects of the late-antique discourse on common things that the master had to integrate and make sense of in his own works.

213 On this point, see Averroes, *Incoherence*, 111–117. Averroes has this to say: “The theory of the philosophers that universals exist only in the mind, not in the external world, only means that the universals exist actually only in the mind, and not in the external world, *not that they do not exist at all in the external world*, for the meaning is that they exist potentially, not actually in the external world; *indeed, if they did not exist at all in the outside world they would be false*” (111.8–12, translated by van den Bergh, 65, my emphasis).

4 Avicenna's predecessors on common things

4.1 The late-antique philosophers

Avicenna's views on the relation between nature and universality, on the intrinsic shareability and commonality of nature, and on the ontological status of nature in concrete beings all appear indebted to late-antique Greek philosophical works stemming from Peripatetic and Neoplatonic circles.²¹⁴ According to a threefold scheme that was widespread in late antiquity, and which Avicenna reports at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12, philosophers were in the habit of distinguishing between the universals 'before,' 'in,' and 'after multiplicity.' Avicenna in this same section implicitly correlates this threefold distinction with another tripartite distinction consisting of 'the natural,' 'the logical,' and 'the intellectual,' to which I have already referred in previous sections of this book. At this juncture, let us turn our attention to these important lines in an attempt to fully appreciate Avicenna's relation to the late-antique heritage with regard to the issue of the existence of nature in the concrete world:

Text 21: It is the custom when trying to understand these five [universals] to say that [they can be divided into] what is natural [*ṭabīʿī*], logical [*manṭiqī*], and intellectual [*ʿaqlī*]. One may also say that [they can be divided into] what is prior to multiplicity [*qabl al-kathrah*], in multiplicity [*fī l-kathrah*], and after multiplicity [*baʿd al-kathrah*]. It is also customary that this inquiry be connected with the inquiry regarding genus and species [specifically]—even though it is common to the five universals [*al-kulliyāt al-khams*]. We therefore say, following our predecessors, that each one of the things that is taken as an example for one of these five [universals] is in itself a thing [*huwa fī nafsihi shayʿ*], and [another] thing inasmuch as it is genus, or species, or differentia, or property, or general accident.²¹⁵

Avicenna in this passage reports the tripartite division of the common things that can be found in a set of Neoplatonic works dealing mostly with logic.²¹⁶ In addition to these ancient authors, it should be noted that some predecessors and contemporaries of Avicenna also rely on this scheme, which attests that it was widespread in classical Islam.²¹⁷ This framework, I contend, is crucial for understanding Avicenna's

214 For the late-antique background to Avicenna's views, see de Libera, *La querelle*, 230 ff.; idem, *L'art*, 499–515; Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 128 ff.; idem, *Universals Transformed*; and Chiaradonna, Alexander. There are key parallels between Alexander and Avicenna, which are discussed below.

215 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.4–11.

216 See Ammonius, *Commentary on Eisagoge*, 41.17–20; 42.10–21; 104.27–31; Philoponus (?), *Commentary on Posterior Analytics*, 2.435.28–30; Simplicius, *Commentary on Categories*, 82.35–83.20; 69.19–71.2 (all in *CAG*); as well as Proclus, *Commentary on Euclid's Elements* 50.16–51.9 (I owe these references to Sorabji, *Universals Transformed*).

217 According to Madkour, *L'organon*, 146–148; and Vallat, *Du possible au nécessaire*, 91, 98–99 and note 30, 116–121, it underpins Fārābī's theory of the universals; cf. Albert the Great, *Posterior Analytics*, 1.1.3, who mentions the view of "Alfarabius." This threefold scheme forms the backbone of Ibn

theory of quiddity in itself, even though it represents only one piece of the puzzle. In effect, Avicenna correlates this tripartite division with other frameworks and distinctions, including the threefold distinction between ‘the natural,’ ‘the logical,’ and ‘the intellectual,’ as well as the various considerations (*i’tibārāt*) of quiddity, thereby elaborating a unique approach to the problem of universals.

According to this threefold distinction, one aspect of the common thing or the universal is its existence *in* multiplicity, that is, in the multiple individuals that make up the concrete world, or what Avicenna calls *al-mawjūdāt fī l-a’yān*. In this context, it is to be connected, first, with the second consideration of quiddity that Avicenna outlines in *Introduction* I.2, i.e., quiddity “in concrete beings” (*fī a’yān al-ashyā’* and *min ḥaythu hiya fī l-a’yān*), and, second, with what Avicenna describes as ‘nature’ (*ṭabī’ah*) and ‘the natural’ (*al-ṭabī’ī*, and by extension, the natural universal, *al-kullī l-ṭabī’ī*) in the above passage. In spite of the divergent phrasing, these terms all refer to the common nature and pure quiddity immanent in concrete beings, such as horseness in the concrete horse.²¹⁸ In the particular context of chapter I.12, these terms are to be distinguished from the logical notions of species and genus, which exist only in the mind, and which Avicenna refers to in this passage as ‘the logical’ (*al-manṭiqī*, i.e., the logical notions). This is made clear at the end of the passage, when Avicenna argues that the nature, say, of animal, is one thing, and its being a genus or species is another thing that is predicated of it in the mind. Accordingly, in the lines immediately following this excerpt, Avicenna mentions the nature ‘animal in itself’ to illustrate how this pure quiddity is distinct from its concomitants and from the logical notion of genus, which is attached to it through thought. By extension, what Avicenna calls in this passage “the five universals” (*al-kulliyāt al-khams*), namely, genus, species, differentia, property, and accident, are logical notions confined to the human mind. They are explicitly made to correspond to the ‘logical universal’ and implicitly made to correspond to the aspect of the universal ‘after multiplicity.’ Nevertheless, there is one feature of Avicenna’s account that may be confusing: ‘the logical,’ inasmuch as it is produced by the human mind, can also be described as ‘intellectual.’ But for our purposes, the important point here is Avicenna’s determination, as in *Metaphysics* V.1, to disentangle nature and pure quiddity from universality and its various concomitants. In line with this strategy, in the rest of this chapter of *Introduction*, he refrains from applying the term universal to natures such as humanness and animalness. There is therefore

‘Adī’s discussion in his treatise *On the Four Scientific Questions*. Abū l-Faraj b. al-Ṭayyib also refers to it in *Introduction*, 54.1, where he mentions that “Plato believed that genera and species have three [modes of] existence [*wujūdāt thalāthah*].”

218 Avicenna’s analysis of quiddity in concrete things in this section of *Introduction* rests on a cluster of closely related terms: nature (*ṭabī’ah*), the natural universal (*al-kullī l-ṭabī’ī*), the natural form (*al-ṣūrah al-ṭabī’iyyah*), meaning (*ma’nā*), and the corresponding stock examples horseness (*fara-siyyah*) and humanness (*insāniyyah*). All of these terms refer to the same thing in concrete beings, namely, common nature and pure quiddity.

a palpable intention in this work, which goes hand in hand with his approach in *Metaphysics* V.1–2, to focus the analysis on nature and quiddity and to reserve the term and notion of ‘universal’ (*kullī*) for ideas in the human mind.²¹⁹

The tripartite distinction between ‘the natural,’ ‘the logical,’ and ‘the intellectual’ serves another purpose. It helps Avicenna to explain the process by which pure quiddity acquires the status of a universal in the mind, that is, how pure quiddity (‘nature’ or ‘the natural’) relates to the intention and concomitant of universality (‘the logical’) to form the universal concept in the human intellect (‘the intellectual’). It is apparent that these distinctions are not applied indiscriminately to the ‘universals’ *per se*, but rather to the relation between quiddity and universality.²²⁰ In brief, Avicenna employs this matrix of distinctions he inherited from antiquity as a framework to discuss, not universals in general, but the more focused issue of how quiddity relates to its material and mental concomitants, which is one of his main concerns in his logical and metaphysical works.²²¹ While embracing this ancient framework, he has shifted the main focus from the common thing to pure quiddity specifically and to the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* relation. In addition, the master has accentuated the mentalist or intellectualist framework in which the discussion of the universal proper should unfold. To be sure, then, there are telling differences between the Greek commentators’ and Avicenna’s treatments of this issue. The Greek scholars, unlike Avicenna, routinely speak of universals (*katholou*) or common features (*koinon*), rather than quiddities or essences specifically. For Avicenna, in contrast, the crux of the discussion focuses on the various aspects or considerations (*i’tibārāt*) of quiddity, including quiddity in itself, and he consistently reserves the term universal (*kullī*) for mental existents, which correspond only to the universal aspect of quiddity in the human mind. There is, admittedly, an important terminological divergence in that regard. In addition, whereas the theory of the Platonic Forms plays a foundational role in the metaphysics of many, if not most, of the late-antique Neoplatonic thinkers who engaged with this issue, it plays no role at all in Avicenna’s system, which articulates

219 The ‘predecessors’ Avicenna alludes to in Text 21 to justify this practice are likely to be Alexander of Aphrodisias and some Neoplatonists, although it is conceivable that he also had Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī in mind, since the latter appears to have distinguished between these notions.

220 Accordingly, a basic division of the text can be proposed: first, Avicenna reports the views of the late-antique philosophers (I.12.65.1–8), who referred to these various aspects of the universals; then he embarks on his own analysis (65.8 ff.), which presupposes a sharper distinction between nature and the universal. Nevertheless, as was highlighted before, one can perceive a certain ambiguity in Avicenna’s endorsement of the term *kullī*.

221 The various tripartite schemes deployed in *Introduction* I.2 and I.12 are crucial to understanding how Avicenna positions himself vis-à-vis the late-antique discussion about the universals. However, their interrelationship as well as the issue of exactly how they reflect specific doctrines from the late-antique philosophical context are points that have to be examined. Marmura, Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals, 39 ff., provides only limited insight into these questions and appears to regard these various sets of distinctions as fundamentally unrelated. I disagree with Marmura on this point; additional comments are provided below.

a theory of quiddity and the universals that dispenses entirely with this metaphysical model of externally existing separate entities.

In spite of these important terminological and doctrinal differences, it is likely that this threefold scheme—and more generally the late-antique philosophical reflection on the universals—shaped Avicenna’s thought on quiddity in decisive ways, particularly his views on how the universal relates to the concrete existents. As some scholars have remarked, Avicenna’s triplex distinction of quiddity unfolds against a rich and intricate philosophical background highlighted by the late-antique Greek commentaries dealing with the nature, epistemological status, and ontology of the universals.²²² In this connection, it is notable that the Greek commentators anticipate many of the questions raised in this study in connection with the Avicennian texts: indeed, the number of aspects or considerations of the universals, their nature, as well as their ontological status and localization are all issues raised by these authors that reverberate in the master’s own writings. More specifically, the status of common things in the mind vs. in the concrete world and their causal relationship across these contexts are points debated at length in the late-antique commentaries, some of which were translated in whole or in part into Arabic and may have been available to Avicenna.

There are three points in particular that should arrest our attention. Although the Neoplatonists recognized a wide variety of common things or universals, it was common to outline three aspects in particular: those in concrete individuals or in species, those in the human mind, and those corresponding to the Platonic Forms, which were, strictly speaking, not universals, but often loosely described as such and listed alongside the other kinds of universals. In the Greek philosophical literature, these universals are often described as being ‘before,’ ‘in,’ and ‘after plurality’ or ‘the many.’ This scheme appears, in one form or another, in the works of Porphyry, Simplicius (fl. c. 530 CE), and Ammonius Hermiae (d. c. 526 CE).²²³ In upholding this threefold division, these thinkers were trying to distinguish between (a) those common things or universals that are causally and essentially prior to their embodiment in concrete things (i.e., the Platonic Forms), (b) those that exist in concrete things (i.e., the substantial forms), and (c) those that exist in the human mind as a result of intellectual abstraction (the intellectual forms). This threefold distinction of the universals arose partly out of a dialectical effort aimed at synthesizing Aristotle’s understanding of the universal as “that whose nature it is to be predicated of many”—and which he made out to correspond primarily to mental concepts—with the Platonic Forms as transcendent ontological archetypes and causes of the reality of things. It should be noted that this tripartite scheme reappears in the works of the Syriac think-

²²² See Tweedale, Alexander; idem, Duns Scotus’s Doctrine; de Libera, *La querelle*, 223–262; Heer, *The Sufi Position*, 1–2, whose comments pertain mostly to the post-Avicennian tradition.

²²³ See Ammonius, *Commentary on Eisagoge*, 68.25–69.3; and Simplicius, *Commentary on Categories* 82.35–83.20 in *CAG*.

er Sergius of Resh'aynā (d. 536 CE).²²⁴ Now, there can be no doubt that Avicenna was cognizant of this Neoplatonic tripartite scheme, even though he may not have been well informed about the metaphysical background from which it stemmed. He reports it at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12 and explains there that it is “customary” (*jarat al-‘ādah*) among philosophers to divide things in this threefold way. Although no specific names or texts are cited to support this statement, it echoes the similar division that can be found in the works of these Neoplatonic and Christian thinkers, even though the terminology has been modified slightly. What is more, as is apparent from a later section of *Introduction* I.12, Avicenna himself relied on this classification to discuss quiddity in its human and divine contexts. There he draws a distinction between the meanings (*ma‘ānī*) in God and in the supernal intellects, which are “before multiplicity” (*qabl al-kathrah*), and those in matter and in the human intellect, thereby implementing the tripartite scheme outlined at the beginning of the chapter.²²⁵

At times, the terminological and doctrinal overlap between Avicenna and these earlier thinkers assumes a more specific form. Simplicius in his *Commentary on Categories*, 82.35–83.20, explicitly outlines three kinds of “common feature” (*koinon*): the Forms, the common item or feature in species of the same genus, and the common item or feature *qua* concept in the mind. In the section describing the first of these, namely, the Platonic Form *qua* common feature, the Greek philosopher focuses on the example ‘animal,’ which he also alludes to as the “first animal” (πρώτον ζῷον) and “the animal in itself” (αὐτοζῷον). Incidentally, this form is also a “nature” (φύσιν), which transcends the concrete particulars in which it inheres.²²⁶ According to both Simplicius and Avicenna, then, it is “animal in itself”—a separate and transcendent form for Simplicius, an immanent form for Avicenna—that endows all concrete animals with a certain commonality (κοινότητα, adj., *mushtarak*) and an identical nature (φύσιν, *ṭabi‘ah*), namely, animalness. The two philosophers also agree that it is “by means of abstraction” (ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως, *tajrīd*) that the human intellect grasps these common items or nature.²²⁷

In light of this, there is an obvious sense in which the threefold distinction discussed in the Greek commentaries corresponds to the Avicennian triplex scheme: two of these aspects are virtually identical (‘in particulars’ and ‘in the mind’),

²²⁴ See Hugonnard-Roche, *Les Catégories*, 352, which provides a French translation of Sergius’s *Treatise to Philotheos*. The threefold distinction is mentioned in that text, with the difference that the universals ‘before multiplicity’ are said to lie “next to God,” which is probably a reference to the Platonic forms. In fact, Sergius in that treatise attributes this scheme to Plato, although, as Hugonnard-Roche notes (358), it is instead to be traced to the works of the Neoplatonists.

²²⁵ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 69.7–18; see Text 45 in chapter V.

²²⁶ Simplicius, *Commentary on Categories*, 82.35–83.20, especially 83.3; see also Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 128–131, 133. It is, of course, not a coincidence that Avicenna’s stock example when discussing quiddity, namely, ‘animal,’ also appears in Simplicius and other late-antique Neoplatonic discussions.

²²⁷ Simplicius, *Commentary on Categories*, 83.8 in *CAG*.

while the third aspect is in Simplicius's and Avicenna's systems distinct from the other two, yet somehow more real and foundational than them. More specifically, the universal *qua* Platonic Form, 'the Animal in itself,' may be said to correspond in some ways to Avicenna's quiddity in itself, since both are responsible for the very nature of a thing in abstraction from other accidents and concomitants. The fact that Simplicius calls this aspect a nature (φύσιν), and that Avicenna later on also calls it a nature (*ṭabi'ah*), strengthens the connection between their views. The following analysis will also highlight other similar features that connect the late-antique and Avicennian accounts, in particular with regard to ontology and causality. These parallels notwithstanding, the differences between these thinkers remain considerable and should not be understated: while one endorsed the theory of the Forms and made it the cornerstone of his theory of common things, the other rejected the Forms and operated within a revised Aristotelian paradigm where existents are either mental or concrete, but where universals and quiddities cannot exist separately on their own.

Avicenna's belief that universality is merely an accident that attaches to quiddity in the human mind also finds a salient precedent in the Greek commentators and especially in the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias. Alexander is quite explicit in some of his works that universality is a mental construct and an accident that occurs to a thing in the mind and that it is to be distinguished from the real entities of the extramental world. Alexander appears to make the universals "mind-dependent" (to use Sorabji's formula), a view which seems to have been advocated also by Porphyry some time later.²²⁸ Moreover, Alexander in his commentary on *On the Soul* argues that these universals exist only inasmuch as they are being actually thought or intellectuated by the mind, and that they cease to exist when the mind ceases to contemplate them.²²⁹ These points also appear in Avicenna's noetic account and constitute the basis of his views of the universals. For Avicenna as well, the universals exist only in the human mind and are hence mind-dependent; universality is an accident—or rather a concomitant—that attaches to quiddity *qua* mental existent; and a universal concept or intelligible object may be said to truly exist only insofar as it is being actually intellectuated.

Defining universality as a purely mental or mind-dependent accident enables Alexander and Avicenna to establish a sharp distinction between the nature of a thing, which exists in the concrete world, and the universal as such, which exists only in the mind. In this regard, by far the strongest parallel in the way these two thinkers conceive of universals appears in *Quaestio* 1.11. In that text, Alexander seemingly argues for the concrete existence of natures as opposed to universals, which should, strictly speaking, only be posited as existing in the human intellect.

²²⁸ Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 149–156; Chiaradonna, Porphyry. The key text here is *Quaestio* 1.11, which, as Stephen Menn already pointed out, might have deeply influenced Avicenna's conception of quiddity and universality; see Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 155–159.

²²⁹ Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 149–151.

As Tweedale has already observed, this would imply that Alexander, before Avicenna, had sharply distinguished between the 'natures' of things and their 'universality' and regarded the former as being prior to the latter. In turn, this suggests that he attributed some degree of extramental existence only to the former.²³⁰ The key passage encapsulating this doctrine in the original Greek text is the following:

For since the genera are universal, and what is universal is *of* certain things, it is universal [as] being something. For it is not the case that, being nothing, it [nevertheless] is universal and a genus and is predicated unequivocally; but there must be some thing to which 'universal' attaches. That to which 'universal' attaches is a [real] thing; the universal is not a [real] thing in its own right, but something that attaches to that thing. For example, 'living creature' is a [real] thing and indicates a certain nature; for it signifies an animate being with sensation—and this in its own nature is not universal.²³¹

Alexander defines the universal as something that "attaches" to a real thing or nature and as "an accident that supervenes on some thing," which recalls Avicenna's similar description of universality as a mental concomitant and accident of nature or pure quiddity. In other words, Alexander appears to defend exactly the same kind of moderate realist position as can be found in the Avicennian works. In both cases, this moderate realism is predicated on a distinction between the essential nature that somehow exists in the concrete world and universality that exists only as a mental accident.²³² The relevance of the Alexandrian antecedent increases when one realizes that *Quaestio* 1.11 was among the writings of Alexander to have been translated into Arabic.

There is a final, and for us crucial, aspect one finds debated at length in the Greek commentaries: the ontological status of the various kinds of universals or common features posited by the Neoplatonists. Attempting any kind of summary of this difficult question in the present study would be vain. Suffice to say that the issues of whether, and if so, in what state or mode, these various universals or common features can be said to exist generated intense discussion among the various schools of late antiquity. One crucial question for the Neoplatonists in particular was how the

230 Alexander, *Quaestio* 1.11, in *Quaestiones* 1.1–2.15, 50–55 in the translation by R.W. Sharples; for a study of universals in Alexander's philosophy and its importance for Avicenna, see Tweedale, Alexander; idem, Duns Scotus's Doctrine, especially 81–89.

231 Alexander, *Quaestio* 1.11, 23.21–29. A similar idea is articulated in the Arabic adaptations of Alexander's works. In *Discourse of Alexander of Aphrodisias* (Badawī, *Aristū*, 279.22), one reads that "the animal on account of its nature [*tabī'ah*] is not universal," so that universality is an accident that is added to it in the mind.

232 Chiaradonna, Alexander, 319–325, describes Alexander's position as a kind of essentialism and "abstractionist realism, according to which definitions refer to real natures that exist in individuals. These are natures that are not universal as such, but only insofar as our soul isolates them from matter and conceives of them by themselves" (323). What Chiaradonna says about Alexander can be applied with equal validity to Avicenna. This indicates that Avicenna is approaching the issue of quiddity and the universals partly within an Aphrodisian tradition.

common features in concrete things relate to the archetypal forms and paradigmatic causes. This issue arose from their adherence to Platonic metaphysics. As it turns out, some of the Neoplatonists who tackled this issue, and, later, many of the medieval thinkers who relied on their writings, defended a version of a realist metaphysical interpretation of quiddity (or, rather, in the ancient context, of ‘the common thing’). Alexander defended some features of a realist position, even though he did not adhere to the Platonic theory of the forms. Porphyry, possibly influenced by Alexander, also appears to defend a doctrine of formal immanentism, according to which the essential form that inheres in concrete beings corresponds to the common nature or item that is shared by all individuals of the same species, but remains distinct from the universals proper in the human mind. What is more, as Chiaradonna explains, Porphyry, probably following Alexander, defines this nature or form as an intelligible part of the concrete being.²³³ In brief, Porphyry appears to have borrowed from Alexander’s essentialist and realist views and adapted them to his metaphysical system.

This trend of doctrinal adaptation continues in the metaphysics of Avicenna. According to the master, who follows these Greek thinkers, the existence of this common feature in concrete beings is often referred to as ‘a nature,’ which is in turn identified with quiddity in itself. Furthermore, this φύσις *qua* quiddity is regarded as being immanent in the thing itself. It constitutes one of its ontological principles, without which that entity would not be what it is. For many Neoplatonists, and regardless of the specificities of their individual systems, the common things in the concrete world are ontically real and embedded in the very fabric of things. *Qua* intelligible forms, they constitute a part of the whole substantial being. There is therefore an essentialist, realist, and mereological trend running through their works, which, I would like to contend, was bequeathed to Avicenna and reappears in an idiosyncratic form in the master’s treatment of quiddity. This makes Avicenna a direct heir to the late-antique philosophical deliberations about the universals and to some of the Neoplatonic theories attached to them. At the same time, Avicenna reformulated key aspects of this problematic by deploying his own philosophical language and by shifting the emphasis from the common things and their Platonic background to a more recognizably Aristotelian notion of essence or quiddity, while also preserving important Neoplatonic elements. At any rate, it is partly in this Avicennian form enriched with the Persian master’s numerous conceptual elaborations that the Latin Scholastics approached the problem of essence and the universals during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²³⁴

233 Chiaradonna, Porphyry, 327–328. For the views of Plotinus and Porphyry on universals and their instantiation, see also Adamson, *One of a Kind*.

234 Wéber, *Le thème avicennien*; Wippel, *Essence and Existence*; and Conti, *Realism*, provide a useful overview of key features of scholastic realism, many of which find an echo in, or were directly influenced by, Avicenna’s works (surprisingly, however, Conti does not integrate the Avicennian legacy in his analysis). These include a realist interpretation of the essence/existence distinction; the

To summarize, Avicenna regards the (mental) universal as existing potentially in the concrete world, but actually in the mind. He regards pure quiddity as existing in the concrete world and in the mind according to its own ontological mode, which (in itself) excludes both potentiality and actuality, oneness and compositeness, as these notions are customarily applied to the contingent beings. Yet, from a purely ontological and epistemological standpoint, the universal, on the one hand, and the common nature and pure quiddity, on the other, always remain distinct. In holding these views, it is possible that Avicenna sought to reconcile two major, albeit seemingly incompatible, passages found in Aristotle concerning the universals: first, the statement at *Posterior Analytics* II.19.100a.6–7 where Aristotle describes the universal as “the one beside the many which is a single identity within them all,” and, second, the passage in *On the Soul* I.1, 402b7 where Aristotle states that we should treat universals “either as nothing at all or as a later [or posterior] product.”²³⁵ Following the latter statement and Alexander of Aphrodisias, Avicenna holds that the universals, strictly speaking, are posterior to the concrete entities, since they exist truly only in the human mind and as a result of abstraction. But he also argues that there is a principle from which the universals are derived through abstraction, which exists as an immanent form in concrete beings, namely, pure quiddity or common nature. This shows that he also paid heed to the passage in *Posterior Analytics*. Avicenna’s solution to this conundrum appears profoundly indebted to the Aphrodisian tradition and revolves around a distinction between the universal or universality *per se* and nature. While the former exists only in the mind, the latter exists in each concrete being. Avicenna’s main innovation was to amplify Alexander’s distinction and to adapt it to his own metaphysical system, in which the nature—but not the universal—is identified with quiddity in itself. This theory in turn developed deep roots in Avicenna’s philosophy and came to constitute one of the cornerstones of his ontology and epistemology. In elaborating his doctrines, Avicenna engaged in a practice that was at the very heart of the Neoplatonic philosophical project and that consisted not only in reconciling some aspects of Platonic and Aristotelian doctrine, but also in reconciling Aristotle with himself and harmonizing various passages of his works.²³⁶

notion of common natures existing in concrete beings; the identification of this common nature with quiddity in itself or absolute quiddity; the tripartite division of universals and their relation to matter and multiplicity as exposed in *Introduction* I.12; regarding universals as second intentions and mental objects; and attributing a special mode of being to essence.

235 It should be said that in the rest of *Posterior Analytics* II.19 Aristotle describes the universal as arising in the soul as a result of sense-perception and the inductive study of particular things. The main ambiguity that could have struck Avicenna and other Arabic thinkers, above and beyond this text, is whether, in addition to existing as an idea in the human mind, the universal should also be regarded as somehow existing in each particular concrete beings.

236 On this trend in Avicenna, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*.

In the final analysis, it seems that Avicenna defends a variant of Aristotelian immanent realism against the transcendental realism of the Platonic tradition. Moreover, Avicenna's version of this moderate realism appears to have been considerably colored by Alexander of Aphrodisias's doctrines in the form in which they reached him in Arabic translation. Perhaps more surprisingly at first glance, what Avicenna also appears to be doing in some respects is reconciling Plato with Aristotle by positing a fundamental and archetypal principle or model—which for him is not the ideal form, but quiddity in itself—and making it immanent in each concrete instantiation. Although his position is in general closer to that of Aristotle, Avicenna also inherited some features of late-antique Neoplatonism that shaped his views on quiddity. One of them consists in recognizing a real, unchanging, and intelligible principle that underlies all the natural beings and endows them with their true nature. Although Avicenna rejects the separate and autonomous forms of Platonic metaphysics, he regards the pure quiddities as one of the main ontological components of concrete beings, as a foundational principle that is intelligible and unconditioned, and which, not coincidentally, he correlates with form (*ṣūrah*). He furthermore seems to have borrowed the mereological framework that was used by the Neoplatonists to interpret common things and their relation to concrete instantiations.²³⁷ One could argue that Avicenna collapses within pure quiddity some of the features of the transcendent forms of Plato and the immanent forms of Aristotle. This quintessentially Avicennian doctrine possesses features indebted to both philosophical systems. In this regard, it was influenced by the harmonizing efforts of the Neoplatonic tradition. Finally, Avicenna was also cognizant of, and profoundly influenced by, the Neoplatonic doctrine of the three ontological states of the universal, as it was defended by thinkers such as Ammonius, Elias, David, and Simplicius, although he transformed and adapted this doctrine to fit his own philosophical system. It is within this broad tripartite paradigm he inherited from the late-antique tradition that the Persian master implements many of his innovative metaphysical ideas.

One question worth addressing at this juncture is how the various matrices of distinctions Avicenna unravels in *Introduction* interrelate with one another.²³⁸ In what follows, I shall limit my comments to the present inquiry of quiddity in the concrete world. In light of the results reached in the previous analysis, one may surmise that there are salient interconnections between these sets of distinctions. For example, it is quite blatant that the consideration of quiddity as it exists in concrete beings (*fī l-a'yān*) (*Introduction* I.2) corresponds to what Avicenna loosely describes as the universal 'in multiplicity' (*fī l-kathrah*) (*Introduction* I.12), and that these two distinctions are in turn related to the description of pure quiddity as a 'nature' (*ṭabī'ah*) or 'the natural thing' (*al-ṭabī'ī*) in concrete beings (*Introduction* I.12). Furthermore, the

²³⁷ For the Neoplatonic use of this mereological framework in connection with common things, see Adamson, *One of a Kind*.

²³⁸ I provide a more comprehensive answer to this question in chapter V, once the analysis of the existence of quiddity in the divine context has been completed.

universal aspect of quiddity in our conception or mind (*fī l-taṣawwur*) described in *Introduction* I.2 corresponds to what is 'after multiplicity' (*ba'd al-kathrah*) (*Introduction* I.12), and it is also to be connected with both 'the logical' (*al-mantiqī*) and 'the intellectual' (*al-'aqlī*). These correlations, however, are not strict or rigid, but rather fluid. Moreover, it is still unclear at this stage whether quiddity in itself can be correlated in any meaningful way with the remaining distinction 'before multiplicity' of I.12. I return to this issue in chapters IV and V.

Given (a) Avicenna's articulation of a threefold description of quiddity in *Introduction* I.2 that is reminiscent of the classification some late-antique thinkers employ with regard to universals or common things; (b) his use of the concepts of nature (*ṭabī'ah*), common nature (*ṭabī'ah mushtarakah*), and common thing (*amr mushtarak*) to refer to quiddity (modeled on the Greek practice of referring to the extramental universals as common things in concrete beings and in the divine intellects); (c) his mereological doctrine of quiddity as a part and principle of concrete beings; and (d) the general trend to ontologize universals and to expressly address the issue of their ontological status in the concrete world, the realist connection between Avicenna and some of these Greek thinkers should be taken seriously and represents a key component of the master's approach to metaphysics. These parallels are compounded by the Neoplatonic tripartite scheme 'prior, in, and after multiplicity,' which is reproduced in *Introduction*. In this regard, the consideration in the late-antique sources of what is *in multiplicity* or *in matter* announces in a critical way Avicenna's account of the existence of quiddity in concrete beings. Not only does the master regard this aspect of quiddity as existing in multiple physical individuals and, hence, *in multiplicity*—without itself being subject to numerological considerations or becoming multiple—but he also explicitly refers to pure quiddity in this context as a 'nature' (*ṭabī'ah*) or 'the natural form' (*al-ṣūrah al-ṭabī'iyah*), and to the compound of pure quiddity and its material accidents as 'the natural thing' (*al-shay' al-ṭabī'ī*).²³⁹ The presence of this terminological connection and the metaphysical realism implied by it cannot be coincidental in these various texts. Rather, the late-antique discourse about whether and how the universals and the forms can be said to exist in the material world appears to have shaped the main contours of Avicenna's doctrine of pure quiddity in the concrete world.

4.2 Yaḥyā b. 'Adī

Even though these parallels are striking, there is an important precedent much closer to Avicenna's time that deserves scrutiny: the Jacobite Christian theologian and philosopher Yaḥyā b. 'Adī. As Arnzen already pointed out, Yaḥyā defends a realist inter-

²³⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.17.

pretation of the essences and universals.²⁴⁰ According to Yaḥyā, forms, essences, or universals (Yaḥyā conceives of these notions in close terms) inhere in the concrete individuals and exist irreducibly in them. In his *Treatise on Unity* (*al-Maqālah fī l-ta-wḥīd*), he describes both particulars and universals as “creatures” (sing., *khalīqah*) and as things that are contingent and caused to exist by God.²⁴¹ The term “creature” or “created thing” that Yaḥyā uses in that passage and applies to particulars and universals alike already suggests that the latter should be conceived of as actual entities or as substantive things in the world, or else it would be hard to account for the claim that they are “created.” It also suggests that Yaḥyā in that section of his work is discussing extramental existence or existence in the concrete world primarily. But how exactly can the universals be said to exist in concrete reality? In this connection, he goes on to state the following:

And it is clear that the general things and universals [*al-umūr al-‘āmmiyyah wa-l-kulliyyah*] require, for their existence, individual things in order for them [i.e., the general things and universals] to exist in them [the particulars] [*li-tūjada fihā*]. For the things that exist in themselves [in the concrete world] are only the individuals. As for the common things, their subsistence and existence is the essential existence [*al-wujūd al-dhātī*] [they have] in [*fī*] their particulars and individuals.²⁴²

The key point Yaḥyā seeks to establish in this passage and in the one immediately preceding it is that the universals and common things can only be said to exist in the concrete world in particular and individual things. Since the particulars are created from nothing, likewise the common things present in them must be (ultimately) created from nothing. In following this line of reasoning, Yaḥyā is implicitly setting God aside ontologically from all the other things in existence, both particular things like Zayd and universal things like humanness. The foil against which he unfolds his argument is a Platonic position that would locate the universals as substantive things in the exterior world but separate from the particulars themselves. Yet, in the process of establishing this point, Ibn ‘Adī puts forth what is quite clearly a realist and mereological interpretation of the universals according to which these exist immanently in the concrete individuals (*li-tūjada fihā, fī juz’iyyātihā wa-ashkhāṣihā*). In this context, Yaḥyā mentions the “essential being” (*al-wujūd al-dhātī*) of the common things, a notion to which I return briefly below and in more detail in chapter IV. Suffice to stress here that Yaḥyā’s interpretation of the common things and how they relate to the extramental particulars opens an important perspective with regard to my interpretation of Avicenna’s position. In order to delve deeper into this issue, we need to examine other works by Yaḥyā that have a bearing on the matter.

240 Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 71: “Al-Fārābīs Schüler Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī vertritt eine dezidiert realistische Interpretation der Universalien.”

241 Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *Treatise on Unity*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 400.14–18.

242 Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *Treatise on Unity*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 401.1–3.

In two treatises entitled *On the Four Scientific Questions Concerning the Three Kinds of Existence* (*Fī l-buḥūth al-‘ilmiyyah al-arba‘ah ‘an aṣnāf al-wujūd al-thalāthah*), which was recently analyzed and translated by Robert Wisnovsky and Stephen Menn, and *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things* (*Fī Tabyīn wujūd al-umūr al-‘āmmiyyah*), which was the object of a detailed study by Marwan Rashed, Yaḥyā seeks to establish a classification of the existents (*mawjūdāt*) by means of a threefold division he inherited from the late-antique sources, but which he revised in the context of his own philosophical system.²⁴³ In these texts, the Christian thinker argues that the existents can be divided into ‘the natural’ (*al-ṭabī‘ī*), ‘the intellectual’ (*al-‘aqlī*) or ‘logical’ (*al-manṭiqī*), and ‘the divine’ (or the ‘metaphysical,’ *al-ilāhī*). More specifically, since he is to some extent operating within a revised Platonic framework (without however going so far as to endorse the separate existence of the Forms), he intends to examine how these ontological modes apply to the underlying forms (*ṣuwar*) and essences (*dhawāt*) of things.²⁴⁴ Yaḥyā argues that the essences found in the divine world, in concrete reality, and in the human mind have a distinct kind of existence, hence the title of his first treatise. One important point he makes is that the essences found in nature and in the human intellect depend on the divine (or metaphysical) mode of existence of essence or form, which is essentially prior, since it focuses on the definition of the thing taken ‘in itself.’ This divine (or metaphysical) mode of existence, which Yaḥyā also describes as “essential existence” (*wujūd dhātī*) and “true or real existence” (*wujūd ḥaqīqī*), is to be located presumably in the divine mind, although Yaḥyā does not elaborate on this point. Moreover, according to Yaḥyā, these quiddities or forms can be regarded as a simple part (*juz’*) of the concrete composite beings. As he puts it, “because these forms are parts of the composite and for this reason are causes of it, and every cause is prior by nature to its effect, forms free of all concomitants will therefore be prior by nature to their effects.”²⁴⁵ Finally, quiddity, although it exists in concrete beings, can be extracted and dissociated from its various material concomitants and related to the essence taken in itself and contemplated by the mind.

Now, although Menn and Wisnovsky have emphasized the doctrinal differences between Yaḥyā and Avicenna, Adamson and Rashed for their part believe that Avicenna was deeply influenced by Yaḥyā and that he likely developed his understanding of quiddity and the universals by elaborating on the Christian thinker.²⁴⁶ Building

243 Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*; Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī. These two treatises develop similar ideas and should be read side by side.

244 For these points and Yaḥyā’s relation to Platonism, see Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 71–74.

245 Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 95.

246 Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*; Menn, Avicenna’s Metaphysics, 154–157 (although Menn acknowledges Avicenna’s debt to Yaḥyā and notes some important parallels, he stresses mostly the differences between these two thinkers’ conception of essence); Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī, especially 146, 149–150; Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 150–159; and Ehrig-Eg-

on their insight, and bearing in mind the topic of the present chapter, I wish in what follows to provide a comparative analysis of these thinkers' views on how quiddity relates to the concrete existents and on the extramental existence of the common things. My hypothesis is that the Ibn 'Adīan theory of existing quiddities and forms in concrete beings anticipated Avicenna's metaphysical realism as well as his mereological argument that the pure quiddities constitute an irreducible and simple part of these beings.

Although Yaḥyā entitled his treatise *On the Four Scientific Questions Concerning the Three Kinds of Existence*, the bulk of his analysis focuses on the forms and quiddities, and especially on how these can be said to exist in the divine, physical, and intellectual spheres. In fact, Yaḥyā states that he intends "to investigate the pure essences" (*al-baḥṭh 'an al-dhawāt al-maḥḍah*), and throughout the treatise, he goes back and forth between the terms form (*ṣūrah*), essence (*dhāt*), and quiddity (*mā-hiyyah*) to refer to what is, at root, a Platonic or Platonizing conception of form. What is more, his tripartition of existents (*mawjūdāt*) and existence (*wujūd*) corresponds clearly to a threefold distinction of essences envisaged either in matter, in the mind, or in themselves. This indicates that Ibn 'Adī conceives of these three kinds or modes of existence as applying to the same essences taken in these various contexts, and not to different kinds of essences.²⁴⁷ This, from the very outset, somewhat connects Yaḥyā's terminology and outlook with Avicenna's own agenda in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* to investigate the pure quiddities in their various ontological contexts, one of which is concrete reality. Beyond this general concern for classifying the ontological contexts of essences, which jointly characterizes Yaḥyā's and Avicenna's approaches, it is the similarities in their discussion of how essence exists in the concrete individuals which should retain our attention here.

In the course of his analysis, Yaḥyā makes a number of points that are directly relevant to my interpretation of Avicenna's metaphysics. According to the Christian thinker, the essences exist in concrete beings together with the material concomitants and accidents that surround them. This is what Yaḥyā describes as the 'natural existence' of form or essence, in contradistinction to its 'logical or intellectual state' (in the human mind) and to its 'divine state' (presumably in God's mind). In this physical or natural context, Yaḥyā tells us, essence is taken "in that it is in matter and with specifying accidents" (*bi-annahu fī hayūlā wa-ma'a a'rāḍ khāṣṣah*). This implies, for example, taking the definition of human with its external things, or, as Yaḥyā puts it, taking "the rational mortal animal existing in matter with accidents" (*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq al-mā'it al-mawjūd fī hayūlā wa-ma'a a'rāḍ*).²⁴⁸ In spite of this

gert, Yaḥyā, who does not focus on the relation between Avicenna and Ibn 'Adī, but provides insight into Yaḥyā's theory of nature and the universals.

247 For a pellucid statement of this important point, see Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 96 (66b15).

248 Ibn 'Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 151.22–23, 152.17.

state of embeddedness in matter, the essence can be conceptually extracted and considered solely in itself, since it constitutes an irreducible part (*juz'*) of the composite concrete existent.²⁴⁹ This is because, in themselves, the forms or essences are pure and devoid of the accidents and concomitants (*lawāḥiq*) that attach to them.²⁵⁰ Such pure and irreducible forms nevertheless exist in the concrete individuals as a simple part (*juz'*) exists in a more complex or composite being.²⁵¹ Thus, on Yaḥyā's mind, these simple parts are nothing other than the essences envisaged without their attachments and concomitants.

One point that remains somewhat unclear in Yaḥyā's two treatises is how the divine mode of existence of the form or essence relates to the other two modes. It is evident that in his view the logical or intellectual aspect of essence is posterior to concrete individuals and, hence, to natural existence. But how exactly does the divine existence relate to concrete beings and to natural existence? And why would Yaḥyā in *Treatise on Unity* describe the immanent existence of the form in the particular as a case of 'essential existence'? Yaḥyā's use of the expression 'divine existence' would seem to suggest at first that such forms exist only in the divine world or, more specifically, in God's mind, and that they are disconnected from the realm of matter and multiplicity. In that sense, they would correspond to the universals 'before multiplicity' one finds outlined in the Neoplatonic sources. But the text from *Treatise on Unity* quoted above seems to suggest otherwise: divine existence can also be construed as the existence of the universals and common things *in* concrete particulars according to a realist interpretation. This means that the notion of 'essential being' or 'divine being' or 'true being' pertains to the essences taken in themselves, regardless of their ontological context, i. e., regardless where they are located. Thus, even when they are embedded in concrete things, the essence or definition in itself somehow preserves its 'divine' existence. In sum, the definition or essence in itself, the 'definitional' or 'essential being,' can be predicated of the concrete thing and exists immanently in each concrete individual according to a mereological mode. As a result, this third type of existence can be said to be essentially prior and also to encompass and subsume the other two types of existence.

The various points Yaḥyā develops in his argumentation appear to have directly informed Avicenna's understanding of quiddity, even though he adapts them to his metaphysical system. Like his forerunner, the master upholds a mereological approach whereby pure quiddity represents a simple part (*juz'*) of the composite existents and can be said to exist irreducibly in the concrete beings (this horse) and in the universal complex beings (universal horse).²⁵² While Yaḥyā speaks of "the

249 Ibn 'Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 152.1–3.

250 Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 65b5, 65b30, 66b5, 66a25.

251 Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 66a25–35, 66b10–15.

252 I would argue that what Menn (Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 154) writes about Yaḥyā, "it is this neutral essence, not the universal concept, which is predicated of Socrates and Plato, since Socrates is not in fact the concept human," can be applied to Avicenna as well with some qualifications. Al-

pure essences” (*al-dhawāt al-maḥdah*), Avicenna for his part discourses on ‘quiddity in itself.’ Both seek to distinguish the essence taken ‘in itself’ from the consideration of essence taken with its concomitants and accidents as it is found in composite substances. In this regard, there is significant overlap between Yaḥyā’s and Avicenna’s terminology: the former’s description of essence in a material setting as “in that it is in matter and with specifying accidents” (*bi-annahu fī hayūlā wa-ma‘a a‘rāḍ khāṣṣah*) directly echoes Avicenna’s formula “on the condition of something else” (*bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*), where *shay’ ākhar*, for the master, can mean material concomitants and accidents. In fact, Yaḥyā and Avicenna (in *Metaphysics* V.1) jointly provide the example of the human being to explain how the essence humanness can be envisaged either ‘with other things’ or solely in itself. The essence in itself, for Yaḥyā, is the definition “to which no other thing is connected” (*min ghayr an yuḍāfa ilayhi shay’ ākhar*), while for Avicenna it is “unconditioned” quiddity or quiddity “without the condition of something else” (*lā bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*), with the same sense intended.²⁵³

This tactic of differentiating between pure essence and essence taken together ‘with something else,’ and, hence, as existing in a composite, is developed in a particularly cogent way in Yaḥyā’s treatise *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*. There Yaḥyā differentiates between essence taken in itself, essence in concrete beings, and essence in the mind. The last state, which Yaḥyā describes as “in that it is conceived or in the soul” (*bi-annahu mutaṣawwar aw fī l-nafs*) also represents a condition added to essence or essence taken together with something else.²⁵⁴ As such, it intersects with Avicenna’s theory that the universal in the mind is quiddity ‘with something else,’ where ‘something else’ this time refers to the mental concomitants and the condition of ‘being predicated of many.’ Although Yaḥyā’s treatise builds on a long Greek tradition of differentiating between various classes of ‘common things’ (*koina*)—some of which are in the mind, others in the concrete world—his designation of one class of common things as coinciding with the essences and as being conceivable purely ‘in themselves’ emerge as a salient elaboration on this heritage.

To recap: Yaḥyā appears to have anticipated some of the logical and ontological distinctions of essence Avicenna draws in his works. Both thinkers reject a strong

though Avicenna believes that the universal concepts (universal human, universal animal) can be predicated of the individuals, he also argues that it is ‘humanness in itself’ and ‘animalness in itself’ that are in Zayd, not the universal concepts ‘human’ and ‘animal.’ In Avicennian parlance, the difference at stake is between the mental universals that are predicated conditionally or ‘on the condition of something else’ and pure quiddity that is predicated unconditionally or ‘without the condition of something else.’ I believe the latter aspect can be traced back to Yaḥyā, although Avicenna elaborates it considerably in light of his logical distinctions and adapts it to his ontology. In fact, Menn himself acknowledges that Avicenna’s mereological interpretation of essence is akin to Yaḥyā’s (155, note 24), although he also insists on major differences as well (see notably 157–158).

253 Ibn ‘Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 153.2.

254 Ibn ‘Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 151.22–23.

Platonic realist position whereby the pure forms exist separately in the concrete world, but they maintain that essence exists as a principle *in* concrete things. They articulate a similar mereological interpretation of essence that makes it a part of composite concrete (and complex mental) beings, but which also allows it to retain a special ontological status in these states. Both thinkers believe that the common things or universals—in one qualified sense—can be said to exist in the concrete particulars, and even that essence as such exists in them. In addition to these various parallels, in chapter IV, it will become clear that Avicenna regards the mode of existence of quiddity in itself as irreducible, prior, simple, and even ‘divine,’ in a manner not altogether dissimilar to Yaḥyā.²⁵⁵ And I will argue in chapter V that, as in Yaḥyā’s metaphysics, the mode of existence of quiddity in concrete beings is also to be connected to a prior state of the pure essences in the separate intellects and in God’s mind. So there are many important parallels in the way these thinkers conceive of essence, even though their terminology does not always match perfectly and they disagree on other issues.²⁵⁶ The link between Yaḥyā and Avicenna is an important element in the reconstruction of the textual matrix—Aristotelian, Alexandrian, Bahshamite, ‘Adīan—that shaped Avicenna’s doctrine of quiddity. I would suggest that *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things* and *On the Four Scientific Questions* should be regarded—along with the Alexandrian and Bahshamite sources highlighted previously—as key sources that informed Avicenna’s theory of quiddity. This accords with recent research that emphasizes the influence of Ibn ‘Adī on Avicenna.

At any rate, by taking the bulk of *Metaphysics* V.1 into account, and by comparing it with the logical writings and especially *Introduction* I.2 and I.12, one may conclude that these texts show a remarkable degree of overlap and harmony and appear to support an integrated, systematically argued, and metaphysically coherent doctrine of how quiddity can be said to exist in concrete beings. They put forth the dual doctrine of the existence of pure quiddity as a part, nature, and reality in concrete things and of the inherent epistemic and ontological irreducibility, simplicity, and unconditionedness of pure quiddity in this context. The existence of pure quiddity in concrete individuals is an irreducible principle, with the result that the nature

255 On this point, see Benevich, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz’*; Menn, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, 154–155. Benevich construes the epithet “divine” in a mereological sense; for Menn, it is merely a concession to Yaḥyā’s position that should not be taken literally in the case of Avicenna. My interpretation partly overlaps with that of Benevich: quiddity is divine not only because it remains a simple and irreducible part of the complex existents, but also because it has a divine origin and exists in the supernal intellects (see chapter V). My interpretation therefore suggests that Avicenna considerably modified Yaḥyā’s theory.

256 Indeed, there are also significant differences between Yaḥyā and Avicenna, which will become clear later on in chapter IV. Suffice to say here that Avicenna does not explicitly recognize three “kinds” (*aṣnāf*) of existence and diverges profoundly from Ibn ‘Adī in the manner in which he approaches the issue of the senses (*ma’ānī*) and modes (*anḥā*) of existence as well as the issue of whether existence is an equivocal notion. In this connection, Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*) plays no role in Yaḥyā’s system.

and pure quiddity can be abstracted by the mind and considered either with or without the material concomitants that accompany it in the exterior world. One observes that Avicenna's epistemological theories rest directly on his ontology. Because it underlies and is constitutive of the concrete existents, quiddity in itself bridges the concrete and mental spheres of existents and explains how knowledge of exterior things is possible. For it to be possible for the mind to perform this abstractive task, there must be something in the exterior world that corresponds directly to this aspect of mental quiddity. Or else, the mind would not be able to recognize and identify objects at all. Hence, the account articulated in *Introduction* is premised on the idea that quiddity does exist in concrete things, and that it is this objective and mind-independent existence of quiddity in concrete beings that enables the operations of the mind to unfold.

One upshot of the foregoing is that the only thing that is common to both universal and concrete beings is the irreducible meaning of quiddity in itself, which is somehow constitutive of the thing or existent taken as a composite whole (taken together with its concomitants). This crucial feature of Avicenna's argumentation appears to have been inspired in part by Yaḥyā's works. On the one hand, the pure essence defines that existent in its capacity as a quidditative meaning and definition (*ḥadd*). Pure quiddity is therefore a *definitional constant* of mental and extramental existents. Moreover, it is also an *ontological constant*, since this *ma'nā* corresponds to an intelligible nature and reality that exists in things. This nature eventually becomes conditioned, specified, and individualized in these existents through the addition of external 'things' and concomitants that specify it as either a mental or concrete existent, but it remains ontologically the same, or rather 'it itself remains itself' (although not numerically one) regardless of the number and types of attributes it combines with. It is on these grounds that both Yaḥyā and Avicenna hold that the universals and essences exist in the concrete world in a qualified sense, while at the same time rejecting a full-blown Platonic model of the separate existence of the forms.

4.3 Avicenna and the Bahshamites on essential similarity and commonness

Avicenna's concept of a common nature that can be applied to a plurality of existents in the concrete world may have been informed by some *kalām* arguments in addition to the Greek sources. In this regard, the works of the Bahshamite School contain sophisticated discussions about the relationship between our perception and apprehension (*idrāk*) of concrete beings and our descriptions (*awṣāf*) of them, on the one hand, and the ontological status of the attributes (*ṣifāt*) and entities or determinant causes (*ma'ānī*) in those beings, on the other. So the Bahshamite thinkers, like Avicenna, were interested in exploring the interface between predication and mental representation and their ontological correspondents in the exterior world. In what follows, I begin by exposing some key features of Bahshamite doctrine and then

turn to the question of how they may help us to better understand Avicenna's theory of common nature.

One key *kalām* term that can help to shed light on this topic is *ma'nā*.²⁵⁷ In its basic usage in an epistemological context, the term *ma'nā* refers to 'meaning' or 'notion' and therefore bears some connection with the way the philosophers employ it. But in the context of their ontology the Mu'tazilite theologians endow it with a more technical sense that refers to an 'entity,' 'ground,' or, according to Frank, "an entitative accident."²⁵⁸ It is with this underlying meaning that the term is usually encountered in the primary sources, where it points to the entitative ground of the attributes and descriptions. Hence, for most Mu'tazilites (and some Ash'arites) *mutakallimūn*, the notion of *ma'nā* in an ontological context refers to a real entity or entitative accident that can be said to exist in an existent thing or in a substance. The *ma'ānī* are distinguished from the states and attributes, which are predicated of these external entities, but which, strictly speaking, do not exist in the external world.²⁵⁹ The notion of *ma'nā* thus serves to ground the attribute and state in a real entity and provides it with its rationale and ontological justification. This term encapsulates the Mu'tazilite position that, even though the attributes and states cannot be said to exist in the concrete world, they are grounded in entitative accidents (*ma'ānī*), which themselves exist and are real entities in beings.²⁶⁰ Consequently, the descriptions (*awṣāf*) of these states and attributes are not mere verbal statements with no reference to, and traction in, reality, but adequately reflect the ontological structure of reality. This ensures a direct conformity between knowledge and reality and a correspondence between predication and our experience of the exterior world.

4.3.1 Similarity and commonness in Bahshamite ontology

It is with regard to this interface between epistemology and ontology centered on the notions of the attribute, the state, and the entity or entitative accident, that the Bahshamites usually discuss the notions of the similarity (*tamāthul*), commonness (*mushtarakah*, *ishtirāk*), and difference (*ikhtilāf*) of substance and accident. These notions reflect the commensurate or analogous nature of the relationship binding our knowledge ('ilm) of things to their actual reality in the extramental world. For the Bahshamites, 'to be similar to' (*tamāthala*), as well as the corollary notion of similar-

²⁵⁷ This term was already analyzed in section II.1.3 and at the beginning of chapter III, with relevant references to its *kalām* background. Here I dwell on it to explore a potential link between Avicenna and the Bahshamites by relying on Frank's interpretation of this term.

²⁵⁸ See Frank, *Beings*, 194; and idem, *Ma'nā*.

²⁵⁹ As Frank, *Beings*, 194, explains, the term *ma'nā* in its ontological sense means "the entitative accident, sc., the basis of the truth of the predication and the ground of the actuality of the attribute or characteristic."

²⁶⁰ More specifically, according to Bahshamite doctrine, it is the states and attributes that are grounded and caused (*mu'allalah*) that refer to real entities (*ma'ānī*) in the concrete world.

ity (*tamāthul*), can be predicated of multiple things on account of the fact that they share a common set of attributes and characteristics. In other words, ‘to have an attribute or characteristic in common with’ (*shāraka, ishtaraka*, with the corresponding nouns *mushārakah, ishtirāk*),²⁶¹ implies that a certain similarity can be attributed to these things and becomes apparent to our mind. Both similarity and commonality are directly linked to, and dependent on, the various essential attributes that are attached to thingness or the Attribute of the Essence. More specifically, these notions are implied by the Attribute of the Essence and the essential attributes it entails, since all things that share the same Attribute of the Essence will also necessarily have the same essential attributes. Thus, atoms have in common not only their ‘being an atom’ and the thingness ‘atomness,’ but also the essential attributes of ‘occupying space’ (*taḥayyuzuhā, kawnuhā mutaḥayyizah*) and their being existent (*kawnuhā mawjūd*).²⁶² As Abū Rashīd explains in his work entitled *Issues Concerning the Disagreement between the Baṣrian and Baghdādī [Mu‘tazilites]*, “we know [‘arafnā] that they [the atoms] are common [*mushtarakah*] in their being atoms [*fī kawnihā jawāhir*] and common also in their occupying space upon their existence [*mushhtarakah fī l-taḥayyuz ‘inda l-wujūd*].” And it is on account of the fact that the atoms share or are common with regard to these *ṣifāt* that “they must be deemed similar” (*wajaba l-qaḍā’ bi-annahā mutamāthilah*).²⁶³ Elsewhere Abū Rashīd states that “that which effects [or actualizes, *yu’aththiru*] similarity is the Attribute of the Essence or the entailed [attributes] from the Attribute of the Essence [i.e., the essential attributes].”²⁶⁴ And as Mānkdim Shashdīw notes, things belonging to the same kind must share all of their essential attributes, not just one.²⁶⁵ That is to say, from the moment that two things have the same Attribute of the Essence, then they will have all the essential attributes in common.²⁶⁶

What is more, the atoms and all existents also differ from one another in virtue of these same attributes and characteristics. The notion of difference (*ikhtilāf*), as well as the fact of ‘being qualified or characterized by’ a particular attribute (*ikhtaṣṣa*, in passive, *ukhtiṣṣa*), is the counterpart of similarity in the Bahshamite ontology and epistemology. For example, atoms occupy different units of space, while some are receptacles for blackness and others for whiteness. At a more fundamental level, things are distinguished by having different Attributes of the Essence. It is

²⁶¹ For these terms, see Frank, *Beings*, 192, 197.

²⁶² As Frank, *Beings*, 65, explains, “similarity and dissimilarity, sameness and difference, are determined through the Attribute of the Essence or through the essential attributes that flow directly from it.” See also Alami, *L’ontologie modale*; 59–62.

²⁶³ Abū Rashīd, *Issues*, 34.13–16.

²⁶⁴ Abū Rashīd, *Issues*, 36.23; cf. 37.8–9.

²⁶⁵ Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 110.2–7.

²⁶⁶ This applies to the divine essence as well. Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 129.3–4, explicitly makes the Attribute of the Essence responsible for both the difference and commonality between God and other things.

this attribute that distinguishes and sets apart 'being an atom' from 'being black' and 'being black' from 'being white.' The Attribute of the Essence differentiates one kind (*jins*) of things from another.²⁶⁷ Thus, the attributes and states account for the ontological differences in beings as well as the corresponding conceptual differences that are grasped by the human mind as a result of perception. In this connection, the Bahshamites sometimes refer to 'the most specifying attributes' (*akhaṣṣ ṣifātihā*) of a thing, which together constitute the *jins* of a thing, and which amount to the sum of the attributes and states that characterize a thing and set it apart from other things.²⁶⁸

The Bahshamites are keen to insist, however, that difference does not arise from the attribute of existence itself, since the latter is one for all existent things and is predicated univocally of all beings. Rather, difference arises from the actualization of the states and characteristics on account of the existence of a thing. Thus, it is when they exist that atoms can be said to occupy different units of space or be a receptacle for whiteness or blackness. In sum, then, the set of attributes that is predicated of the essence or thing-itself, and which is the principle of resemblance in things, is also, by the same token, a principle of distinction or difference. This dual principle of difference and similarity stems ultimately from the Attribute of the Essence, first, because the essential attributes derive from it or are entailed by it, and, second, because the Attribute of the Essence is itself a principle of similarity and difference by differentiating between the essences of things and conceptually setting them apart from one another.

4.3.2 Similarity and difference in existence and nonexistence

One important distinction here concerns the manner in which similarity and difference apply to existent and nonexistent things. The Bahshamites apply these notions primarily to existent things or essences. The reason for this is that the attributes and characteristics that derive or are entailed by the Attribute of the Essence become actualized or real only with the attribute of existence, that is, only when the entities to

267 In Bahshamite ontology and epistemology, the term *jins* is in general more adequately translated as 'kind' than 'genus.' In this context it does not refer to the Aristotelian genus, but rather to the fact that these things are one of a kind and share a similar set of essential attributes. Thus, the atoms are one *jins* because they have the four essential attributes in common, namely, being an atom, occupying space, being existent, and having a specific location.

268 Gimaret, *La théorie*, 67; Benevich, *The Classical*, which explores what the author calls the "‘*umūm wa-khuṣūṣ* argument." As Frank, *Beings*, 78, notes, the *akhaṣṣ ṣifātihā* necessarily involve the actualization of the essential attributes, and so they refer to existent things. These attributes taken together form the *jins* of an existent thing, the 'kind of thing' it is, which encapsulates the notions of similarity and differences, since it characterizes kinds of things in contrast to other kinds of things, e.g., atoms in contrast to instances of blackness. As was explained in chapter II, the Attribute of the Essence extends the principles of similarity and difference to the realm of nonexistent things (sing. *shay' ma'dūm*) inasmuch as we can consider them in the mind.

which they refer can be said to possess realized existence. It is in virtue of the condition (*shart*) of existence, for instance, that an atom can be said to actually occupy a unit of space or to receive blackness. All the attributes—with the exception of the Attribute of the Essence—necessitate the attribute of existence in order to be actual or be actualized (*thābitah, mu'aththarah*), with the consequence that similarity and difference are to a large extent conditioned upon existence. It is 'on the condition of existence,' therefore, that attributes and characteristics are actualized in a being, leading also to the actualization of its similarity and difference vis-à-vis other beings. In that sense, our perception of similarity follows that of the essential attributes and especially the attribute of existence.

With that being said, the Attribute of the Essence represents an exception, since it is not grounded in, or conditioned by, existence. It is intelligible in abstraction from the realized existence of a thing and can be predicated of nonexistent things. In fact, the Attribute of the Essence is a sufficient factor to establish *both* the similarity of things that share it and the fundamental difference between them and other things, such as atomness from blackness or blackness from whiteness. The upshot is that even 'nonexistent things' can be said to be similar in that they share the same Attribute of the Essence, or different in that they do not. This is what distinguishes one nonexistent thing from another. By the same token, this means that the difference between two things can be specified beyond the Attribute of the Essence only in the case of their existence (*wujūd*). If they are not existent, they will be differentiated only at the level of their Attribute of the Essence.

In this connection, however, it is interesting to note that some disagreement seems to have arisen within the Baṣrian Mu'tazilites as to whether a nonexistent atom (*jawhar*) can be legitimately described as an atom, or merely as a nonexistent thing (*shay' ma'dūm*). Abū Rashīd reports that some masters believed that the atom is an atom even in the state of its nonexistence, whereas others contended that the *ma'dūm* is not a substance (an atom), but merely a thing (*shay'*).²⁶⁹ This point notwithstanding, what is important here is that at least some Bahshamites believed that the Attribute of the Essence represents a principle of difference and similarity even when things do not presently exist. It is what enables us, for example, to compare this presently existing unit of blackness to that no longer existent unit of blackness. To return to the example of the atom, atomness remains intelligible and conceivable even when predicated of a nonexistent thing. Fundamentally, then, and on a minimalist reading of the Bahshamite sources, various things can be said to be similar or common on account of the fact that they share the same Attribute of the Essence, which is constant and irreducible and remains intelligible regardless of ontological considerations attached to the thing. The following passage taken from Abū Rashīd's work vividly illustrates this point:

269 Abū Rashīd, *Issues*, 37.10–38.3.

The atom is [intrinsicly] distinguished from what is not an atom in its 'being an atom' [*bi-kaw-nihi jawharan*] and its occupying space. We know that the atoms once they exist [lit., upon their existence, '*inda l-wujūd*'] are common [*mushtarakah*] in their occupying space [i.e., they share this similar essential attribute]. And if they do not exist, then they are common [*mushtarakah*] in their being an atom, even though they are not common in their occupying space.²⁷⁰

Essential commonness and similarity are therefore notions that remain meaningful and intelligible even in the case of nonexistent things, since they derive from the Attribute of the Essence and from its entailed attributes. Atomness (*jawhariyyah*) or 'being an atom' (*kawnuhu jawharan*) is an epistemic and intelligible constant that forms the basis for our cognition of the commonness and similarity between existent and nonexistent things or atoms.

4.3.3 Avicenna and the Bahshamite connection

Some features of Avicenna's conception of common nature are highly likely to have been shaped as a result of his exposure to Bahshamite doctrines. I wish to outline three points in particular that seem to indicate such a connection. The first one is Avicenna's frequent description of quiddity in concrete beings as a *ma'nā*. Although this term has a well-established range of meanings and usages in the Arabic philosophical tradition, where it is usually translated as 'idea,' 'meaning,' 'intention,' or 'intelligible,' the manner in which Avicenna uses it to express the reality of quiddity and nature in concrete beings may very well carry some Bahshamite connotations. For Avicenna holds not only that we can have a mental conception of the quidditative *ma'nā* of a thing, but that this *ma'nā* is a real principle of the concrete existent and that it somehow exists in the concrete being (see Text 11).²⁷¹ This term therefore seems to carry certain entitative and ontological implications that transcend the domain of logic and conceptualization. In the context of Avicenna's philosophy, it also serves to justify the ontological and epistemological link between the natures of exterior beings and our apprehension of these natures through abstraction and intellection, and, ultimately, between the concrete and mental existence of quiddity. Hence, even though the term *ma'nā* has a fundamentally different meaning in their systems, since it refers to an *entitative accident* for the Bahshamites and to *quiddity* or *nature* for Avicenna, in both cases it possesses a dual cognitive and ontological function, which, moreover, serves to cement the veracity of the human cognition of the exterior world by granting it some degree of entitative grounding and traction in reality. Just as *ma'nā* is an entitative ground for some of the Bahshamite attributes and states, so

²⁷⁰ Abū Rashīd, *Issues*, 34.17–19.

²⁷¹ As Hardy, *Avicenna on Knowledge of the Self*, 37, notes, *ma'nā* is an intention or concept that lies between the thing and the thing thought.

in Avicenna's metaphysics, it refers to the foundation, ground, or reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the essence of a concrete being.²⁷²

Secondly, Avicenna, even though he does not develop a full-blown theory of similarity and difference on the Bahshamite model, regards nature in concrete beings as a principle of commonness. Quiddity in concrete beings is a common nature (*ṭabī'ah mushtarakah*). According to Avicenna, beings that share the same nature or species, for example, the nature 'humanness' in Zayd and 'Amr, have an essential commonness that is real and even existent in them, even though it does not amount to a universal form that is numerically one or single. This latter proviso, however, does not prevent nature from being something real or even existent in those beings and, hence, from amounting to something more than a mere definitional commonality. At *Metaphysics* VII.1, Avicenna explains that what is the same or identical in species can be described as similar (*mā kāna huwa huwa fī l-naw' qīla mumāthil*).²⁷³ Notice in this regard that he relies on the same root *m-th-l* as the Bahshamites to express the idea of similarity 'in kind' or species. Even though Avicenna is referring to the logical universal species in the mind, it corresponds ontologically to the nature or quiddity in the concrete individuals.

In brief, Avicenna shares with his Bahshamite counterparts the notions of essential commonness and similarity, as well as terms derived from the roots *sh-r-k* and *m-th-l* to express them. What is particularly striking is that these theories are equally based on the idea of a commonness *that derives from the essence* and that, consequently, has little to do with the notion of existence: commonness is entailed by the Attribute of the Essence in the Bahshamite sources, and by pure quiddity or nature in Avicenna's case. Interestingly, the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity are also, by the same token, a principle of difference, since they are what distinguishes one thing(-ness) from another thing(-ness). And just as further differences, specifications, and particularizations are entailed by the actualization of the essential attributes and characteristics in Bahshamite ontology, so they are entailed, in Avicenna's system, by the concomitants and accidents of quiddity. For Avicenna, then, quiddity in concrete beings is an irreducible principle of commonness and difference, and it fulfills a role that is in many ways similar to that of the Attribute of the Essence in Abū Hāshim's ontology.

²⁷² Before Avicenna, Ibn 'Adī uses *ma'nā* in his discussion of essence to describe its various aspects; see Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*. Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 625.21–22, follows Avicenna in using *ma'nā* to refer to the nature that is common to a species (*ṭabī'ah 'āmmah*), by which he means the nature that exists in those individuals. There are many instances in the Avicennian corpus where the term *ma'nā* seems more appropriately translated as 'entity,' rather than 'meaning,' and, relevantly for our purposes, as 'quidditative entity,' rather than 'quidditative meaning.' Such a slippage from the purely semantic plane to the entitative or ontological plane, which appears so typical of Avicenna, can be partly explained in light of the influence of Avicenna's predecessors, whether Ibn 'Adī or the Mu'tazilites, who all ascribe a certain entitative grounding to this term.

²⁷³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VII.1, 304.4.

Combining the two points above leads to an interesting realization and to another potential link between the Bahshamite and Avicennian positions. For the Persian philosopher, common nature does not exist as an actual universal in concrete things or as a single transcendent form that would be shared by individual instantiations. Nevertheless, it is real and may even be said to exist in each being according to a certain mode proper to it, which is not conflatable with the realized existence of the complex entity. To my mind, it is probable that the Bahshamite notion of subsistence (*thubūt*) used to describe the attributes may have influenced Avicenna's understanding of the reality of common nature in concrete beings. After all, it is these real, actual, and subsistent (but not existent) attributes and states that constitute the Bahshamite principle of commonness and similarity. These states are located midway between existence and nonexistence and thus possess their own ontological status. Avicenna's ambiguity concerning the exact ontological status of the common nature in concrete beings may have something to do with this *kalām* background and his acquaintance with the Bahshamite theories of the *ḥāl* and *ma'ānī*. Common nature does not exist as an *actual universal form* in concrete beings, but it is nevertheless a principle of commonness and may even be said to be *potentially* universal. Moreover, it possesses its own ontological status as something irreducible and constant, which is different from the existence of the complex being in which it inheres. The Bahshamite states and the Avicennian common nature therefore both possess a special ontological status that is not identical with or reducible to the existence of the thing-itself in reality. This suggests a possible rehandling of Bahshamite theories and their adaptation to Avicenna's ontological system. But since the latter does not accommodate the theory of the states and maintains the law of the excluded middle, he had to angle for solutions based on a theory of ontological modulation and a reinterpretation of the notion of *wujūd*.²⁷⁴

Finally, the cognition of the notions of commonness and difference that are implied by the Attribute of the Essence and Avicenna's theory of common nature appears to be irreducible and constant. In both cases, commonness and difference arise from the abstract consideration of the essence in the mind—either the Attribute of the Essence, or the essential nature—even when the actual beings to which they may potentially correspond do not exist in the concrete world. So the common nature and the Attribute of the Essence at the same time inform us about what is common to all atoms, black things, or human beings that exist or may potentially exist, in addition to what is unique about their thingness in abstraction from these concrete beings. This would seem to make commonness and difference necessary mental concomitants of the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity, which nonetheless find a correspondence in concrete beings. When the essence of atomness or horse-

²⁷⁴ This connection is explored in much more detail in chapter IV. My point here can be boiled down to the observation that essential commonness, for Avicenna, has, like the Bahshamite states, an elusive entitative status in concrete beings, for although it is real and is even existent (in a way the states are not), it is not so in the way that a complex being or accident is existent.

ness is reflected upon and grasped by intellectual apprehension, it informs us about what is unique about it and proper to it, as well as what is common in the various beings of which it can be predicated.²⁷⁵ What is more, the Bahshamites and Avicenna believe that further degrees of specification or particularization beyond the fundamental essential differences evoked by the Attribute of the Essence and common nature require the perception of accidents and attributes that do not pertain directly to the essence of the thing, such as blackness in the atom or musicality in Socrates. These things, which are manifested to the senses, do not enter into the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity, but are additional to them and can be conceptually separated in the mind.²⁷⁶

4.4 Recapitulation

Avicenna's approach to the problem of universality and the ontological status of the universals in the concrete world is complex and nuanced. It was shaped by, and in some regards perpetuates, the ancient philosophical and *kalām* developments that had reached him. His insistence that the universals are properly speaking mental or intellectual objects, combined with his recognition of a special and modulated sense of universality that applies to the natures and essences of concrete particulars, can both be traced to the late-antique trends that informed his works.²⁷⁷ Building on this legacy, Avicenna puts forth some innovative ideas, which have to do notably

275 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VII.1, 303.3–4, 13, describes 'the similar' (*al-mumāthil*) as a concomitant or appendage (*lāḥiq*) of unity and as something that specifies unity. But oneness is itself a concomitant of pure quiddity for Avicenna. So if similarity is twice removed from quiddity, then how can it be said to qualify it? As in the case of identity, or the self-identical (*al-huwa huwa*), there are two distinct notions at play here: there are the identity and similarity that pertain to, and are predicated of, the complete substance (as when we say that Socrates and Plato are similar in being philosophers); and there is the identity and similarity that is predicated of quiddity in itself. Thus, horseness is just horseness and identical to itself, although one may also say that two horses are similar in having this horseness in itself in common. But the latter statement excludes all the concomitants and accidents that follow horseness.

276 It is fascinating to observe that Shahrastānī, intuiting the fundamental parallels between the Bahshamite and Avicennian doctrines, proceeds to synthesize them and also to adjudicate between them in his work. For example, Shahrastānī attempts to merge the two discourses—the Bahshamite and Avicennian—in his analysis of the notions of resemblance (*tamāthul*) and difference (*ikhtilāf*), as well as of essence and the states. More specifically, he adopts Avicenna's framework and distinctions regarding essence and the universals in order to interpret the theory of the states, stressing the germane outlook between the mental considerations (*i'tibārāt*) Avicenna speaks of and the attributes and descriptions of the Mu'tazilites; see Shahrastānī, *The Ultimate Steps*, 147–148.

277 On the other hand, Avicenna's general insistence on restricting the universals proper—and, accordingly, the term 'universal' or *kullī*—to the sphere of human intellectuality contrasts with what became a standard practice in the postclassical Arabic tradition of referring to the natural universals (sing. *al-kullī l-ṭabī'ī*).

with the scope he attributes to these universal mental entities as existents in the mind, the redefinition of the boundary between pure essence and universality (both in the mind and in the concrete), as well as the general reorientation of the ancient discussion of common things toward the core notion of pure quiddity. The latter feature can be attributed in part to the influence of the *mutakallimūn*. In this manner, Avicenna creatively reshaped much of this material and bequeathed an original philosophical synthesis to the later Islamic philosophical and theological traditions.²⁷⁸

5 The issue of the real distinction of essence and existence

One issue in Avicennian studies that has received continuous attention on the part of scholars up to the present day is the applicability of Avicenna's distinction of essence and existence to the concrete world. Does this distinction refer to a real state of affairs in the world and a metaphysical reality in concrete beings? Or is it a purely mental or logical distinction that should be confined to conceptual thought? While virtually all scholars agree on the conceptual nature and scope of Avicenna's distinction, there is some disagreement regarding the corollary question of 'the real distinction.'²⁷⁹ Without pretending to settle this long-standing issue in any decisive way, I wish in what follows to underline two points that emerge from the previous analysis and that can feed into the ongoing debate regarding this aspect of Avicenna's thought. I shall also return to it at a later stage in chapter IV with additional insight.

278 Thus, Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 500, follows his master Avicenna in devoting one sense of the universal to the essence that exists in concrete beings, which is unconditioned essence.

279 The purely conceptual nature of this distinction has been assiduously defended by Rahman, *Essence and Existence in Avicenna*, and idem, *Essence and Existence in Ibn Sinā*; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, and idem, *Philosophical Analysis*; and Izutsu, *The Fundamental Structure*, 63–64 (although at 86 Izutsu acknowledges that Avicenna is ambiguous when it comes to the issue of whether the essence/existence distinction is mental or extramental). More recently, it has been endorsed by Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*; idem, *Essence and Existence*. Wisnovsky makes Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī largely responsible for the interpretation of Avicenna's metaphysics according to which essence and existence amount to a real distinction, where existence is 'superadded to' (*zā'id 'alā*) quiddity in the concrete world. Through Rāzī's works, this interpretation could have been diffused to later Islamic intellectual history. In contrast, there is a long scholarly tradition stemming from the philosophical circles of medieval Europe that ascribes a real distinction to Avicenna, and which extends to the studies of the neo-Thomists; see notably Goichon, *La distinction*. But the 'real' or 'metaphysical distinction' has sometimes been given serious consideration by specialists of Arabic philosophy, such as Bertolacci, *The Distinction*; Lizzini, *Wuğūd-Mawğūd*; eadem, *Ibn Sinā's Metaphysics*; Belo, *Essence*; and Adamson, *Existence*. It should be said that this issue is particularly intricate, because it intersects with many other aspects of Avicenna's philosophy, such as causality, the modalities, hylomorphism, and individuation, to name only a few notions.

The various results attained thus far in the present study do not seem to harmonize well when it comes to the topic of ‘the real distinction.’ One point that has emerged clearly from the analysis conducted in chapter II is the primarily intellectual and intelligible nature of pure quiddity. Avicenna discusses pure quiddity primarily in a logical and epistemological context that has to do with our conception and cognition of essence. Moreover, his comments are also directly linked to, and in fact rely on, the notion of mental existence, because objects of thought in Avicenna’s philosophy typically coincide with mental existents. The relationship between conceivability and existence in the mind is therefore a topic to which Avicenna contributed significantly in his works. In this connection, the preliminary hypothesis that was sketched in chapter II, and which will be further strengthened in chapters IV and V, is that if any special ontological mode is to be ascribed to pure quiddity, it is an intelligible and intellectual one that is to be located chiefly in the human and divine minds. These considerations accord with the general tenor of *Metaphysics* I.5, where Avicenna distinguishes between the primary notions of existence and essence, or rather ‘the existent’ and ‘the thing,’ in what is primarily a discussion about the foundations of human conception. If one follows this line of reasoning, there are no obvious and convincing reasons why Avicenna would want to extend this problematic to the exterior world and why he would not be satisfied with positing merely a conceptual or mental distinction between essence and realized existence. If this interpretation is retained, then the distinction between essence and existence, between ‘the thing’ and ‘the existent,’ would be fundamentally the product of a mental consideration. It is the mind-dependent nature of these notions and the intentional difference between them that would prevail—with no actual extensional and ontological difference obtaining between them in concrete beings. Indeed, this is exactly how many post-Avicennian thinkers understood the distinction. They argued that the difference between essence and existence is merely conceptual (*i’tibārī*).

With that being said, the evidence collected thus far in chapter III compels us to reconsider this picture somewhat and to articulate a more nuanced account of Avicenna’s position. His statements regarding quiddity in the concrete world raise a new set of difficult questions. Avicenna expounds the view that the common natures exist in concrete beings, and he seems to angle towards a moderate form of metaphysical realism. According to this approach, there is a sense in which quiddity, *qua* nature and form, and even, in a highly qualified way, *qua* universal, can be said to exist in each concrete instantiation. One—but by no means the only—representative statement to that effect appears in Text 11 (from *Salvation*), where Avicenna posits a distinction between *wujūd* and *shay’iyyah* specifically *in the concrete world* or *in concrete beings* (*fī l-a’yān*). In a similar vein, in some passages of *Metaphysics* V.1, he states quite plainly that there is a sense in which pure quiddity exists irreducibly in concrete beings and should be distinguished from the attributes and accidents that together constitute the *sunolon*. These statements seem to unequivocally point to a *real* distinction. Or, at the very least, they pose a serious challenge to the thesis of the identity of essence and existence in concrete beings. In this regard,

the analysis of nature conducted above squarely places Avicenna in the camp of the moderate realists. Avicenna, however, is not a realist in the way this term is traditionally used in medieval Latin philosophy. He is not a realist about ‘universals,’ strictly speaking, because he locates actual universals in the human mind and does not postulate the existence of a single, actual, universal form responsible for actualizing the nature of multiple concrete beings in which they would participate. Rather, Avicenna is a realist in a more qualified sense, because he upholds the immanent and irreducible existence of the pure quiddities and common natures in individual beings. He does not believe that ‘universal human’ exists in the concrete world. But he does believe that ‘human in itself’ or ‘the pure nature humanness’ somehow exists in each individual human being. By extension, he does not regard universality as a *mode of existence* in the concrete world—rather, according to him, universality is an attribute that exists only in the mind. But he does regard the pure quiddities as enjoying a *mode of existence of their own* in the extramental composite entities, and a rather special one at that, since it is qualified neither by numerical determination nor by the realized existence that is an attribute of essence and that can be predicated of the composite and contingent being as a whole. So although it would be plainly wrong to assert that the essences exist separately in the concrete world on the model of Plato’s forms, it would be equally fallacious to claim, according to Avicenna, that the existence of pure quiddity in the concrete horse is identical to the existence of the concrete horse taken as a complex entity or *sunolon*. It is by navigating a middle course between these two pitfalls that Avicenna developed his doctrine of essence in the concrete world. It may not be outlandish in this regard to compare Avicenna’s theory of the essential nature to the Bahshamite theory of the state, which has a certain reality, even though it cannot straightforwardly be said to exist on the conventional meaning of that term. For Avicenna as well, quiddity in the concrete world is a reality (*ḥaqīqah*), whose ontological status is to be distinguished from the realized existence of the composite substance or *sunolon*. This makes Avicenna’s brand of metaphysical realism somewhat unique or idiosyncratic.

This last point notwithstanding, some of the results compiled here go against the grain of much recent scholarship on Avicenna (starting with Rahman), which depicts his doctrine of quiddity as being exclusively located on the conceptual or logical planes. The ideas that Avicenna defended a realist position and argued that quiddity somehow exists in concrete beings as a distinct principle have not been popular among scholars and are typically regarded as interpretive residues bequeathed by the scholastic approach, which regards existence as a real accident of essence. Many Avicennian scholars nowadays regard the essence/existence distinction as a purely conceptual and logical one effected by the mind and without any ontological grounding in the concrete world. Moreover, they typically regard existence as being foundational and primary in Avicenna’s metaphysics, reminding us that Avicenna himself defines the subject matter of metaphysics as the investigation of being *qua* being. Interestingly, however, this interpretive approach to Avicenna’s works may itself have been informed to some extent by one of the intellectual strands that devel-

oped out of the master's legacy during the postclassical period, and which is usually referred to as the 'foundationality of existence' (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) tradition. This commentatorial trend and philosophical current, which are considered to have reached their apogee in the works of Mullā Ṣadrā, regard quiddity as a mental construct and the essence/existence distinction as a mere mental consideration. This approach prioritizes existence over essence and regards *wujūd* as the foundational ontic principle of reality, relegating essence to a purely mental object. In spite of this, and as I tried to show above, the evidence regarding the real or conceptual distinction of essence and existence in Avicenna remains fundamentally ambiguous.

At this juncture, two additional considerations can be adduced. The first—for what it is worth, given that the evidence it relies on postdates the Avicennian corpus—concerns the reception of Avicenna's moderate metaphysical realism in the later period, both in Islam and the Latin West. It is a historical fact that many illustrious interpreters of Avicenna construed his metaphysics through the lens of his theory of nature and quiddity and also ascribed to him a real distinction between essence and existence. Among their ranks, one finds Muslim luminaries such as Averroes, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and, in a more nuanced way, Ṭūsī, as well as, in the Latin West, Scholastics such as Albert the Great, Aquinas, and Henry of Ghent. Although it is not always clear in the Islamic context that Avicenna—as opposed to Avicennian thinkers who flourished in the centuries following the master—is the main subject of these reports,²⁸⁰ important evidence that can be gleaned from the works of later authors points to a trend to interpret Avicenna's theory of the universals, as well as his distinction between essence and existence, in a realist manner.²⁸¹

The second consideration is significant, because it throws light on a potential reason why Avicenna may have deemed it worthwhile to defend the real existence of quiddity and nature. The key in this regard rests on the connection between a real essence/existence distinction and the notion of the compositeness and contingency of concrete beings. Recall that for Avicenna, the theory of the internal complexity or compositeness of all caused existents is a crucial feature of his metaphysics, one of whose functions is to prop the distinction between the Necessary of Existence and all other beings. On the one hand, there is God who, *qua* necessary of existence, is perfectly one, simple, and indivisible (in the mind and in reality), and whose quiddity is identical with His existence. On the other hand, there are

280 For an interesting case study, see Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, which focuses *inter alia* on Suhrawardi's criticism of what appears to be the later reception of Avicenna's doctrines.

281 This observation does not in itself *prove* anything, of course, especially given that the reception of Avicenna's ideas always entailed adaptation and transformation. Nonetheless, the question of why many prominent philosophers who commented on Avicenna ascribed a real distinction—or at the very least, a doctrine of the real existence of nature or essence—in concrete beings remains a valid one. It also raises the interesting methodological question of how much weight should be placed on the postclassical interpretations of Avicenna when examining the works of the master.

all the contingent and caused entities, in which existence and quiddity are distinct and, hence, amount to a duality of ontological principles. As Adamson notes:

If contingent things are indeed composed of essence and existence, then they are, by virtue of this very fact, sharply distinguished from God, whose essence is simply His existence. Insisting on the real distinction thus allows us to give a rigorous account of God's simplicity, as He is the one existent for whom the distinction fails to apply.²⁸²

Hence, this fundamental distinction can be explicated in light of Avicennian theories of causality: the composite existent is possible of existence in itself (i. e., its quiddity is only possible or contingent), but necessary of existence with regard to its cause (i. e., its quiddity is necessarily caused to exist by its cause), which makes it dependent on an exterior agent for its actual existence. As Avicenna succinctly puts it, "Everything that has a quiddity other than existence is caused."²⁸³ There is therefore a direct interconnection for Avicenna between the notions of causation, compositeness, and the essence/existence distinction. As Wisnovsky has lucidly shown, Avicenna relied on different matrices of distinctions at different periods of his life to argue for the composite and contingent status of caused beings, eventually making the modalities of 'the possible' and 'the necessary' the cornerstone of his mature theory.²⁸⁴ This developmentalist account notwithstanding, what remains constant throughout Avicenna's engagement with this issue is the correlation he establishes between compositeness and causedness: whatever is composite (*murakkab*) or endowed with internal multiplicity (*kathrah*) must be caused. In this context, Avicenna frequently resorts to the duality of essence and existence as a rationale to explain the compositeness of extramental beings, a duality which he sometimes identifies with possibility and necessity respectively. This doctrine, and especially the implication that what has a distinct essence and existence must be caused, represents a key argument of his metaphysics. Conversely, according to this metaphysical rule, every contingent and caused existent amounts to a duality, either because it can be divided in its essence and existence or because it has a possible or contingent quiddity and receives necessary existence from an external cause.²⁸⁵

282 Adamson, Existence. Adamson intends these remarks chiefly with regard to the post-Avicennian tradition, where some thinkers explicitly articulated ideas that are found only *in nuce* in Avicenna's works.

283 See the crucial section in Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.4, 346.13ff.

284 Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, especially chapters 8–9 and 11–14.

285 The phrasing Avicenna employs in such passages and his correlation of existence and essence with necessity and possibility respectively are problematic, inasmuch as, strictly speaking, for Avicenna, it is the quiddity that is both contingent in itself and necessary through another. In other words, the modalities apply to quiddity, not to existence itself. Existence is just existence, and it is quiddity that determines whether existence is necessary or only possible. Hence, God's quiddity necessitates existence, whereas all other quiddities are intrinsically possible, but necessary with regard to their cause. Furthermore, there is the added difficulty that, strictly speaking, the modalities are

These points are illustrated by many passages in the Avicennian corpus that support a real distinction on the grounds of this theory of causal contingency. Witness, for example, the following excerpts gleaned from various works by the master:

Therefore what [is caused to] exist from the First [Cause] [i.e., the First Effect] from the outset exists as [something that is] one in essence, but because it is necessitated by a certain relation [*iḍāfah*], there must be some multiplicity after its existence is constituted.²⁸⁶

Its [the First Effect's] multiplicity does not derive from the First, for its possibility of existence is something belonging to its very essence, and which is not due to the causality of the First. But it receives from the First the necessity of its existence.²⁸⁷

Insofar as it [the First Effect] is caused, nothing prevents it from being constituted of a multiplicity of things [*min mukhtalifāt*]. How could this be otherwise, when its quiddity is possible and its existence is necessary due to something else?²⁸⁸

A similar statement can be found in *Notes*:

The First [has] a simple essence completely devoid of multiplicity. But the efficient act that is entailed by [the First] [i.e., the First Effect] [*wa-l-fi'l al-fa'āl al-lāzim 'anhū*] contains multiplicity from the outset, because it is a quiddity whose existence is given to it by the First.²⁸⁹

One of the clearest formulations of this theory appears in Avicenna's commentary on *Theology of Aristotle*, wherein he explains that multiplicity cannot regress infinitely in caused beings, lest there result an endless multiplication of ontological principles. Rather, quiddity and existence are two irreducible principles in caused beings:

The first [kind of] duality [*ithnayniyyah*] in what is created [*al-mubda'*]³—whichever created thing that may be—is that possibility [*al-imbkān*] belongs to it by virtue of itself and existence [or necessity]²⁹⁰ belongs to it by virtue of the First Truth [*al-haqq al-awwal*] ... This process cannot go on infinitely, and we must therefore posit two fundamental entities [*waḥdatayn širfatayn*]. The very least is to affirm that one is the quiddity [*māhiyyah*] and the other the existence deriving from the First.²⁹¹

These passages, which are gleaned from various works by the master that span his entire philosophical career, aptly show the correlation between complexity or com-

considerations added to the pure quiddities. They are concomitants of essences, but are not constitutive of them. Ultimately, then, the modalities qualify existence as it pertains or relates to any given essence, and, as such, they represent one aspect of Avicenna's theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*); see section IV.1.2. In the final analysis, the modalities shed little light on the ontological status of quiddity taken *in itself*.

286 Avicenna, *Philosophy for 'Arūḍī*, 161.5–7.

287 Avicenna, *Provenance*, 79.7–8.

288 Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 652.2–653.1.

289 Avicenna, *Notes*, 208.10–11.

290 One can read either *wujūd* or *wujūb*, with a roughly similar argument.

291 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 60.18–61.7.

positeness—in this case the duality of essence and existence—and causedness. The first passages focus on the complexity of the First Effect and therefore pertain chiefly to a cosmological context. They are intended as a real, descriptive account of external existents, of the way things really are, and not as a purely abstract metaphysical analysis of being in general or being *qua* being. Rather, Avicenna's comments seem to underscore a real ontological complexity and compositeness in the First Effect—and by extension in the other intellectual beings and all caused entities. This is the case particularly with the text from Avicenna's commentary on *Theology of Aristotle*, which attributes a "duality" (*ithnayniyyah*) and "two fundamental or irreducible entities" (*waḥdatayn širfatayn*) not only to the First Effect, but to all caused or created beings (sing., *mubda'*), "whichever created thing that may be." And since the master pinpoints the duality of essence and existence as a source of multiplicity in those beings and as a rationale for their causality and contingency, it is quite clear that he intends this distinction as a real one extending to the extramental world. By further implication, the duality between the ontological principles of essence and existence can be applied to all contingent beings and serves to account for their compositeness and causedness. We may infer, therefore, that (a) the essence/existence distinction, (b) ontological compositeness (or complexity), and (c) ontological causedness all go hand in hand in Avicenna's metaphysics. This in turn sheds some light on why Avicenna would be committed to making quiddity a real ontological principle of the world and why he would want to claim that it possesses a kind of existence *in* concrete beings.

Nevertheless, although they may amount to a philosophical rationale, the previous remarks say little about the actual relationship between essence and existence in concrete beings. Beyond the simple recognition that essence and existence can be designated as real metaphysical principles, the ontological status of both in reality and their connection with causality remain somewhat obscure. For example, maintaining a real distinction between essence and existence does not clarify whether one enjoys priority over the other, nor does it answer the difficult query of exactly how essence comes to exist in the concrete individual.²⁹² Furthermore, in making these remarks, my aim is not to minimize the importance of being or *wujūd* in Avicenna's metaphysics. It is, admittedly, moot to negate the crucial place Avicenna assigns to it in the metaphysical inquiry. Rather, the previous analysis suggests that his theory of quiddity represents a valuable and highly sophisticated counterpart to his theory of existence, and that it occupies an equally significant place in his account of

292 These are separate issues that call for a detailed inquiry, and they will be addressed in chapter IV in connection with the ontological mode of pure quiddity. Defining the *relationship* between essence and existence in the concrete world now presents itself as the main issue that remains to be tackled, once a moderate form of metaphysical realism has been recognized. The challenge that lies ahead, therefore, is not, as some medieval and modern scholars have striven to do, to interpret Avicenna's metaphysics exclusively in light of one of these principles, i.e., either essence or existence, but to elucidate their 'relationship,' and this, both in the concrete world and in the mind.

external reality and its underlying principles. It would appear, or so I have argued, that existence and quiddity are jointly to be regarded as metaphysical principles that inform Avicenna's account of concrete existence (*wujūd fī l-a'yān*).

I wish at this juncture to stress two caveats linked to the previous hypothesis. The first is that Avicenna's strand of moderate realism should *not* be interpreted as implying the prior and fully separate and autonomous existence of quiddity in the concrete world. As is well known, the master rejects the theory of the Platonic forms, so my analytical approach will focus rather on the relationship of essence and existence within the realized substance. It is this state of inherence qualifying the relationship of these principles that calls for heightened attention. What this boils down to is that, if it is blatantly false to claim that quiddity already exists before acquiring existence from its cause, it seems also highly incorrect to claim that, on Avicenna's account, the existence of pure quiddity in the realized substance is identical with the existence of the substance taken as a whole. It is this difference in formulation, as well as the relation between essence and substance it implies, that remain to be elucidated.

The second point pertains to the notion of accidentality that has often been associated with the essence/existence distinction. Indeed, the assumption of a real distinction between essence and existence directly raises the issue of the accidentality of existence vis-à-vis essence, because Avicenna quite explicitly describes existence as an external attribute of quiddity and something distinct from it. It is this issue, more than any other perhaps, which has plagued modern discussions about the real distinction, with scholars on one side regarding existence as a full-blown accident of quiddity, and others rejecting this view and maintaining the purely conceptual nature of the essence/existence distinction. It should be stressed, however, that (a) the issue of the real distinction, or better, of the real relationship, between essence and existence, and (b) of the accidentality of existence, are distinct, if interconnected, topics in Avicenna's philosophy.

One way to make progress with regard to the latter issue is to highlight the difference between an accident proper and something whose relation to another thing is merely accidental in the sense of being external and non-constitutive. It is quite clear that Avicenna does not regard existence as an accident (*'araḍ*) of essence according to the standard or most straightforward acceptance of this notion. In other words, existence is definitely not an accident in the sense in which 'musical' can be an accident of Socrates or 'black' an accident of 'this cat.' Rather, in technical Avicennian language, *wujūd* is a concomitant (*lāzim*, *lāḥiq*) of quiddity. Now, for Avicenna, the definition of something *lāzim* or *lāḥiq* is that it is external (*khārij*) to quiddity and, hence, not constitutive (*ghayr muqawwim*) of it. The concomitants are not internal and essential constituents of quiddity, and in that sense they not participate in the definition of what a thing is. Accordingly, existence, *qua* concomitant, does not enter the definition of a thing, and it is possible to conceive of essence in complete abstraction from any consideration of existence. This in turn legitimates the Avicennian position, against Aristotle and later also Averroes, that the knowledge

of the quiddity of a thing conceptually and logically precedes the knowledge of its existence.

Nevertheless, the very state of being external to, and non-constitutive of, quiddity represents a qualified state of accidentality on Avicenna's reckoning. This is theoretically justified by the ambiguous or modulated nature of what it is to be an accident. Accordingly, in *Definitions*, the master deploys various senses of the term 'accident' or 'araḍ', the third of which states that an accident is "any meaning or entity [*ma'nā*] that exists externally of a thing's nature."²⁹³ This definition applies to what it is to be a *lāzim* or *lāhiq* and therefore includes the external attributes such as existence or oneness. On this interpretation, *wujūd*, as something external (*khārij*) to the nature of a thing, would be an accident *in a qualified sense*. Further evidence corroborating this view can be found in *Philosophical Compendium*, where the master glosses 'realized existence' as an accidental meaning or notion (*ma'nā 'araḍī*).²⁹⁴ That Avicenna in fact regards one sense of accidentality as applying to the state of being an external concomitant (*lāzim*) is also corroborated by a passage of *Metaphysics*, where the two terms are juxtaposed and used quasi-synonymously: "essence belongs to it [the existent] in itself [*fa-dhātuhu lahu bi-dhātihī*], whereas its being with another is [merely] an accidental occurrence or a certain concomitant of its nature [*amr 'ariḍ lahu aw lāzim mā li-ṭabi'atihī*]."²⁹⁵ There it is apparent that the composite existence that occurs to the pure quiddity of a concrete thing—"its being with another"—is both a state of accidentality and a state of concomitance, the two notions jointly emphasizing the externality of existence vis-à-vis pure quiddity.²⁹⁶ A similar idea is articulated in Avicenna's later works. In a passage of *Notes*, existence is explicitly described as an accident: "all the quiddities receive their existence externally, and existence is an accident in them" (*al-māhiyyāt kulluhā wujūduhā min khārij wa-l-wujūd 'araḍ fihā*).²⁹⁷ In *Discussions*, in a wording that seems indebted to the *mutakalimūn*, the master describes existence as "one of the attributes of a thing" (*al-wujūd min ṣifāt al-shay'*).²⁹⁸ Elsewhere in the same work he states that "existence is an accident in things that have quiddities from which existence follows [*al-wujūd 'araḍ fī l-ashyā' allatī lahā māhiyyāt yalḥaquhā l-wujūd*]."²⁹⁹

This textual evidence can help to explain why, on Avicenna's ontological model, the attributes or concomitants can be said to be 'added to' (*zā'id 'alā*) the essence, a

²⁹³ Avicenna, *Definitions*, 25.

²⁹⁴ See section IV.2.2.2.

²⁹⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*, V.1, 201.4–11.

²⁹⁶ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 11.9–12, has no qualms regarding existence as something "accidental" (*'araḍī*).

²⁹⁷ Avicenna, *Notes*, 561, section 983. It should be noted that the term *māhiyyāt* here is used generically and in a non-technical sense and could easily have been replaced by other terms, such as *mawjūdāt* or *ashyā'*.

²⁹⁸ Avicenna, *Discussions*, 131, section 350.

²⁹⁹ Avicenna, *Discussions*, 272, section 789.

claim the master makes explicitly on behalf of ‘the one,’ ‘the general,’ ‘the specific,’ and ‘the universal.’³⁰⁰ It is true that, as Wisnovsky noted, the master usually refrains from applying this formula to existence in his core works.³⁰¹ But since existence, like these other notions, is an external concomitant of essence, it would seem to follow that it as well can be conceived of as added to essence, all the more so given the narrow relationship between oneness (*waḥdah*) and existence (*wujūd*) Avicenna occasionally highlights in his works. So it comes as no surprise that a passage of *Notes* describes existence as being “external” and “added to” (*zā'id* ‘*alayhā*) the quiddities of the categories,³⁰² while in another passage the master asserts that existence (*al-an-niyah*) “supervenes” or is “added to” (*tāri* ‘*alayhi*) the thing that has a quiddity.³⁰³ These comments connect with the claim made in the same work that existence is an accident (*'araḍ*) of the quiddities, as was shown above.³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the view that existence is somehow external, accidental, and added to essence should not by any means be taken to imply that it is added to fully autonomous and pre-existing essences in the concrete world, or that these essences somehow subsist independently prior to existing in actuality, a view Ṭūsī accuses Rāzī of upholding.³⁰⁵ Rather, it suggests that, within the composite being or substance, and according to a mereological analytical framework, pure quiddity exists irreducibly and immanently, while the existence that together with it forms the *sunolon* remains extraneous to it and distinguishable from it. Just as the human rational soul does not pre-exist and precede the existence of the body and of the complete human being, and yet constitutes a distinct ontological principle within it and has, in a sense, its own mode of immaterial existence, so the being of pure quiddity is distinct from that of the complex entity, where the concomitants, attributes, and accidents can be thought of as external ‘additions’ to quiddity, making it quiddity “with other things” (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*).³⁰⁶ This fundamental irreducibility and distinctness between essence and existence seem ultimately tied to Avicenna’s causal theories and metaphysics of contingent beings. As Belo put it, “it is with the introduction of the concept of causality, at

300 See Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.18–19; 66.7–11; *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.12; *Salvation*, 536.11–12.

301 Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*, 275.

302 Avicenna, *Notes*, 565.4, section 992; this passage is mentioned by Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*, 275, note 31, who still describes Rāzī as the “inventor” of this formula. I think it is in part Avicennian and that Rāzī departs from Avicenna chiefly in applying it to God as well, something which would have been unimaginable for the master.

303 Avicenna, *Notes*, 977, p. 557.7.

304 Avicenna, *Notes*, 561, section 983; cf. 571–2, section 996.

305 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 462–463. Ṭūsī criticizes Rāzī for holding that the essences have subsistence or a reality (*thubūt*) prior to actually existing.

306 Bahmanyār, who was one of Avicenna’s immediate disciples, endorses the view that existence is something external that is added to essence. In *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 11.16–18, he argues that existence is “added” (*muḍāf ilā*) and “exterior” (*khārij*) to the true nature (*ḥaqīqah*) of quiddity.

a metaphysical level, that existence comes to be seen as an accident, in a metaphysical rather than a logical sense as something that befalls the essence or thing.”³⁰⁷

Granted, the foregoing does not decisively prove that existence is a distinct principle added to quiddity *in the concrete world*, and one could insist that Avicenna’s remarks regarding the accidental status of existence vis-à-vis essence should be construed chiefly on a conceptual plane.³⁰⁸ Nevertheless, it is important to point out that there is nothing in Avicenna’s philosophy that bluntly precludes such an interpretation, and some evidence even appears to support it. Moreover, some of the master’s later commentators and critics did in fact proffer such a realist account of his doctrine. Averroes, for example, states that Avicenna regarded existence “as something added to quiddity outside the soul” (*shay’ zā’id ‘alā l-māhiyyah khārij al-nafs*).³⁰⁹ What is more, and remaining within the confines of Avicenna’s system, we saw that there is one sense of accidentality that can be justifiably applied to *wujūd*. Finally, even when it comes to the contentious formulation of existence being ‘added to’ the essence, Avicenna seems to provide conflicting information in his works. In addition to the evidence from *Notes* mentioned above, witness the following statement from *Physics* I.2:

Form is distinct from privation in that the form is, in itself, a certain quiddity [*al-ṣūrah māhiyyah mā bi-nafsihā*] that adds existence to the existence that matter possesses [*zā’idat al-wujūd ‘alā l-wujūd alladhī li-l-hayūlā*], whereas privation does not add to the existence that belongs to matter.³¹⁰

This statement and the larger passage from which it is drawn would deserve a careful analysis, which cannot be provided here. Nevertheless, and for our immediate purposes, it attests to the fact that Avicenna at times intends his distinction to apply to an extramental ontological context.

To sum up, the issues of the accidentality of existence and of the real distinction are intricate and call for a highly nuanced appreciation and interpretation of Avicenna’s various statements on the matter. Avicenna’s position regarding these points has

307 Belo, *Essence*, 413.

308 Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, argues that Avicenna makes these comments in the context of his logical and conceptual analysis of essence and existence and does not extend them to the concrete world. He makes Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī responsible for spreading the view that existence is ‘added to’ and distinct from essence in concrete beings, and he also contends that Suhrawardī in his ontological critique of this position is responding to Rāzī and his followers rather than to the *shaykh al-ra’īs* himself. Whatever the case may be, Rāzī did not consider his own position to be incompatible with Avicenna on this issue (unlike in other instances). What is more, Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*, 275, himself recognizes that later Muslim authors did not ascribe this view to Rāzī. I would argue that the seeds of his doctrines can be found already in the Avicennian texts, although they were considerably amplified and developed by this commentator in one particular direction.

309 Averroes, *Incoherence*, 302.14–15.

310 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.2, 21.5–6.

too often been oversimplified, in spite of the fact that the relevant evidence that can be gleaned from his various works is highly ambiguous. For the time being, one important conclusion is that one may posit the duality of essence and existence as metaphysical principles in concrete beings without naively embracing the view that existence is an accident (*'araḍ*) of essence on the straightforward or standard construal of this notion. This interpretation, which finds its origin in the polemical writings that Ghazālī and Averroes penned against Avicenna (and perhaps even more in the modern interpretations of these writings), finds little traction in the Avicennian works themselves.³¹¹ It is much more accurate to say that Avicenna regards existence as a concomitant and attribute of quiddity, which expresses a state of *qualified accidentality*, in the sense that existence *qua* concomitant is external to, and non-constitutive of, the essence of a thing. This implies that in concrete beings essence is always and necessarily accompanied by existence, that essence and existence are always found together in the concrete substance. This interpretation is not only fully aligned with Avicenna's refutation of the Platonic forms, but also hints at the co-extensionality of 'the thing' and 'the existent' in his system. Yet, this view can also be reconciled with the claim—in line with other conclusions reached in this study—that essence and existence remain irreducible principles in the concrete being and cannot be fully collapsed in the realized substance.³¹² If anything, then, the previous remarks prompt us to question and potentially also to reconfigure the prevailing interpretive model that dismisses or downplays Avicenna's views concerning the extramental reality and existence of pure quiddity, the (qualified) accidentality of existence, and the narrow philosophical links between causation, compositeness, and the essence/existence distinction. Given these remarks, Avicenna's conception of how existence relates to essence should be contextualized not only in light of the legacy of Greek metaphysics in Islam, but also in light of the ontological models of the *mutakallimūn*, especially those stemming from the Bahshamite School. In describing existence as an external attribute of essence and one that is added to essence by virtue of a separate cause, Avicenna's position displays close parallels with these thinkers' theory of the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*). According to the Bahshamites, the attribute of existence is distinct from the Attribute of the Essence (*ṣifat al-dhāt*), and it is also added to it from the outside by means of an agent (*fā'il*). Moreover, like Avicen-

311 For this medieval interpretation of Avicenna and its transmission to the Latin West, see Bertolacci, *The Reception of Avicenna*, 255–259.

312 Hence, Averroes's qualms with Avicenna's metaphysics and his accusation that Avicenna failed to perceive that existence is fully identical with essence in the concrete being. But we can see that Averroes's sustained critique of Avicenna's ontology is not completely without ground, although I would argue that it is somewhat oversimplified for polemical purposes. For instance, Averroes says nothing or very little about Avicenna's views on quiddity in itself, ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), and nuanced understanding of accidentality. As befits a polemical treatise, there is little effort to engage with the subtleties of Avicenna's position. On the critical reception of Avicenna's theories by Averroes, see Menn, *Fārābī*; and Cerami, *A Map*.

na, the Bahshamite attribute of existence is derived from the essence, but imposes a condition (*shart*) on the essence.³¹³

At any rate, it is not my pretension in this study to adjudicate between the various interpretations concerning the real vs. conceptual distinction in Avicenna. Rather, the previous comments emerged as a by-product of my analysis of quiddity, and my conclusions on the subject were reached via another route. Because the textual and philosophical evidence supports the reading that Avicenna maintained a realist and mereological theory of quiddity in concrete beings, one can by the same token infer that he also supported to some extent a real distinction between essence and existence, and that he may also have insisted on the qualified accidentality of existence vis-à-vis essence on account of its being something external to it and non-constitutive of it. These theories are to some extent intertwined and mutually dependent on one another. *A posteriori*, of course, this conclusion appears to fit squarely with other aspects of Avicenna's metaphysics and cosmology, such as his views on causality and substantial complexity, notions which interrelate deeply, and which would be harder to explain convincingly if one relied on a purely conceptualist or nominalist framework. As we saw, Avicenna himself at times *explicitly* identifies the real or metaphysical compositeness or complexity inhering in caused beings in terms of a duality of essence and existence. This distinction rests on the corollary postulation that quiddities somehow truly exist in concrete beings as a distinct principle. Finally, it should be noted that some of the major philosophers and commentators who flourished after Avicenna perceived the argumentative potential of the real distinction for their ontology and especially for their theology. In fact, the metaphysical projects of thinkers like Suhrawardī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī acquire additional relief if interpreted against the backdrop of a realist reading of Avicenna's theory of quiddity, or, at the very least, if one allows for the possibility of such an interpretation of the Avicennian texts.³¹⁴ Overall, then, the various pieces of the puzzle that consist of pure quiddity, the real distinction, the universals, as well as the notions of ontological causedness and complexity, all fit together intricately in Avicenna's metaphysical system and appear to be doctrinally interconnected. It is these conceptual matrices and interpretive ramifications that enabled

313 For a more complete treatment of this issue and a detailed comparison of the Avicennian and Bahshamite positions, see section IV.5.

314 The case of Ṭūsī is particularly nuanced and interesting, and one finds in his works many of the ambiguities and tensions that underscore Avicenna's system. It is true that Ṭūsī at times seems to unequivocally defend a purely conceptualist interpretation of the essence/existence distinction, as in *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 462–463. But we saw also that Ṭūsī refers to the natural universals; that he insists on recognizing the existence of the pure nature and quiddity as a nature in concrete beings; and that, against Rāzī, he fully embraces the distinction between the absolute oneness, simplicity, and essential being of the First and the compositeness and causedness of the contingent beings, and this, on the very basis of the essence/existence distinction. Exactly how these various doctrinal components co-exist in the systems of later thinkers such as Ṭūsī calls for more research.

later commentators to articulate such rich and variegated accounts of the master's philosophical system.

6 Quiddity in itself and psychological abstraction (*tajrīd*)

The foregoing discussion has raised an intriguing possibility. Avicenna's theory of the existence of pure quiddity in the concrete world seems to lay the ground for the corollary theory of its abstractability by the mind. *Because* quiddity in itself exists in things as a nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*), and *because* this same nature and quidditative meaning also underlie the universal in the mind, abstraction represents the link that connects these two aspects of essence. This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that pure quiddity in concrete beings is described as 'unconditioned' (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*), meaning that it can be considered either 'with' or 'without' conditions attaching to it. This implies that it is not irretrievably bound to its material accidents and itself remains distinct within the material composite. But how should we understand the transition of essence from the exterior to the mental context? The difficulty involved here is partly terminological—what does Avicenna mean exactly when he describes quiddity as abstract (*mujarrad*) or suggests that it is the object of abstraction (*tajrīd*)?—and partly conceptual—what would be the ontological relation between the abstracted quiddity and the universal in the mind?

I already discussed the status of quiddity as something separate (*mufāriq*) in the context of Avicenna's refutation of the Platonic Forms. Closely related to the notion of quiddity's separateness is its abstraction or immateriality (*mujarrad*, *tajrīd*). In this regard, the terms *mufāriq* and *mujarrad* are related in Avicenna's philosophy, insofar as they both refer to an object's being free of matter. However, unlike the term *mufāriq*, which usually designates extramental, immaterial beings such as the separate intellects or the Platonic forms, the various terms derived from the root *j-r-d* also serve to describe mental objects in Avicenna's philosophy. In that sense, a separate intellect and an intelligible object in the human mind can equally be described as *mujarrad*, as immaterial or abstracted from matter. In the case of the intelligibles and, hence, of our mental conception of quiddity, it drives home the point that these objects are characterized by immateriality and a kind of abstraction from the corporeal trappings of the concrete world.³¹⁵

One thorny issue in this regard pertains to Avicenna's views on the abstractness of quiddity in itself. It should be noted to begin with that the master applies the term

315 The distinction between these two terms is conveyed in the Arabic rendition of Porphyry's *Eisagoge* (*Isāghūjī*, 67.10–11) in the crucial passage where the Greek author discusses the ontological issues related to the universals. He asks whether genus and species are "abstract conceptions in the mind" (*mujarrad taṣawwūrāt fī-l-adhḥān*) and whether, if they exist in concrete reality, they are "separate" (*mufāriqah*). This corresponds exactly to how Avicenna applies these terms to quiddity.

mujarrad to pure quiddity in order to stress not only its abstraction from matter, but also, and more specifically, its abstraction from the mental concomitants and accidents, and, hence, its abstraction from other immaterial things. What is more, the term *mujarrad* can be taken to refer ambiguously to the process of abstraction in addition to the resulting object acquired by virtue of that process. In other words, it can refer either to the state of the mental object when apprehended by the intellect (i.e., an abstract, immaterial concept) or to the finality of the process (in its relation to *tajrīd*) through which a concept or quiddity becomes abstracted from matter and subsequently actualized in the mind to form an intellectual concept. While all scholars agree on the first aspect, i.e., on the abstract and immaterial nature of the intellectual concepts, there is at present a heated debate concerning the role of abstraction as a cognitive process in Avicenna's epistemology and whether mental objects are abstracted in addition to being abstract.³¹⁶ Some scholars, such as Étienne Gilson, Fazlur Rahman, H.A. Davidson and Deborah Black, have minimized or altogether denied the role of abstraction as a process involved in the formation of intellectual concepts, claiming that human intellection arises solely as a result of the emanation of forms from the Agent Intellect. Other scholars, in contrast, such as Dimitri Gutas, Dag Nikolaus Hasse, Jon McGinnis, and Tommaso Alpina have claimed that abstraction is the main process by which Avicenna explains the formation of intelligibles in the mind, although most of them also ascribe a role to the Agent Intellect in this cognitive process.³¹⁷ In what follows, I engage with this debate only insofar as it con-

316 For example, according to Black, *Mental Existence*, 16: "Rather, Avicenna uses the term abstraction (*tajrīd*) to describe, not the process by which intelligibles are acquired, but rather, the mode of the quiddity's mental existence in cognitive faculties."

317 The main point of contention revolves around whether it is abstraction as a rational operation of the human mind or the causation or emanation of the Agent Intellect—or perhaps both—that is responsible for the actualization of the universal intelligibles in the intellect. The key studies are Davidson, *Alfarabi*; Nuseibeh, *Al-'Aql al-Qudsi*, especially 46–47; Black, *Mental Existence*; eadem, *How do we Acquire*; Gutas, *Avicenna*; idem, *Intuition*; idem, *The Empiricism*; Hasse, *Avicenna on Abstraction*; idem, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*; McGinnis, *Making Abstraction*; idem, *Logic and Science*; Sebtī, *L'analogie*; Alpina, *Intellectual Knowledge*; see also the discussion in de Libera, *La querelle*, 243ff. Very useful summaries of this debate are provided by Alpina, *Intellectual Knowledge*, 135–142, and Taylor, *Avicenna*, who also offer some fresh insight into the relation between abstraction and emanation. In brief, Gilson, Davidson, Nuseibeh, and Black reject abstraction as a process leading to the actualization of the universal forms in the mind and emphasize the role of the Agent Intellect in the human cognition of universals. According to them, the Agent Intellect transmits the content of universal intellection to the human mind. Gutas, Hasse, McGinnis, and Alpina, for their part, make abstraction the core feature of Avicenna's epistemology. A key issue that has occupied recent scholarship is the nature of the role the Agent Intellect is supposed to fulfill, if one grants it any agency: either it emanates the intelligibles as such to the human mind; or it merely facilitates the human abstractive process by bringing the rational mind from potentiality to actuality, from obscurity to light; or, as McGinnis contends, it emanates merely the mental accidents. According to Gutas, Hasse, and Alpina, the Agent Intellect is a condition of human intellection due to its role in the actualization of intelligibles. The present analysis focuses specifically on the place of quiddity

nects with the issue of abstraction and the nature of quiddity in the extramental world and in the mind. Of particular relevance are the following questions: first, exactly what is the object of abstraction according to Avicenna? Can that object be identified with quiddity in itself and, if so, on what grounds? Second, what is the epistemological link between essence in the concrete world and essence as a concept in the mind, and how can the theory of pure quiddity help to answer that question?

On my reading of the evidence, Gutas, Hasse, McGinnis, and Alpina are undoubtedly right to uphold the validity of abstraction in Avicenna's epistemology.³¹⁸ Here is not the place to reiterate their arguments or to rehash the evidence they and others have adduced. Suffice to say that Avicenna stresses on numerous occasions the active, causal role that the internal and intellectual faculties play in the process of abstracting concrete objects and of divesting exterior forms and quiddities from their material accidents in order to prepare them for contemplative thought.³¹⁹ Moreover, in spite of what Black contends, the quiddities and forms in the mind are not only grasped in their abstract (*mujarrad*) state, but also the end result of a process of abstraction (*tajrid*). In this connection, Avicenna sometimes describes in some detail the psychological continuum leading from the sensory perception of physical objects to the actualization of abstracted forms in the mind without any reference to the Agent Intellect.³²⁰ Hence, one cannot dispense entirely with a theory of abstraction and the role of human rationality to explain the actualization of the universals in the mind. At the same time, it is true that, given its repeated mention in Avicenna's writings, the parallel involvement of the Agent Intellect in human cognition also has to be accounted for. The importance of these two features in Avicenna's epistemology

in itself in the process of abstraction and seeks to answer the question *what* is abstracted by the faculties of the human soul. I return to the issue of the Agent Intellect's causality in chapter V.

318 For a summary of their views and a fresh interpretation of the place of abstraction in Avicenna, see Taylor, Avicenna. Taylor agrees with the primacy of abstraction as a cognitive process, and in addition contributes new insight into the role of the Agent Intellect in light of Themistius's paraphrase of *On the Soul*.

319 See Avicenna, *Demonstration* III.5; *On the Soul of The Cure* II.2; *On the Soul of Salvation*, 344–349.

320 For example, Avicenna, *On the Soul of The Cure* II.2, and especially the crucial passage at 61.10–14. In *Introduction*, I.12, 69.7–9, Avicenna states the following: “Sometimes the intelligible form [*al-ṣūrah al-ma'qūlah*] is in some manner a cause [*sababan*] for the occurrence of the form that exists in external reality [*al-ṣūrah al-mawjūdah fī l-a'yān*]; sometimes the form in external reality is in some manner a cause of the intelligible form, that is, [the latter] occurs in the mind after it has existed in external reality.” The fact that the hylomorphic form is described as a cause (*sabab*) of the intelligible form in the mind leaves little doubt that the acquisition of the latter in some cases occurs through abstraction. In this regard, one shortcoming of Black's interpretation is that it ignores many passages that stress quite explicitly the active role of the mind's abstractive powers. Her claim that we should construe terms derived from the root *j-r-d* as meaning exclusively *a state of immateriality or abstraction*, as opposed to *a process of abstraction*, does not on my view do justice to many passages that support the latter interpretation, as well as to the grammatical and semantic distinctions between the terms *mujarrad* and *tajrid*. The latter term points to a mental activity or process that results in the acquisition of the abstract intelligibles.

explains a recent trend in the scholarship aiming to reconcile them, rather than opting for one to the exclusion of the other.³²¹

This debate notwithstanding, the questions of what object, or more precisely what aspect of essence, undergoes abstraction from matter, as well as how that object relates to the universal form in the mind, have not received a detailed formulation in the secondary literature.³²² Although it is evidently the forms (*ṣuwar*) and quiddities (*māhiyyāt*) that are abstracted, knowing exactly which aspect of quiddity is the object of this process is more arduous. In this regard, the place of quiddity in itself in Avicenna's discussion of abstraction has not been examined in sufficient depth in the modern scholarship. This is problematic, because Avicenna appears to hold the view that it is quiddity in itself that is abstracted and, hence, the object of the process of *tajrīd*. This would mean not only that pure quiddity is an immaterial concept (*mujarrad*), but also that it can be abstracted from the concrete instantiations existing in the world. Hence, quiddity in itself would be not only *abstract*, but also *abstracted* and *abstractable*. By implication, this would indicate that it is conceptually abstractable and separable from the concrete particulars in which it inheres. Accordingly, I contended in chapter II that universal quiddity and quiddity in itself are both distinctly conceivable in the mind. The existing thing—concrete or mental—is a combination of pure quiddity together with its accidents and concomitants, but the mind can conceptually disentangle pure quiddity from these accretions through a process of abstraction in order to arrive at a pristine conception or consideration of what quiddity in itself really is.

Nevertheless, while it is relatively straightforward to imagine how the mind can demarcate pure quiddity from universal quiddity—according to Avicenna, the mind can combine and separate concepts and intentions at will, and hence can separate quiddity in itself from universality, existence, and its other concomitants³²³—it is more challenging to grasp how this abstractive process unfolds in the case of the quiddities of concrete existents. Yet, Avicenna seems to argue for a direct abstractive operation of the mind, which begins with the sensory perception of quiddity combined with its material accidents, and which culminates in the intellectual apprehension of quiddity in itself. Consider, for instance, the following passages. At *Metaphysics* V.1.151.13 and 155.14–16 Avicenna refers to our ability to “abstract” quiddity in itself (*fa-inna qad jarradnāhā* and *wa-ammā l-ḥayawān mujarrad*)³²⁴; and at

321 McGinnis, *Logic and Science*; idem, *Making Abstraction*; Hasse, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*.

322 One exception is McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, who addresses these questions specifically, and whose conclusions I rely on.

323 For the mind's ability to combine and separate different concepts and to unify and multiply notions, see Avicenna, *On the Soul of The Cure*, V.5, 236.5 ff.; for its ability to combine and separate quiddity and universality as distinct ideas or meanings specifically, see *Metaphysics*, V.1.

324 Admittedly, the second occurrence conveys the ambiguity between abstraction as a process and a state as highlighted above. However, since it appears shortly after a mention of the verb ‘to ab-

156.18–19 he refers specifically to pure quiddity as “the form of animal abstracted in the manner of abstraction which we have mentioned” (*ṣūrat al-ḥayawān al-mujarrad ‘alā naḥw alladhī dhakarnāhu min al-tajrīd*) and he expressly contrasts that form to that of the universal. But perhaps a clearer statement to that effect appears later in *Metaphysics* V.1, when Avicenna describes the rational soul’s ability to extract the quidditative meaning from any concrete instances:

Text 22: Whichever of these [concrete] instances you take whose representation is brought to the imagination [*al-khayāl*] in any state, the intellect then extracts its pure quidditative meaning from accidents and this form becomes as such actualized in the mind [*thumma intaza‘a l-‘aql mujarrad ma‘nāhu ‘an al-‘awāriḍ ḥaṣala fī l-‘aql hādhihi l-ṣūrah bi-‘aynihā*]. This form [*ṣūrah*] is what is realized as a result of abstracting animalness [*‘an tajrīd al-ḥayawāniyyah*] from any individual image [*khayāl shakḥṣī*], taken either from an exterior existent or from something that takes the role of an exterior existent—and even if it [the individual image] itself does not exist externally, but [is something] the imagination invents.³²⁵

This excerpt follows a statement—already analyzed above in connection with Text 3—that explicitly distinguishes the form of quiddity in itself from the form of universal quiddity in the human mind. The crucial point with regard to this passage is that the form and nature that are abstracted from the concrete particulars are identified with quiddity in itself, which represents the aim or end result of the abstractive process.³²⁶ In this passage, pure quiddity is referred to as “an abstracted quidditative meaning” (*mujarrad ma‘nāhu*) and as “the abstracting of animalness” (*tajrīd al-ḥayawāniyyah*). This abstracted form and quiddity are not the mental universal *per se*, but quiddity in itself in its pure state, which has been divested of all the material attachments with which it exists in the concrete world. As such, it has not yet combined with the mental concomitants (universality, oneness, etc.) that will later render it a universal in the mind.³²⁷

stract,’ Avicenna is presumably referring here to the resulting form that is abstracted from concrete particulars.

325 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 205.9–13, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 156, revised; cf. *Notes*, 31.12–13, section 10, where one reads that “the acquisition of knowledge for human beings is by way of the senses; their acquisition of the universals is by way of their sensation of the particulars” (*wa-idrākuhu li-l-kulliyyāt min jihah iḥsāsihi bi-l-juz‘iyyāt*).

326 In contrast to the previous passage, where Avicenna distinguishes the form of the universal from the form of pure quiddity in the mind, there is some ambiguity here whether he is referring to the universal animal or animal in itself. But this issue is secondary, since the main point here is that it is pure quiddity *qua* meaning that is abstracted and extracted from concrete existents, and which subsequently becomes a universal in the mind.

327 Another interesting text in this connection is Avicenna’s *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 40. In this section the master explains that the forms in material things are “imitations of the universal forms” (*muḥākkiyyah li-l-ṣuwar al-kulliyyah*), which can be fully abstracted by the intellect according “to an intellectual mode of abstraction” (*al-tajrīd al-‘aqlī*) and “extracted by the rational soul” (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqah tanzi‘uhā*). The intellect peels away (*yaqshiru*) the various layers of material attachments and concomitants (*lawāḥiq*) to arrive at the essential reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the thing. This text

But is Avicenna really saying that it is quiddity in itself, rather than the universal as such, which is extracted from concrete beings and first comes to exist in the intellect as a result of this process of abstraction? This view would go against some deeply entrenched interpretations of Avicenna's epistemology, which make the universal concepts the main objects of abstraction. Moreover, as we saw earlier, many scholars point to the Agent Intellect—not the process of abstraction—as the main cause for the existence of the universal intelligibles in the human mind. Even those scholars, like Hasse, who emphasize the importance of abstraction in Avicenna's epistemology, do not explicitly identify the intelligibles that come to exist as a result of abstraction with the *pure quiddities*. Rather, they speak of them as *universals*, with the implication that only the universal concepts would play a role in human cognition. The premise underlying this view is that mental existence for Avicenna is necessarily universal, so that whatever form is extracted from the concrete individuals and apprehended by the mind must be universal in nature. In spite of this, some scholars have envisaged the possibility that it is essence in itself that is the object of abstraction, even though they have not developed this view at any length.³²⁸ By building on their insight, I wish to pursue this line of investigation in order to shed some light on the nature of the intelligibles that are produced in the mind as a result of abstraction.

The interpretation I advocated thus far leads to the inevitable conclusion that it is *sensu stricto* pure quiddity—not the universal—that is the object of psychological abstraction. This view seems supported by a cluster of points. As I argued in chapter II, Avicenna believes that pure quiddity exists irreducibly and distinctly in the mind and in a mode that is different from that of the universal taken as a complex existent. Moreover, the terminology Avicenna uses when speaking of abstraction puts the emphasis on pure quiddity, not the universal taken as this derivative and synthetic concept. This abstractionist terminology spans Avicenna's psychological, physical, and metaphysical writings, thereby showing that it does not rest solely on the (admittedly limited) evidence that can be gleaned from *Metaphysics*. Before turning to some additional evidence on this point, we should recall that Avicenna describes quiddity in the exterior world, or, more precisely, the state of pure quiddity as it exists in each concrete individuals, by means of a rich and often confusing terminology. When referring to quiddity in concrete beings, Avicenna often speaks of nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and true reality (*ḥaqīqah*), and he also often describes it as a quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) and a form (*ṣūrah*). Now, these terms all have a fundamental ambiguity: they can refer to quiddity as it exists irreducibly in the material concrete existents, but they can also refer to the same quiddity as an object divested from its material

not only supports the validity of the abstractive process in Avicenna, but also seems to identify pure quiddity specifically as that which is abstracted, since it describes these forms as neither truly particular nor universal, and also mentions the object of abstraction as a *ḥaqīqah*.

328 See de Libera, *La querelle*, 243ff.; Sebtī, *Le statut*; McGinnis, *Logic and Science*; and Alpina, *Intellectual Knowledge*, 164–165.

accidents and apprehended by the mind. Hence, the terms *ma'nā* and *ṭabī'ah* in particular bridge the extramental and mental contexts.

This clarification is crucial to the problem at hand, because it suggests that the quiddity that exists in individual concrete existents and the quiddity that is apprehended by the mind are the same thing, namely, pure quiddity. Pure quiddity can be abstracted from its material accidents and conceived in the mind solely in itself. In light of this, the terms *ṭabī'ah*, *ḥaqīqah*, *ma'nā*, and *ṣūrah* have a dual function: they refer to quiddity in itself existing as a nature, a true reality, and a form *in concrete things*, as well as an object of abstraction that exists *in the mind*. This explains why Avicenna resorts to the same cluster of words to identify it and describes it as *lā bi-sharṭ shay'*: it can be considered with its material concomitants and accidents, or in abstraction from them. It is therefore fundamentally unconditioned, literally, taken *not with the condition* that other things be added to it. Even when it exists in concrete things, it remains in an irreducible and intelligible state that makes it potentially abstractable and separable by the mind.

Thus, I would contend that when Avicenna describes the object of abstraction in the exterior world by means of these various terms (nature, form, reality, and quidditative meaning), what he is referring to is really quiddity in itself, which, as an epistemic and ontic constant, bridges the concrete and mental spheres. This can be vindicated textually by his tendency to illustrate such terms and notions with instances of pure quiddity, such as 'animalness' or 'humanness,' which are the very examples he uses to discuss quiddity in itself in the seminal passages of *Metaphysics* V. It is important to note that these various terms are interchangeable in most cases and all refer equally—albeit with semantic nuances—to pure quiddity. For example, in *On the Soul of Salvation*, in his account of abstraction, Avicenna alternates between the terms form (*ṣūrah*), nature (*ṭabī'ah*), and quiddity (*māhiyyah*). He explains that the “form and quiddity of humanness is a nature,” and later on he explicates how the mind extracts and abstracts this nature from its material accidents.³²⁹ The ‘nature’ Avicenna refers to here is just another name for pure quiddity. This same tendency is also found in *Philosophical Compendium*, where the form (*ṣūrah*) is equated with quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and idea (*ma'nā*), as well as with true reality (*ḥaqīqah*). In *On the Soul* II.2 of *The Cure*, the “form of humanness” (*ṣūrat al-insāniyyah*), which can be no other than the quiddity in itself ‘humanness,’ and which is said to be extracted by the mind, is described as a quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and nature (*ṭabī'ah*).³³⁰ Finally, in *Demonstration* III.5, Avicenna, in emphasizing the gap between sensory perception and intellectual apprehension, affirms that “the thing that sensory perception encounters is neither the true nature of the common human [i. e., pure quiddity as it exists in the concrete] nor [the true nature] that the intellect encounters, except accidentally.” In this case as well, pure quiddity, e. g., humanness, is de-

³²⁹ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 344–349, especially 344.10–345.10 and 347.6 ff.

³³⁰ Avicenna, *On the Soul*, II.2, 58.11–13.

scribed as a true nature (*ṭabīʿah*) and true reality (*ḥaqīqah*) apprehended by the intellect, which Avicenna is keen in this passage to dissociate from sensory perception.³³¹ Finally, one finds a similar picture sketched in *Physics* when Avicenna explains that “individuals are impressed on the internal sense faculty from which the intellect subsequently learns what things are shared in common [*al-mushārakāt*] and what things are not, and so extracts the natures of things common in species [*fa-yantaziʿu ṭabāʿiʿ al-ʿammiyyat al-nawʿiyyah*].”³³² These texts, as well as the ones I quoted earlier, especially Text 12 and Text 13, show a remarkable consistency in terminology and doctrine. They unanimously describe the *agent of abstraction* as the human intellect, making it the principal cause for the apprehension of quiddity. Moreover, they identify the *object of abstraction* as the quidditative nature and meaning that inheres in concrete existents, which has been shown to be identical with pure quiddity. Finally, they depict the *psychological process* at play as one of active extraction and abstraction by the mind and as a transfer of the quidditative meaning (*maʿnā*) from the concrete to the mental spheres. This has the effect of somewhat ontologizing *maʿnā* and making it an immanent principle of the concrete individuals.

One idea that appears frequently in those discussions is the common or shared (*mushtarak*) quality of nature or pure quiddity.³³³ This term needs to be qualified, since, if uncritically accepted, it could lead one to the conclusion either that Avicenna was deliberately espousing a Platonic theory of participation, or that he regarded the universals as existing in individual things in a strong sense. In fact, Avicenna intends neither. By using this term, the Persian philosopher wishes only to stress the sharedness of pure quiddity as a nature existing in the concrete individuals belonging to the same species (e.g., human), but, as it befits pure quiddity, in a manner that precludes any notion of numerical determination. As the last quotation from *Demonstration* above shows, pure quiddity, as it inheres in each concrete individual existent, is what is “shared by” or “common to” (*mushtarak*) all of them. For example, Avicenna describes the nature, quiddity, form, and meaning ‘humanness’ as being common to all individual human beings. In those passages, he employs the term *mushtarak* idiosyncratically, and in a conscious departure from the Platonic doctrine of participation in the Forms.³³⁴ He refutes the Platonic position with regard to the idea that this sharedness of quiddity could be said to refer back to a transcen-

³³¹ Avicenna, *Demonstration*, III.5, 221–222.

³³² Avicenna, *Physics*, I.1, 7.6–7.

³³³ On this concept, see Galluzzo, Two Senses. Galluzzo defines the commonality of quiddity in the concrete world in light of the fact that the individuating principles of concrete existents are not “metaphysically primitive” and, hence, concern only the actual existence of concrete beings. Galluzzo’s distinctions between “actually common” and “modally common” and between the commonality of quiddity and the actuality of the ‘metaphysically non-primitive’ individual qualities of beings bear some resemblance to my own distinctions. But Galluzzo stresses the mostly epistemic aspect, whereas I emphasize both the epistemic and ontological aspects.

³³⁴ For the Platonic connotations of this root, see Lammer, *The Elements*, 175.

dent, archetypal, and autonomously existing Form, while at the same time developing his own view of how quiddity in itself exists in concrete beings. It is this common and shared existence of humanness in the particular instances that makes the process of abstraction with regard to any one of these individuals possible in the first place and also equal or level in terms of which individual is selected. Since pure humanness inheres in each and every individual of that species, the abstractive process can focus on any one of them as its initial subject. The intellect will abstract the true reality, nature, pure quiddity, and form ‘humanness’ from any concrete instance it encounters.³³⁵ But it is important to stress that this nature is not yet a universal. As Marmura writes, “the nature in itself is not a universal, but it has the suitability (*al-ṣulūh*) to become one when it is conceived as such.”³³⁶ It is only at a later stage that this nature, pure quiddity, and form will be apprehended as a universal in the mind, i.e., when the intellect intentionally relates it to its various individual instances.

We notice that the notion of the commonality of nature or pure quiddity lies at the core of Avicenna’s theory of abstraction. The nature, which exists commonly in concrete beings, is the object of mental abstraction, and, hence, also represents the conceptual and ontological foundation for formation of the universal in the mind. But common nature and universality are different things: according to Avicenna, the former exists in each concrete being, the latter exists only in the human mind. In a passage of *Demonstration* III.5, Avicenna proposes to investigate how the “intelligible human” (*al-insān al-ma’qūl*) is conceptualized (i.e., the intelligible form of human), and he states that the object of this knowledge is “an intelligible nature” (*ṭabī‘ah ma’qūlah*).³³⁷ This shows yet again that the notion of ‘nature’ bridges the states of the extramental and mental existence of pure quiddity, abstraction serving as the link between the two. But an even stronger statement to that effect appears shortly thereafter, when Avicenna distinguishes between two classes of existents (*mawjūdāt*): those whose essences are intelligible in existence and those whose essences are sensible or perceivable in existence (i.e., the immaterial vs. material existents). Concerning the former, abstraction is superfluous, since these beings are already in an intelligible state and, hence, cannot be perceived by the senses. Regarding the latter, Avicenna writes:

Text 23: As for essences that are sensible in existence, their essences in existence are not intelligible, but rather perceptible [by the senses]. But the intellect makes them [these essences] [*ya-j’aluhā*] such that they become intelligible, because it abstracts their essential reality [*yujarridu ḥaqīqatahā*] from their material concomitants ... So it [the intellect] turns to these [material] accidents and extracts them [the forms or quiddities],³³⁸ as if it were shaving off [*ka-annahu yaq-*

³³⁵ See Text 11, Text 12, and Text 13.

³³⁶ Marmura, Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals, 41.

³³⁷ Avicenna, *Demonstration*, III.5, 221.8–16.

³³⁸ Although the subject of these two verbs is the same (namely, the intellect), one can relate the object and the pronoun “them” either to the accidents or to the essential natures. Strictly speaking,

shīru] these accidents and putting them aside until it reaches the quidditative meaning that is common to them [*al-ma'nā alladhī yashtariku fīhi*] [viz., all the concrete individuals possessing this *ma'nā*] and by which they do not differ. [Finally, in this manner the intellect] acquires and conceives them [the quidditative meanings or forms] ... The senses provide the soul with things mingled [with matter] and not intelligible, and the intellect makes them intelligible [*al-'aql ya-j'alahā ma'qūlah*].³³⁹

This account corroborates the fact that abstraction is an active, deliberate process carried out by the human soul and responsible for the acquisition of the intelligible forms. It also accords with many other passages from Avicenna's corpus that describe the intellect as the main agent in the acquisition of the intelligibles. Regardless of the role the Agent Intellect plays, it is the human mind that performs much of the work underlying the acquisition of the intelligible forms. But for our purposes, what is particularly significant here is the clarification that *what* is being abstracted is a nature or reality (*ḥaqīqah*), which is in turn identified with the "common meaning" (*ma'nā*) shared by the concrete individuals possessing the same definition. As has been established, these two terms are roughly synonymous with quiddity in itself, leaving little doubt that it is pure quiddity that lies at the core of the abstractive operation performed by the intellect and makes possible the acquisition of the intelligible form. Mention of the quidditative meaning being abstracted from concrete existents reappears explicitly in *Metaphysics* VIII.7 when Avicenna asserts that "the intelligible meaning [*al-ma'nā l-ma'qūl*] may be taken from the existing thing, as occurs when [for example] we apprehend the intelligible form [*ṣūratuhu l-ma'qūlah*] of the heavens through observation and the senses."³⁴⁰ Although it is the epistemological and psychological process that is emphasized here thanks to the term *ma'nā*, one should not forget that this term expressly refers to the quiddity in itself, reality, and nature that exists in concrete beings. *Qua ma'nā*, this nature, reality, and quiddity is abstracted by the mind and becomes the intelligible conceived by the intellect.

These passages neatly bring together two essential points: the human intellect is the *subject and agent* of abstraction, and pure quiddity (also described as an essential nature and meaning) is the *object* of abstraction. What is more, there is a homogeneous overlap between Avicenna's doctrines as exposed in his logical and psychological works and in his metaphysical writings. His views regarding the abstractability of pure quiddity in concrete beings are articulated consistently throughout the entire range of his writings, and the terminology he relies on to carry out this task also shows a remarkable degree of consistency.

however, the intellect does not extract (*yanzi'u*) the accidents, but rather the forms and quiddities that inhere in matter.

339 Avicenna, *Demonstration*, III.5, 221.20–222.14.

340 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7, 363.5–6. This statement is echoed in *Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 706.7–707.1, when Avicenna explains that the "intelligible forms [*al-ṣuwar al-'aqliyyah*] can, in a certain way, be acquired from the exterior forms [*al-ṣuwar al-khārijīyyah*], as when the form of the heavens [*ṣūrat al-samā'*] is acquired [directly] from the heavens."

What is the upshot of these various points? The foregoing lends new weight to the hypothesis briefly put forth by some scholars to the effect that it is pure quiddity that is the object and focus of the abstractive process.³⁴¹ Quiddity in itself is an ontological constant that underlies each concrete and mental thing to which it relates. With regard to abstraction, it is extracted from material bodies by the faculties of the soul (with or without the help of the Agent Intellect, a question we shall examine later on) and subsequently becomes a complex mental concept. By the same token, pure essence is also an epistemological bridge between the two contexts or spheres of concrete and mental existence. As McGinnis eloquently explains, “Through a process of abstraction the scientist strips away these accidental features and conceptualizes the essences in themselves independent of the accidents that follow upon their ontological location either in concrete particulars or in the intellect... . Essences in themselves provide the link between the world as it is and the world as we conceptualize it, guaranteeing that the two in very important ways are identical.”³⁴² Pure quiddity is the principle that ensures the linkage between these ontological and epistemological levels. It exists in the concrete world and in the mind as an irreducible and underlying nature or true reality. Nature, for all intents and purposes, is the irreducible essence that can be spoken of alternatively in terms of extramental and mental existence. As Avicenna explains in *Introduction*:

Text 24: It is the more fitting for animalness in itself [*al-ḥayawāniyyah fī nafsihā*] to be called natural form [*ṣūrah ṭabī‘iyyah*] at one time, intelligible form [*ṣūrah ‘aqliyyah*] at another, and, in being animalness, not to be a genus in any manner whatsoever, either in the mind or exter-

341 De Libera, *La querelle*, 243 ff.; McGinnis, *Logic and Science*; and Alpina, *Intellectual Knowledge*, 164–165. De Libera also integrates Avicenna’s theory of abstraction in a broader emanationist framework where the universals are obtained from the Agent Intellect (224, 252). So on his account Avicenna appears to have upheld two theories for the acquisition of the universals whose reconciliation poses problem according to this author: the capacity of the human mind to apprehend pure quiddity through a process of abstraction; and the acquisition of the universals from the Agent Intellect. The former represents Avicenna’s real contribution according to de Libera (254). McGinnis provides a cogent picture of the abstractive process based on the notion of pure quiddity. Nevertheless, I disagree with his claim that the accidents accompanying pure quiddity in the human mind (such as universality) are derived from the Agent Intellect. As for Alpina, his brief comments on essence serve to demonstrate the continuity between the objects of imagination and the objects of intellect, and he does not extend his discussion of essence to the external concrete beings: “the imaginative particulars and the intelligible forms, even though they differ with respect to their way of existence, are not unrelated; rather, they share the same, common nature which is in itself neither particular nor universal” (165).

342 McGinnis, *Logic and Science*, 171. Given these statements and the fact that McGinnis recognizes the validity of the conception of the pure quiddities in the human mind, it is surprising that he does not also recognize—or at the very least raise the question of—their existence in the human mind. It is accordingly not clear how McGinnis envisages the relationship between the concept of pure quiddity and the concept of the universal, a point which is not addressed in his article. This tension is compounded by the fact that he regards universality as a mental accident acquired from the Agent Intellect and hence as something distinct from pure quiddity.

nally, but to become a genus only when a consideration, either in the mind or externally, is conjoined to it.³⁴³

As this passage shows, pure quiddity is *both* the natural form and the intelligible form, depending on the focus of analysis. Moreover, because they underlie the concrete and mental existents, nature and true reality are potentially a mental universal as well, if and when they are abstracted by the mind and predicated of many. Once divested of their material trappings, these natures will then serve as the basis for the constitution of the universals in the mind. The actualization of this nature in the mind arises as a result of the abstractive process, which precedes the actualization of the universals. For example, the pure quiddity ‘horseness’ is apprehended by the mind as a distinct form as a result of the abstraction of ‘horseness’ from an individual instance of horse, and it is only subsequently that ‘universal horse’ emerges in the mind as a further elaboration on this pure quiddity. Quiddity in itself, inasmuch as it exists in concrete particulars, represents an object of human perception and determines the various levels of psychological apprehension. What is more, in its dual capacity as *ma’nā* in the sense of quidditative meaning and intelligible thing or existent, quiddity in itself also undergirds and even constitutes the psychological states or intentions associated with the human imaginative, estimative, and intellectual faculties.³⁴⁴ As both Hall and Sebtī have suggested, nature and pure quiddity need to be posited for the lower psychological and sensual levels of perception to unfold.³⁴⁵ With that being said, since the quidditative meaning itself is some-

343 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 68.19–69.1; transl. Marmura, Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals, 49–50, slightly revised.

344 As Black, *Intentionality*, 6, notes, a *ma’nā* in Avicenna can be an object of perception or a psychological intention; quiddity in itself thrives on this ambiguity.

345 Hall, *Intellect*, 66, argues that nature and quiddity are found already in some partially abstract state at the level of the estimation and experience, but that the fully abstract quiddities *qua* intelligibles are acquired from the Agent Intellect; on his account there is therefore a disconnect in Avicenna’s epistemology between the levels of estimation and intellection. See also Sebtī, *Le statut*. Sebtī has shown that quiddity is what is common to all levels of psychological representation in Avicenna, from the perceptual apprehension of images to the imaginative, estimative, and intellectual kinds of representation. The passages discussed by Sebtī in this connection mention the common nature and are mostly derived from *Physics*. I take common nature here to be just another appellation for the nature or pure quiddity as it exists in concrete individuals. Sebtī, *Le statut*, 133–135, writes: “La matière de toute représentation est la *nature commune* prise dans son indétermination naturelle sur laquelle l’intellect n’a pas besoin d’opérer d’abstraction d’abord afin de pouvoir l’universaliser ensuite. L’intellect humain adjoint à la nature commune l’universalité, et la représentation sensible la conçoit avec une différence individuante qui a pour conséquence de la singulariser” (135). Sebtī regards this common nature as underlying the various acts of apprehension and representation (sensual as well as intellectual), although she does not connect it with the process of abstraction directly. In another passage, she makes the Agent Intellect the cause for the existence of the intelligibles in the human mind (110, note 3; 128). The main point, however, is that, according to Sebtī’s exposition, the common nature is somehow the object of sensual representation and abstraction, so that quiddity

thing immaterial and abstractable from the parasitical corporeal accidents in which it is embedded, it should be primarily connected with the estimative and especially intellectual faculties of the soul. As Black has pointed out, intentions become immaterial at the level of the estimative faculty, so that the *ma'nā* of pure quiddity only plays a role at the level of the estimative and intellectual forms.³⁴⁶

In light of this, one may conclude that Avicenna's doctrine of pure quiddity plays a crucial role in the process of abstraction and in his epistemological theories. The acquisition of quiddity in itself by the intellect represents the furthestmost goal and highest degree of abstraction, although essence could also underlie all the previous stages leading to it (sensory perception and the internal faculties). Once it has been freed of all its corporeal concomitants and attributes, quiddity emerges as a pure intention and form in the human intellect. From this stage on, it is ready to assume the role of a universal form, if it is combined with universality and other intentions. One common misconception that has been challenged in this regard is that it is the universal intelligible that is abstracted directly from the concrete particulars. Avicenna's views on this point are quite clear: it is pure quiddity that, *qua* nature, form, meaning, or true reality, is first abstracted from the concrete particulars and envisaged by the intellect in its pure and simple state. It is only subsequently, when it has been combined with *mental concomitants*, including universality, that the full-fledged universal aspect of quiddity emerges in the mind. When compared to quiddity in itself, the mental universal is therefore a *composite or compound* of quiddity in itself and mental attributes. It is also, by the same token, *posterior* to the apprehension of pure quiddity.

I conclude by proposing that (a) pure quiddity as a nature in concrete beings, (b) pure quiddity as an abstracted object with the potential of being universalized or of becoming a universal, and (c) the actual universal quiddity, mark the three main stages of the abstractive process according to Avicenna. These stages presuppose that quiddity in itself is an *ontological and epistemological constant*.³⁴⁷ This special

in itself may already be said to underlie (together with its material accidents) the lower levels of psychological abstraction.

³⁴⁶ Black, *Intentionality*, 15–16, 22.

³⁴⁷ It is possible that Abū l-Faraj b. al-Ṭayyib, who was roughly contemporary with Avicenna, held a similar theory. In his *Introduction*, 41.13–17, he explains that the mind separates the abstracted forms one from another and isolates their essence. He then states: “In this manner, [the mind] acquires universal natures inasmuch as they are essences [*yuḥaṣṣilu l-ṭabā'i' al-kulliyah min ḥaythu hiya dhawāt*]. It then produces the meaning of generality [*ma'nā l-'umūm*] in order to make it general for this form that was extracted and for all other similar [forms]. So that in this way the acquisition of the universal forms can be achieved from a single individual.” Ibn al-Ṭayyib, like Ibn 'Adī and Avicenna, appears to separate the pure quiddities from the notion of generality or universality, which is added to them in the human mind. Moreover, his terminology to the effect that we abstract the universal natures *qua* essences seems to imply that what is being abstracted is the pure essence, rather than the universal as such. In section 99 (42–43) he again proceeds to distinguish between essence and the universal in a manner reminiscent of Avicenna.

status of essence is expressed in particular by the terms *ma'nā* and *ṭabī'ah*, which Avicenna applies to these three contexts and to the various stages of the abstractive process. What is more, quiddity in itself *exists* in these three stages, albeit in a different mode: as a part of a composite material being, in the first stage; as a distinct and abstract intelligible form in the second; and as a synthetic universal form in the third. Avicenna's statement that "the nature to which universality occurs exists in things external to the mind"³⁴⁸ in effect posits the existence of pure quiddity in each concrete being and suggests that it is this same nature that serves as the foundation of the universal concept in the mind.

Nevertheless, these considerations do not fully solve the persistent problem of whether the acquisition of pure quiddity in its final, consummated intelligible state is purely the result of abstraction in an Aristotelian sense or whether it is also caused to exist in the human mind by the Agent Intellect. In an attempt to alleviate this complicated question, two approaches may be put forth. The first is to posit a paradox in Avicenna's system, which could have emerged from the development of his views on the subject. Given the fact that Avicenna tackled emanationism in works spanning his entire career, the possibility of an evolution in his conceptualization of this issue is a real one. If this is indeed the case, then scholars would be struggling with two incompatible models developed during different periods of the master's life. On this hypothesis, only a developmentalist approach would be appropriate to address this problem.³⁴⁹ The second approach consists in promoting a harmonizing reading of the evidence, as has recently been attempted by some Avicennian specialists. One compelling assumption buttressing this approach is that it would be truly surprising if the master had not pondered on how abstraction and emanation fit together in his system and angled toward a solution to this problem. In this regard, one key feature of recent scholarly interpretations has been to reconcile these two theories, while maintaining the validity and sometimes the primacy of abstraction as a cognitive process.³⁵⁰ I shall return to this issue later on in chapter V, which deals with essence in the divine world. In the meantime, what should be borne in mind is the crucial body of evidence pointing to the centrality of pure quiddity in Avicenna's theory of abstraction and the elaboration of the universal concepts in the mind.³⁵¹

348 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.2, 211.9–12.

349 This developmentalist hypothesis is envisaged by Gutas, *Avicenna*, and Hasse, *Avicenna on Abstraction*, 40; see also Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 173–181, 272ff.

350 See notably McGinnis, *Making Abstraction*; and idem, *Logic and Science*; Hasse, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*; Alpina, *Intellectual Knowledge*; and Taylor, *Avicenna*.

351 Accordingly, and anticipating my analysis in chapter V, I agree with Hasse that abstractionism should represent the default position for any attempt to accommodate the theory of the Agent Intellect within Avicenna's epistemological system. Given the weight of the evidence dealing with abstraction, the challenge is how to integrate the Agent Intellect and emanationism in Avicenna's theory of abstraction, not vice versa.

7 The post-Avicennian tradition on quiddity in concrete beings: some preliminary remarks

Turning to the post-Avicennian tradition for support of one's interpretation of Avicenna is a highly interesting but risky enterprise. This is because the history of the reception of Avicenna in the postclassical tradition is one of profound doctrinal adaptation and transformation. In the present case, the textual evidence that can be gleaned from this tradition appears to lend much weight to the interpretation proposed above. At the same time, there are subtle yet significant departures from the master that deserve to be fleshed out, but whose degree of faithfulness to Avicenna is not always easy to assess with precision, due to the complexity of the Avicennian sources themselves.³⁵²

7.1 Bahmanyār

One thinker who addresses the topic of quiddity in the concrete world is Bahmanyār. He was one of Avicenna's most important disciples and an active proponent of Avicennian philosophy in the immediate aftermath of the master's passing. In *The Book of Validated Knowledge* (*K. al-Taḥṣīl*), Bahmanyār equates quiddity in the concrete world with nature (*ṭabī'ah*), and he also distinguishes this nature from universality in the mind.³⁵³ With Bahmanyār, one also finds to my knowledge the first instance in the post-Avicennian literature of an author who routinely refers to the concrete aspect of quiddity as a kind of universal. In the section of his book devoted to this topic, Bahmanyār endorses two senses of *kullī*: (a) the universal that exists in concrete things; and (b) the universal that exists in the mind. What is more, Bahmanyār considers that the universal meaning (*al-ma'nā l-kullī*) and the quidditative meaning, in this case, the meaning 'humanness' (*ma'nā l-insāniyyah*), are obtained from the exterior concrete existents, such as Zayd and 'Amr. This is a pointed, if not spelled out, reference to abstraction on the Avicennian model, where quiddity in itself is extracted in a first step and only subsequently becomes a universal. Later on Bahmanyār explains that quiddity in the mind is quiddity in itself, which only subsequently becomes a universal when the mind adds to it the predication of many.³⁵⁴ Hence, Bahmanyār appears to endorse the main contours of Avicenna's position: that there is a valid conception of pure quiddity in the mind; that the form of pure quid-

³⁵² For a recent analysis of Avicenna's theory of nature and quiddity in the extramental world as well as of its reception in the postclassical tradition, see Faruque, Mullā Ṣadrā.

³⁵³ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 499.

³⁵⁴ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 500.12–501.11. The crucial statement appears at 501.8–10: "humanness in the mind is nothing else but humanness; as for its being universal, [this occurs when] the intellect creates [*yuhdithu l-'aql fihā*] a predicative link [between it] and [exterior] multiplicity."

dity is abstracted from the exterior world; that quiddity in concrete beings possesses a special sense of universality, different from the one that applies to concepts in the mind; and that essence becomes a universal concept when it is related to many things outside the mind.

7.2 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

Following Avicenna, Rāzī in his *Commentary on Pointers* equates “the foundational nature” (*ṭabī‘ah aṣliyyah*) with “quiddity” (*māhiyyah*) and “true reality” (*ḥaqīqah*), thereby showing the semantic flexibility and overlap between these terms.³⁵⁵ He further argues that this nature and quiddity represent a common determinant or determination (*qadr mushtarak*) in concrete existents. This claim harks back to Avicenna’s description of quiddity as something common to or shared by the individuals that fall under it.³⁵⁶ Developing this idea, Fakhr al-Dīn equates quiddity in concrete beings with ‘unconditioned quiddity,’ and he relies on the same example of the “unconditioned (quiddity) human” (*insān lā bi-sharṭ shay*). According to Rāzī, this aspect of essence is not sensual or graspable by the senses (*ghayr maḥsūs*), and yet it exists in the extramental world, with the obvious implication that it exists in an intelligible mode. This is true to the extent that quiddity in itself can be regarded as an intelligible existent and, hence, serve as proof, against the corporealists, that immaterial things do exist. As will be shown shortly, Ṭūsī follows a similar line of reasoning in his own *Commentary on Pointers*.

Rāzī’s discussion of the extramental existence of essence unfolds in a metaphysics section of *Pointers* entitled *On Existence and its Causes*, in which Avicenna had originally intended to establish the existence of non-sensual (*ghayr maḥsūs*)—and, hence, by implication, immaterial—beings, over and against the thesis of some materialists or corporealists, who equate ‘the existent’ (*al-mawjūd*) with ‘the sensual’ (*al-maḥsūs*). Interestingly, however, in order to establish this thesis, Avicenna does not resort to a demonstration of the existence of the separate intellects, as one would expect. Rather, he aims to prove the validity of mental existence and to show that intelligible entities can exist in the mind. Accordingly, pure quiddity (e.g., ‘humanness’ in Zayd and ‘Amr) exists in a non-sensual or immaterial mode as a “quidditative meaning” (*ma’nā*), a “single reality” (*wāḥid al-ḥaqīqah*), and a “foundational reality” (*ḥaqīqatuhu l-aṣliyyah*).³⁵⁷ It is noteworthy that Avicenna in this passage does not argue explicitly for the existence of this immaterial reality in concrete beings, although he does not exclude this possibility either. He focuses instead on the existence of abstract concepts, such as ‘humanness,’ in the human

³⁵⁵ Rāzī, *Commentary on Pointers*, section on Logic, 61.

³⁵⁶ Rāzī, *Commentary on Pointers*, 338.12, and 338.6–16 for the entire passage discussed above.

³⁵⁷ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 436.1, 437.5–6.

mind. Rāzī, however, believes that Avicenna's argument is incomplete, since it is limited to mental existence. He intends his own refutation of the materialists or corporealists to pertain to exterior existence (*fī l-khārij*) specifically. Thus, following his own agenda, Rāzī elaborates on Avicenna and maintains the intelligible existence of the pure reality and quiddity *in concrete beings*. What strikes us as an ambiguity in the Avicennian text (i.e., the ontological localization of the essential reality and meaning) is promptly resolved in Rāzī's commentary.

Rāzī's views on quiddity are further unraveled in his two main philosophical works *Eastern Investigations* and *Exalted Pursuits*. In the former work, he equates quiddity in itself, such as horseness in itself (*al-farasiyyah min ḥaythu hiya farasiyyah*), with true reality (*ḥaqīqah*). He then raises the thorny questions of whether, and if so, how, pure quiddity or nature can be said to exist in concrete individuals.³⁵⁸ Here again, Rāzī's answer to these questions appears to rest on a close reading of Avicenna's various comments on the matter as exposed in *Metaphysics* V.1–2. Rāzī affirms that pure quiddity exists in concrete things as a part (*juz'*) of a composite whole. Although pure quiddity exists with other aspects and conditions in concrete beings, it is nonetheless possible to consider it solely in itself. In this connection, Rāzī quotes a key statement by Avicenna to buttress this point (*fa-i'tibār al-faras bi-dhātihi jā'iz wa-in kāna ma'a ghayrihi*).³⁵⁹ According to Fakhr al-Dīn, this special state of quiddity *in concrete things* is "prior in existence" (*muqaddim fī l-wujūd*) to the individual concrete existent and to the mental universal, in the manner in which the simple precedes the composite and the part precedes the whole. Rāzī also reiterates the explanation he made in his *Commentary on Pointers* to the effect that quiddity in the exterior world is unconditioned (*lā bi-sharṭ shay'*). He states quite plainly that "the unconditioned animal exists in the exterior [or concrete] world" (*al-ḥayawān lā bi-sharṭ shay' mawjūd fī l-khārij*).³⁶⁰ Being unconditioned, it can be envisaged either with or without its concomitants and attributes. In sum, Fakhr al-Dīn adheres to Avicenna's doctrine that pure quiddity exists in concrete individuals as a nature and true reality. He also echoes the mereological view that quiddity inheres in them as a form and principle, which can be described as a part of these existents.³⁶¹

Rāzī later returns to the discussion of quiddity in *Eastern Investigations* in the context of psychology and more specifically with regard to the issue of how the human soul acquires knowledge. Therein Rāzī explains that the quiddity 'human in itself' (*min ḥaythu hiya*) is a nature (*ṭabī'ah*) that presupposes and necessitates neither unity nor multiplicity. It can be said equally of the multiple (i.e., of what exists in the concrete world) and of the single (i.e., of the universal form that exists in

³⁵⁸ Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 139.5–6; 141.2ff.

³⁵⁹ Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 141.10–11.

³⁶⁰ Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 1, 141.19–20.

³⁶¹ Horten, *Die philosophischen Ansichten*, 10, had perceived this clearly: "Rāzī ist extremer Realist. Die Universalien existieren nach ihm sowohl dem Inhalte als auch ihrer universellen Form nach real in den Dingen."

the mind). This same nature can be connected with concrete, material accidents, or it can be envisaged without them as a universal in the mind. Either way, it is clear that for Rāzī quiddity in itself underlies the concrete and mental states of quiddity.³⁶² What is more, intellection of the universal occurs only after pure quiddity has been extracted (*naz'*) from the concrete individuals and freed from its material concomitants and accidents. Rāzī proceeds to describe the various stages that constitute the process of abstraction, from the senses' perception of this nature, to the increased abstractive activity performed by the imaginative and estimative faculties, to, finally, the ultimate act of abstraction performed by the intellect. Rāzī explains that the intellect extracts the form from its matter (*fa-inna l-'aql yanzi'u tilka l-ṣūrah 'an māddatihā*) and renders it abstract (*mujarrad*).³⁶³ The intellect performs this process of abstraction until (*ḥattā*) the form can be envisaged as applying to many, i. e., until it has become a universal in the mind. But as in Avicenna's account, it is important to bear in mind that the abstracted form itself is the nature—Rāzī tellingly alternates between the terms *ṭabī'ah* and *ṣūrah* in this passage—and that this nature, in turn, has been identified with pure quiddity (*al-insāniyyah min ḥaythu hiya insāniyyah*) at the beginning of the same passage. For Rāzī, as for Avicenna and Ṭūsī, there is no doubt that it is the nature or pure quiddity that is the object of abstraction and that the universal arises in the mind at a subsequent stage (indicated by the Arabic term *ḥattā* in Rāzī's account).³⁶⁴

Rāzī's depiction of quiddity in the exterior concrete world is thoroughly grounded in an Avicennian background. He appears to have read *Metaphysics* V.1–2 scrutinously, since his interpretation relies on some of the key points, concepts, and terms Avicenna establishes in this passage. It should be noted that Rāzī's reading of Avicenna coheres on many counts with the interpretation I advanced in the preceding sections. What is more, many later thinkers aligned themselves with Rāzī and expound these same points, sometimes in more detail. Because of this, it is possible that some of these commentaries take their inspiration from Rāzī, rather than from Avicenna directly. To recap, the key points are the following: quiddity in itself or nature exists as a part in concrete beings; more specifically, it exists in them as an intelligible part; nature, truly reality, and quiddity in itself all refer to the pure existence of quiddity in concrete beings; this aspect of quiddity is described as uncondi-

³⁶² Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 2, 427.15 ff.

³⁶³ Rāzī, *Eastern Investigations*, vol. 2, 428.13–16.

³⁶⁴ However, one should bear in mind that Rāzī in this passage is reporting the view of “the master” (*al-shaykh*) Avicenna. At the very least, then, the passage lends support to my interpretation of Avicenna's theory of abstraction. This explains, I think, why Rāzī stresses the two stages of (a) the abstraction of nature or pure quiddity from particular beings, and (b) the formation of the universal concept in the mind on the basis of this nature/pure quiddity. In Rāzī's other writings, as I discussed in the previous chapter, these two moments and stages are unclear, because Rāzī seems to conflate them in his writings and also to do away with a distinct mental consideration of pure quiddity. But *Eastern Investigations* chiefly relate Avicenna's doctrines, and what Rāzī states in this respect coheres with my interpretation and also with Ṭūsī's later account of abstraction.

tioned (*lā bi-sharṭ shay'*), because there is no condition attached to its consideration, with the implication that it may be envisaged together with, or in abstraction from, its concomitants. Regardless, in itself it remains pure quiddity and nothing else. It is also this nature or pure quiddity that is extracted by the intellective powers of the mind and contributes to forming the universal concept. It can hardly be a coincidence that these various points, which were highlighted in the previous analysis of Avicenna, are precisely the ones Rāzī dwells upon in his paraphrase of the master. After Rāzī, they reappear regularly in the long exegetical tradition on the theme of quiddity that developed in the postclassical tradition. Unsurprisingly, one of the first thinkers after Rāzī to deal with these notions in depth is Ṭūsī, to whose works we now turn.

7.3 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī conveys a relatively lucid account of quiddity in his *Commentary on Pointers*, which is further complemented by the insight he provides in *Abstract of Correct Belief*. However, due to his compressed style and the format of these works, his views need to be carefully reconstructed from a variety of discrete assertions and notes. Ṭūsī, building on Avicenna but probably following Bahmanyār, describes quiddity existing in the exterior concrete world as the “physical universal” (*kullī ṭabī'ī*), although he also refers to it as a “nature” (*al-ṭabī'ah*). The latter, as should be clear by now, is another name for quiddity in itself as it exists in the extramental world.³⁶⁵ As for Avicenna and Rāzī, for Ṭūsī, this nature exists as a part (*juz'*) in each concrete individual of the same species, and it therefore represents something common to or shared by all of them. For Ṭūsī, this *ṭabī'ah* is characterized by sharedness (*ishtirāk*) and potentially also by abstractedness (*tajrīd*), since it can be extracted (*muntazī'ah*) from matter by the mind, just as Avicenna had explained.³⁶⁶

According to Ṭūsī, pure quiddity or nature exists as an intelligible principle in concrete things. Consequently, it is also able to exist in an abstract state in the mind, thanks to the cognitive technique of abstraction. Ṭūsī's account here closely mirrors Avicenna's exposition of quiddity in *Introduction*. The universal aspect of quiddity is formed when the natural universal or nature has combined with the logical universal or the attribute of universality. Accordingly, Ṭūsī calls the “composite” (*al-murakkab*) of (a) the physical universal or nature and (b) the logical universal, the intellectual (*al-'aqlī*). He sums up the previous points when he explains in his commentary that the meanings (*ma'ānī*) that can be conceived of in terms of sharing (or

365 Hence, Ṭūsī follows Avicenna in calling pure quiddity a “nature,” but he (like many other post-Avicennians) goes beyond Avicenna in describing it as a “physical universal”—a term previously used by Bahmanyār. For all intents and purposes, both terms refer to an irreducible quidditative meaning and are therefore employed interchangeably in the post-Avicennian literature.

366 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 2, 345.19–346.17.

commonality, *wuqūʿ al-sharakah fi-hā*) are pure meanings (*min haythu hiya*, i.e., the pure quiddities), and that these meanings and pure quiddities are also the natures (*ṭabāʿi*) and the physical universals (*al-kullī l-ṭabīʿi*). Hence, the natures existing in concrete beings can be abstracted by the intellect, and in turn these abstracted natures—which are no other than the pure quiddities—serve as the foundation for the mental elaboration of the universals. As Ṭūsī explains, the logical universal (*kullī mantiqī*) is an accident that advenes to the pure natures and quiddities and endows them with universality and predicability. The intellectual universal is therefore a combination of these two things (the nature and universality).³⁶⁷ Thus far, Ṭūsī follows Avicenna faithfully with regard to these various points, although he introduces certain terms (*kullī ṭabīʿi*) that are not used by Avicenna.

Furthermore, when he seeks to establish the existence of immaterial beings (against the materialists or corporealists), Ṭūsī, like Rāzī before him, relies on a demonstration of the existence of the pure quiddities as parts in concrete beings, rather than on a demonstration of the separate existence of the secondary causes or immaterial intellects. As an example of the “intelligible natures” (*al-ṭabāʿiʿ al-maʿqūlah*), Ṭūsī mentions “human in itself.”³⁶⁸ Glossing *Metaphysics* V.1, he argues that this nature exists as a part (*juzʿ*) in individual existents. This nature is what is common (*al-mushtarak*) to all human beings, and it is described as a single nature and reality (*ṭabīʿah wāḥidah* and *wāḥid al-ḥaqīqah*). By this, Ṭūsī does not intend to assert that humanness is numerically one, but that the humanness of Zayd is not different from the humanness of ʿAmr. Humanness in itself is just humanness, and so has a kind of essential oneness proper to it. Significantly, Ṭūsī reiterates later on that the quiddity in itself that exists as a part in each corporeal being is an “intelligible nature” (*ṭabīʿah maʿqūlah*)³⁶⁹; that “in each corporeal being is something non-corporeal” (*fi kull maḥsūs shayʿ laysa bi-maḥsūs*)³⁷⁰; and that the reality of each concrete thing is an abstract nature (*ḥaqq or ḥaqīqatuhu l-mujarradah*).³⁷¹ Furthermore, quiddity in itself is what makes concrete beings agree (*tattafiqu*) with one another, and it is “the constitutive part by virtue of which agreement occurs” (*al-juzʿ al-muqawwim alladhī bi-hi yakūn al-ittifāq*).³⁷² Following Avicenna, then, Ṭūsī seems to conceive of pure quiddity as an intelligible principle existing in concrete beings.

Ṭūsī is particularly conscientious to differentiate between the various considerations of quiddity Avicenna had deployed in *Introduction* I.2. On the one hand, he distinguishes between the considerations of pure quiddity as it exists in the concrete world and as it exists in the mind. The nature of a thing exists with material accidents in the concrete world, but it can also be envisaged without them in the

367 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 1, 204.13–22.

368 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 436–437.

369 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 438.19–20.

370 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 439.10.

371 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 440.15–16.

372 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 456.16; 457.12.

mind. On the other hand, he also distinguishes this last mental consideration of pure quiddity from the mental consideration of the universal, as Avicenna had. These various distinctions are invoked to address the objection of an imaginary interlocutor who argues that Ṭūsī's comments on the intelligible existence of quiddity apply only to its existence in the mind, not to its existence in reality (it should be noted that the interlocutor is not Rāzī, who also embraces the theory of the intelligible existence of the pure quiddities in the concrete world). Ṭūsī replies:

The objection is solved as follows: by differentiating between the nature of human, to which commonality or the absence of commonality can apply, and between human posited with commonality. The first exists [both] in the concrete world and in the intellect; the latter exists only in the intellect.³⁷³

This passage establishes a triplex distinction of quiddity along the lines of what Avicenna had achieved in his own works. The basic distinction Ṭūsī stresses is that between pure quiddity or nature, on the one hand, and quiddity taken with commonality, which is a composite, on the other. Elaborating on this basic distinction, he then proceeds to argue that there are two concepts of human in the intellect: one is the pure nature taken in itself, with the absence of commonality; the other is the mental universal, where commonality is necessarily posited. Now, it is noteworthy that Ṭūsī posits the existence of pure nature in the concrete world, thereby proving his interlocutor wrong. As he explains, the intelligible nature (as something unconditioned, *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) can exist *both* in concrete things and in the intellect.³⁷⁴ To conclude, Ṭūsī's interpretation of Avicenna coheres broadly with Rāzī's on these points, in spite of the fact that he has qualms with how Rāzī conceives of the relation between essence and existence. One residual ambiguity in both Rāzī's and Ṭūsī's accounts, however, concerns the relation of pure quiddity and universal quiddity in the mind. Disappointingly, these two thinkers do not delve into this important issue. In spite of this, it appears that Ṭūsī believed—perhaps against Rāzī, and in an attempt to recover the 'authentic' doctrine of Avicenna—that we can have a distinct conception of pure quiddity, and that this conception is separate from, and prior to, that of the universal consideration of quiddity.

373 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 438.9–13.

374 So, there are three aspects of quiddity discussed in this highly condensed passage: (a) nature as it exists in the concrete world; (b) nature as it exists as a distinct form and consideration in the intellect; and (c) the composite of nature and commonality, which constitutes the universal in the intellect. For increased clarity, this passage should be read in light of the comments Ṭūsī makes in *Abstract of Correct Belief*, where pure quiddity and the universal composite are also neatly distinguished. Note that in the passage under scrutiny, Ṭūsī construes commonality as meaning or necessarily implying universality, which explains why he locates it in the human mind. Avicenna in contrast usually distinguishes these two notions in his analysis.

7.4 Jurjānī

In his *Definitions*, the theologian ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 1413 CE) follows the general trend of describing quiddity in the exterior world as a natural universal, a nature, and a true reality.³⁷⁵ In his definition of *al-kullī l-ḥaqīqī*, Jurjānī seizes the opportunity to digress on the subject of universals. He argues that there are three aspects or elements (*umūr*) in positing animal: (a) quiddity in itself [*al-ḥayawān min ḥaythu huwa huwa*]; (b) universality; and (c) the combination of quiddity and universality. Jurjānī regards the third aspect as “a compound and composite” (*al-majmū‘ al-murakkab*). He calls the first element “natural universal” (*kullī ṭabī‘ī*), because it exists in the concrete, exterior world; the second is “the logical universal” (*kullī man-ṭiqī*), which is sought in logic; and the third is “the intellectual universal” (*kullī ‘aqlī*), because it exists only in the mind. Like Avicenna and Ṭūsī, then, Jurjānī holds that “the animal in itself” (*al-ḥayawān min ḥaythu huwa huwa*) can be said to exist in the natural, extramental, or concrete world as well as in an abstracted form in the mind. Universality describes what attaches to the nature in the mind and what can be predicated of many.

7.5 Ḥillī

In his *Unveiling the Intent of the Commentary on Abstract of Correct Belief* (*Kashf al-murād fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-i’tiqād*), the great scholar Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Allāmah al-Ḥillī (d. 1325 CE) provides ample evidence to the effect that he followed Ṭūsī’s interpretation of quiddity closely. After defining quiddity in itself as a true nature or reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and intelligible thing (*amr ma‘qūl*), he proceeds to explain that humanness in Zayd and ‘Amr is the same, but that humanness is not numerically one, since oneness is a consideration added to quiddity in itself.³⁷⁶ Now, while quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay’* exists only in the mind and in abstraction from all concomitants, quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay’* is, in contrast, not abstracted (i.e., considered only and exclusively in itself), but together ‘with other things’ that are not itself, namely, concomitants and accidents. Ḥillī goes on to identify it with the “natural (or physical) universal” (*al-kullī l-ṭabī‘ī*). Quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay’* is “the very natures and true realities of things” (*nafs ṭabā‘i‘ al-ashyā’ wa-ḥaqā’iqihā*), which exist in the extramental world. Ḥillī later identifies the natural universal with the quiddity itself (*nafs al-mā-hiyyah*), viz., pure quiddity.³⁷⁷ In case there remained any ambiguity that pure quiddity exists in things in the exterior world, Ḥillī states that “animal in itself” (*al-ḥayawān min ḥaythu huwa huwa*) exists as a part (*juz’*) in the concrete animals. But,

375 Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 237.11 ff.

376 Ḥillī, *Unveiling the Intent*, 58.19–20; 59.3; 59.21–24.

377 Ḥillī, *Unveiling the Intent*, 61.4.

since Ḥillī defines quiddity and true nature as an intelligible thing (*amr ma'qūl*), this means that pure quiddity exists in things as an intelligible part, which is how Avicenna and Ṭūsī also envisaged the existence of quiddity in concrete things. According to Ḥillī, quiddity in itself, e.g., animality, is truthfully said of the compound and composite thing that exists (*huwa ṣādiq 'alā l-majmū' al-murakkab*), since it dwells in it as an irreducible and constant intelligible. In contrast to the natural universal, which is identified with the true nature and quiddity in itself that exists as a part in concrete things, the logical and the intellectual universals exist only in the mind and not in the concrete world. Nature or pure quiddity, on the other hand, exists in concrete beings and in the mind: this statement directly echoes earlier assertions by Ṭūsī. Finally, Ḥillī explains that there are three considerations that are actualized in each apprehended intelligible in the mind: the natural universal, the logical universal, and (the resulting) intellectual universal.³⁷⁸

7.6 Jāmī

As Nicholas Heer has shown, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 1492 CE) in *The Precious Pearl* regards the natural universal (*al-kullī l-ṭabī'ī*) as synonymous with nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and, hence, as referring to quiddity in contradistinction to its concomitants, whether corporeal or mental. This is unconditioned quiddity. As such, it can exist in the exterior world together with particular accidents and in the mind together with universality, although it can also be apprehended in itself. In any case, quiddity *qua* nature and natural universal exists in the concrete world.³⁷⁹

7.7 Qushjī

Qushjī's breakdown of the various considerations of quiddity was discussed in detail in chapter II. There it was shown that this thinker elaborated an idiosyncratic and highly sophisticated classification of the various considerations of quiddity, introducing new and more refined distinctions within the set of distinctions he inherited from Avicenna, Ṭūsī, and others before him. Izutsu pinpointed Qushjī's works as a turning point in the postclassical reflection on quiddity, especially in view of the latter's differentiation between two senses of negatively-conditioned quiddity.³⁸⁰ In addition, it should be pointed out that Qushjī argues that 'mixed quiddity'—or 'conditioned quiddity' (*bi-sharṭ shay'*)—and 'unconditioned quiddity' (*lā bi-sharṭ shay'*) can be said to exist *in* concrete things. Hence, like most of his philosophical predecessors

³⁷⁸ Ḥillī, *Unveiling the Intent*, 61.3–4.

³⁷⁹ Heer, in Jāmī, *The Precious Pearl*, 38; see also, idem, *The Sufi Position*.

³⁸⁰ Izutsu, *Basic Problems*.

in the Arabic tradition, Qushjī posits the extramental existence of quiddity in concrete beings. Unlike them, however, he also argues for the existence of negatively-conditioned quiddity in concrete beings. This is a surprising and new feature of his argumentation. Qushjī posits all three aspects of quiddity—including negatively-conditioned quiddity—as existing in concrete reality. For Qushjī, it is primarily negatively-conditioned quiddity that can be said to be a part (*juzʿ*) of concretely existing beings, whereas for Avicenna, Ṭūsī, and Rāzī, it was unconditioned quiddity. To my knowledge, Qushjī is the only thinker to develop this theory in the form in which it appears in his commentary. Finally, and in spite of this, he identifies ‘the natural universal’ with ‘unconditioned quiddity’ in line with previous interpreters.³⁸¹ Importantly, Qushjī combines these views with a real distinction between essence and existence in the concrete world and regards external existence as one of the accidents of essence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī min al-ʿawāriḍ*).³⁸² Hence, when it comes to how quiddity applies to the extramental beings, one finds in Qushjī an intensification of the realist trend that characterizes much of the Avicennian tradition, to the point that Qushjī is willing to make even negatively-conditioned quiddity a feature of these beings. This perhaps betrays an attempt on his part to emphasize and maximize the commensurability of mental notions and concrete features of reality.

7.8 Tahānawī

In his *Dictionary*, the eighteenth-century scholar Tahānawī devotes an important section of his work to the various considerations of quiddity. Therein he informs us that there are two aspects of quiddity that exist in the concrete world (*mawjūdān fī l-khārijī*): mixed quiddity or conditioned quiddity (*bi-sharṭ shayʿ*), and absolute or unconditioned quiddity (*yusammā l-muṭlaqaḥ wa-l-māhiyyah bi-lā sharṭ*).³⁸³ The latter, he tells us, is none other than quiddity in itself (*min ḥaythu huwa huwa*).

7.9 Ṭabāṭabāʿī

Let us turn to the works of a modern thinker to complete this sketch of the reception of Avicenna’s theory of extramental quiddity. In his treatise entitled *The Elements of Islamic Metaphysics*, Ṭabāṭabāʿī discusses the different aspects of quiddity that Avicenna had outlined in *Introduction*. According to his account, mixed quiddity, which is identified with conditioned quiddity, and absolute quiddity, which is identified with unconditioned quiddity, can both be said to exist in the concrete world.

³⁸¹ Qushjī, *Commentary*, 4174.

³⁸² Qushjī, *Commentary*, 4075.

³⁸³ Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, 1424.

While the former refers necessarily to quiddity taken ‘with other things,’ the latter indicates quiddity’s autonomy from these things. Interestingly, the Persian scholar subsumes these two aspects of quiddity, together with the third aspect of abstract or negatively-conditioned quiddity in the mind, under the natural universal. Hence, like his predecessors, he identifies quiddity in the concrete world with the natural universal, but in addition he extends the latter notion to encompass negatively-conditioned quiddity in the mind. He states: “The quiddity of which these three kinds [viz., conditioned, unconditioned, and negatively-conditioned] are subclasses is the natural universal [*al-kullī l-ṭabīʿī*], which possesses universality in the mind and is capable of corresponding to a multiplicity of things.”³⁸⁴ While surprising at first glance, this can be explained by the fact that, as shown previously, the natural universal is quiddity in itself considered both in concrete beings and in a state of abstraction in the mind after it has been abstracted from a concrete entity. The natural universal is also therefore the foundation for the intellectual universal. Here Ṭabāṭabāʿī provides some evidence to the effect that it is really the same quiddity that exists as a constant in the mind and in the concrete beings, albeit according to different ontological modes or aspects. Moreover, his account is solidly grounded in the key notion of the natural universal, which characterizes and orients much of the Persian reception of Avicenna’s theories, from Bahmanyār and Rāzī all the way to Ṭabāṭabāʿī.

7.10 Muḥammad al-Mahdī al-Ḥusaynī al-Shīrāzī

Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī (d. 2001 CE), a theoretician and religious authority (*marjaʿ*) of twelver shiism, also wrote a commentary on Ṭūsī’s *Abstract of Correct Belief*, in which he puts forth what one may now call the ‘standard interpretation’ of the natural universal in the post-Avicennian tradition. With regard to the particular issues that concern us, he takes his cue directly from Ṭūsī and construes unconditioned quiddity (*al-māhiyyah lā bi-sharṭ shayʿ*) as applying to the natural universal (*al-kullī l-ṭabīʿī*), which is pure quiddity (*al-ḥayawān bi-mā huwa ḥayawān*). Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī explains that this aspect of quiddity is characterized neither by abstraction from other considerations (*iʿtibārāt*) (such as the material accidents), nor by the absence of their abstraction (*ʿadam al-tajarrud ʿanhā*). In other words, it may or may not be taken together with other considerations, but there is no condition that applies to it either way. Moreover, like Ṭūsī, he endorses the view that this aspect of quiddity exists as a part (*juzʿ*) in the individual concrete instances of animal.³⁸⁵ Finally, he goes on to gloss Ṭūsī’s account of how the intellectual universal is formed in the mind

³⁸⁴ Ṭabāṭabāʿī, *The Elements*, 47.

³⁸⁵ Shīrāzī, *Commentary on Abstract*, 70.15–21.

from a compound of the natural and logical universals.³⁸⁶ In brief, al-Shīrāzī's account is through and through concurrent with the previous ones surveyed thus far.

7.11 Recapitulation

The body of information on the subject of quiddity that can be retrieved from the postclassical sources is immense and intricate. Only a partial, schematic, and tentative picture was provided here. In spite of this, the evidence that can be gleaned from some of the most representative postclassical sources dealing with the reception of Avicenna's theory shows a remarkable degree of homogeneity and consistency, as well as some important departures from the master's writings. Although many of the authors surveyed above did not expressly write commentaries on Avicenna's works, they strove to clarify a set of thorny issues that arose from a close reading of his writings, especially *Introduction* I.2 and *Metaphysics* V.1–2, or from commentaries closely related to these works. These two texts, which must often have been read side by side given the genuine thematic and doctrinal connections between them, may be said to have informed virtually the entire post-Avicennian philosophical tradition on essence.

Let us begin with what is clear before moving on to the more sticky points. Many postclassical philosophers inscribed in the Avicennian lineage argue that quiddity (*māhiyyah*)—as well as a special sense of the universal (*al-kullī*) corresponding to it—exist *in* concrete beings. They thus uphold a realist and immanentist interpretation of essence along the lines advocated by the master. Typically, these thinkers identify this extramental aspect of quiddity with 'unconditioned quiddity' (*māhiyyah lā bi-sharṭ shay'*) and routinely refer to it as a 'nature' (*ṭabī'ah*), 'true reality' (*ḥaqīqah*), and 'form' (*ṣūrah*). In addition, but this time unlike Avicenna, they also systematically describe extramental quiddity as 'absolute quiddity' (*māhiyyah muṭlaqah*) and 'the natural universal' (*al-kullī l-ṭabī'ī*). Hence, for most of these thinkers, the notions that quiddity in concrete beings is unconditioned, absolute, and a kind of universal all go together. The rationale behind the view that pure quiddity (e. g., animalness) in concrete beings is a kind of universal is that it is an irreducible nature common to all the individuals that fall under it, and it is also what enables the mind to attain a universal kind of knowledge of exterior things.

This terminology and the inclination to regard the nature in concrete beings as a special kind of universal establish an important link between these postclassical authors and the late-antique Greek philosophical discussions of the common things. Avicenna's works were one of the major stages in the history of this transmission and reshaped the ancient legacy in a way that had a drastic effect on later Arabic authors. More specifically, the shift towards a focus on quiddities rather than on uni-

386 Shīrāzī, *Commentary on Abstract*, 71.

versals proper, as well as the ideas that quiddity and universality (as well as the other attributes) are distinct from one another, that there are various senses of universality, and that one special sense of universality applies to quiddity in concrete beings, which are all prevalent ideas in the later Islamic tradition, can be traced directly to Avicenna's works. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Avicenna himself generally refrains from speaking of quiddities in the concrete world as universals and cautiously reserves this term for a discussion of mental notions, although he is not entirely consistent with regard to this point. Indeed, for Avicenna, universals, strictly speaking, exist only in the mind, although there is a qualified sense according to which they exist in concrete beings, due to the modulated nature of the notion of universality. The post-Avicennian authors, for their part, straightforwardly and unhesitatingly designate quiddity in the natural or concrete world as a universal, which they contrast to the logical and intellectual universals, both of which exist only in the soul. In doing so, they paid heed, but also significantly amplified, Avicenna's comments in *Introduction* I.12. Another important feature is that the later Avicennian commentators conceive of quiddity in the exterior world, and hence of nature, true reality, and the natural universal, as an intelligible principle or intelligible form inhering in each individual concrete being. It is this principle that they identify as the part (*juz'*) Avicenna mentions in *Metaphysics* V.1. This position seems to have arisen out of a long exegetical tradition on the Avicennian works, as well as by a process of elimination: the quiddities exist in the concrete world, but they can be said to exist neither as material parts nor as separate Forms, so they must inhere in the material substances as an intelligible form and principle.

Perhaps the two most momentous doctrines these later authors formulate by building on Avicenna are (a) that the natural universal (*al-kullī l-ṭabī'ī*) *qua* nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and quiddity in itself (*al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) exists in an unconditioned state (*bi-lā sharṭ*) in each concrete individual, and (b) that it is pure quiddity that is the object of the abstractive process performed by the human mind. By abstracting pure essence, the mind also prepares the form from which the mental universal subsequently arises (that is, when universality is added as an external intention and when the condition (*sharṭ*) of common predicability is attached to it). Virtually all the post-Avicennian commentators and thinkers surveyed in this section concur on these two points. This leads me to conclude that a certain consensus had emerged regarding these doctrines in the centuries after the master's death. Although this interpretation may strike one as committal from a modern perspective, due to what it entails in terms of ontological realism and immanentism, it represents a sophisticated attempt to connect the intramental and extramental spheres by means of a viable epistemological and ontological theory grounded in the notion of pure quiddity. It also reflects some of these authors' unswerving commitment to interpret Avicenna's epistemology and ontology in a coherent and integrated manner. Like the master, then, many postclassical thinkers base their brand of metaphysical realism on the aspect of quiddity they call unconditioned or *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*. Unconditioned quiddity is flexible: it need not be considered together with its material ac-

cidents and concomitants, even though it may also be considered together with them, in which case it becomes conditioned quiddity (*bi-sharṭ shay'*). In that sense, unconditioned quiddity, which is irreducible, can be abstracted from its material substrate and parasitical attributes, precisely because it exists only *qua* itself in those complex beings. Hence, it exists *in itself* and can be conceived of *in itself*, although it is never found *by itself* in the exterior concrete world.

In hindsight, there are six distinct and significant points with regard to my analysis of Avicenna's theory of quiddity that appear to find some corroboration in the post-Avicennian literature. First, later interpreters defend for the most part a realist, immanentist, and mereological interpretation of quiddity in the concrete world; second, they construe quiddity as an intelligible nature (*ṭabī'ah*) and true reality (*ḥaqīqah*) that is shared by all material instantiations to which it applies; third, this true reality or nature exists in the concrete individual (*wujūd fī l-a'yān*) in the strong sense and not merely as a projection or conception of the mind; fourth, these thinkers identify this nature with unconditioned quiddity or quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar* inasmuch as it can be apprehended *either* with its material accidents *or* in abstraction from them, but in any case exists irreducibly in the concrete beings; fifth, this unconditioned aspect of quiddity is also, *qua* intelligible form and principle, abstractable by the mind; finally, when it is abstracted and envisaged solely in itself in the mind, it becomes negatively conditioned or *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. The latter refers to the state of quiddity when it is apprehended as a pure object in the mind in abstraction from any external concomitants and mental attributes. With regard to this last point, however, one finds some ambiguity and disagreement in the postclassical literature as to whether this fully abstract and negatively-conditioned aspect of quiddity is to be identified with the universal form or represents another, distinct mental object.

While this sketch seems on the whole to accurately reflect some important exegetical trends occurring in the postclassical tradition, some points nevertheless remain obscure. First, the custom of referring to each aspect of quiddity—including quiddity in concrete beings—as a universal (*kullī*) undoubtedly has a point of origin in Avicenna's works, but is for the most part a post-Avicennian development. It seems to be an already well-established practice by the time of Ṭūsī in the thirteenth century. Given that Avicenna on the whole avoided this identification (with a few notable exceptions), but that it became systematic in the works of his successors, shedding light on this philosophical development is a desideratum.³⁸⁷ Second, even though the realist dimension of many of these theories is blatant, no extensive and compelling explanation of its immanentist and especially its mereological aspects are articulated in the Arabic sources. For example, Ṭūsī in his *Commentary on Pointers* limits himself to describing quiddity as an intelligible nature and form in concrete beings and does

387 The broad distribution and influence of al-Kātibī's *The Epistle for Shams al-Dīn (al-Risālah al-Shamsiyyah)*, which endorses the threefold scheme of natural, logical, and intellectual universals, may partly explain this development.

not proceed to flesh out these points or elucidate them in an adequate manner. The reluctance to engage in a detailed explanation of these mereological issues harks back to Avicenna himself, who provides tantalizing comments in *Metaphysics* V.1, but no systematic treatment of the topic. In that sense, the *shaykh al-ra'is* is directly responsible for the controversies surrounding these issues in the medieval and modern historiography. Yet, by far the most obscure issue debated by these thinkers, and one also that generated many divergences in opinion in the postclassical works, focuses on the relation between pure quiddity and the universal concept in the human mind. This challenging issue and its interpretive difficulty nevertheless had a salutary effect: it encouraged some of these authors to further define mental existence and its various criteria. Finally, it appears that, in spite of major lines of agreement among later philosophers, the Avicennian terminology and concepts related to quiddity were used quite flexibly and with a whole range of semantic modulations and philosophical intentions by later authors. There is a gradual shift from Avicenna's terminology toward more idiosyncratic usages. Thinkers like Rāzī, Ṭūsī, and especially Qushjī employ these terms in a subjective manner and, it would seem, in order to promote particular features of their philosophical agenda, making any general attempt at terminological disambiguation extremely taxing for the modern reader. A case by case investigation of the way in which each individual author understood and used this matrix of terms and notions seems the only viable course of study.

These departures notwithstanding, and bearing in mind the main doctrinal lines unveiled above, one can conclude that a certain consensus seems to have arisen among some of the major interpreters of Avicenna regarding his views on quiddity and universality. The interpretations they put forth are broadly consistent and point to a particular way of approaching Avicenna's doctrine of essence, which is compatible with the one advocated in this book. With that being said, the later *kalām* and *ḥikmah* works discussed above do not represent the only possible approach to the philosophical problems introduced and analyzed by Avicenna. As Heer pointed out, this was the philosophical (*falsafiyah* or *ḥikmiyyah*) interpretation of Avicenna's theory of nature and pure quiddity in the concrete world. In contrast, some theologians and Sufis followed an entirely different path, which often showcased a rejection of the doctrine of the extramental existence of the natural universal, nature, and pure quiddity.³⁸⁸ Furthermore, this interpretive trend flourished vigorously in Avicennizing circles and in the works of scholars who broadly endorsed the master's metaphysics, but it found little traction in alternative metaphysical systems, such as those elaborated by the Illuminationists and the followers of Ibn 'Arabī. Indeed, one of the key effects of regarding quiddity in concrete beings as a distinct principle is that it strengthens the real distinction between essence and existence. But this was unacceptable to some thinkers, who jointly rejected the real existence of quiddity and the reality of the natural universals. This philosophical reac-

388 See Heer, *The Sufi Position*; Jāmi, *The Precious Pearl*, 38.

tion is important for our purposes as well, because it raises the crucial question of how, or in what ontological mode, quiddity can be said to exist in the concrete world. This question is picked up again in chapter IV.

8 Conclusion

This chapter focused on a set of intricate problems related to quiddity in the concrete world: Does quiddity exist in concrete beings, and if so, in what mode or sense? What would be in that case its relation to universality? How does Avicenna's position on this issue relate to the strong realism of the Platonic tradition and to the formal immanentism of the Aristotelian tradition? How does the late-antique discourse on the universals and common things feed into Avicenna's reflection on the matter? What role does this aspect of quiddity play in the human cognition of universals and the process of abstraction? Connected to these questions was the challenging task of having to clarify a set of technical terms that systematically underpins Avicenna's accounts on the subject, especially 'nature,' 'true reality,' and 'form,' as well as the related notions of 'commonality' and 'universality.' It emerged that the trend of ontologizing essence in the concrete world largely hinges, in Avicenna's works, on a set of technical terms intended to denote the entitative quality of pure quiddity. Perhaps the most important ones in this regard are *ma'nā* and *ṭabī'ah*. Finally, I examined how the various conditions of *bi-sharṭ shay'*, *lā-bi-sharṭ shay'*, and *bi-sharṭ lā shay'* relate to this aspect of quiddity and to the various points raised above.

In order to paint a satisfactory picture of Avicenna's position, his account needs to be contextualized in light of the late-antique commentatorial tradition on Plato and Aristotle, especially with regard to the multifarious discussions about the universals and common things that unfolded in the late-antique Greek sources. One of Avicenna's sources for his treatment of this problem is Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, which the *shaykh al-ra'īs* took as a starting point for his own work bearing the same title (*Madkhal* or *Introduction*). The notorious passage where Porphyry outlines the various possible modes of existence of the universals proved particularly influential on later Greek, Latin, and Arabic thinkers, and Avicenna in this regard was no exception. In fact, this passage served as a blueprint for his own treatment of quiddity in *Introduction* and especially in *Metaphysics V.1*, where he combines logical and ontological considerations to address the very questions raised by Porphyry in his logical treatise. Avicenna was also familiar with other works stemming from the Peripatetic and Neoplatonic backgrounds, notably treatises by Alexander of Aphrodisias, which he used freely and creatively in his interpretation. In spite of a clear debt to the late-antique theorizations on the universals, the result is a distinctly Avicennian doctrine that is thoroughly integrated in his system and connected with other crucial aspects of his philosophy.

Avicenna's framework, as well as many of the conceptual distinctions he sketches, can be traced to this late-antique background. This is true in particular of (a) the

threefold categorization of the common things/universals/quiddities into concrete particular things, mental entities, and things in themselves or foundational forms; (b) the other matrix of distinctions Avicenna endorses in *Introduction* ('prior to', 'in,' and 'after multiplicity'); (c) the idea that universality is mind-dependent and a mental accident or concomitant; (d) the view that universals in the mind are abstracted from particulars; (e) the priority of certain aspects of quiddity/the universals over others; (f) the practice of referring to the common thing/quiddity as a nature or a common nature; and, finally, (g) the correspondence established between these various aspects of the common things/quiddities and various ontological modes. These salient features in the Greek commentaries likely informed Avicenna's treatment of essence. Naturally, it is important to stress that Avicenna was an active participant in this philosophical dialogue and that he tackled these issues in a subjective and creative manner in his works. In that sense, the commentaries provided the master with some of the main problems to be resolved and with the raw material with which he elaborated his own system. Yet, this ancient background and the many terminological, formal, and argumentative parallels between Avicenna's works and the Greek commentaries have to be acknowledged and represent an important component of the master's method and doctrines.

Turning to Avicenna's doctrines on quiddity, a brief recap of the results reaped in chapter III is in order. The foregoing analysis has led to several significant conclusions concerning the textual relationship between key passages in Avicenna's corpus and the interpretation of this fundamental feature of his philosophical system. The master's threefold distinction of quiddity as outlined in *Introduction* I.2 rests on both epistemological *and* ontological considerations whose implications extend to the extramental or concrete world. In general, his approach displays a clear intention to treat these logical categories and notions in an ontological way and to tease out their ontological entailments. Avicenna accordingly extends the discussion to the quiddities as they exist in the extramental world and dispenses much effort to clarifying the relationship between the concrete and mental contexts of quiddity. According to the reconstruction I proposed, Avicenna upholds a moderate realist, immanentist, and mereological theory of quiddity in the concrete world that rests on Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources transmitted via the Baghdad School. On his view, quiddity exists in the exterior world in concrete beings (but not outside of them), and it is to be identified especially with form as a part of the composite. In this connection, the analysis emphasized the correspondence between the notions of form (*ṣūrah*) and essence or quiddity in Avicenna's works. More specifically, it explained how form can be regarded as the extramental counterpart of quiddity *qua* species, differentia, or genus in the mind. In that manner, it was shown that Avicenna's essentialist, hylomorphic, and mereological theories are interconnected in crucial ways. They participate in the explanation of the extramental existence of pure quiddity, in the same way that logic and noetics had sought to accommodate pure quiddity in an intellectualist context.

In addition, the hypothesis—suggested by the previous considerations—was put forth that quiddity *qua* common nature exists as an intelligible principle and form, albeit in an unconditioned and non-numerical state, in the concrete being. More specifically, the *ma'nā* of pure quiddity exists in the form. The implication of this unconditioned and undetermined state is that quiddity is an irreducible ontological principle of concrete beings, which can be considered either together with its surrounding accidents and concomitants or solely in itself once it has been abstracted from those other things. Regardless, pure quiddity is part of the ontological and foundational reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of an existent. It forms a part of that existent, namely, its thingness, its quidditative meaning, its true reality, its nature, and its essential form. Even though Avicenna typically speaks of a nature or quiddity, rather than a universal, as existing *in* things, it is clear that his theories correlate with a sense of the universal as it was broadly understood in ancient and medieval times.

Avicenna's doctrine rests solidly on Aristotle's theory of immanent forms, but it also departs from the Stagirite in certain regards, especially in its novel theorization of the common nature, which seems to stand midway between Aristotle's and the Neoplatonists' conception of the universals. For if Avicenna's concept of nature is faithful to Aristotle in that it is a principle inhering in concrete individuals and does not exist in a transcendent and separate realm of its own like the Platonic forms, some of the characteristics Avicenna ascribes to it on the other hand seem informed by Neoplatonic ontological and causal theories. Although Avicenna usually resists labelling the common nature a *universal* 'in things' or 'in multiplicity,' it is quite clear nonetheless that it has retained some of the main characteristics associated with this notion as bequeathed by the Neoplatonic tradition. For one thing, quiddity in concrete beings remains its irreducible and constant intelligible self, although it is also common to many instantiations and the same in each one of them (albeit not according to numerical sameness). So there is a sense, albeit a highly qualified one, according to which nature transcends the mere individual. What is more, these quidditative natures have their epistemic and ontological origin in the supernal intellects, as I will show in chapter V. There the pure quiddities are reflected as intelligibles in a mode that precedes their instantiation in matter. Hence, with regard to this theory of essence and nature, Avicenna stands conspicuously at the crossroads of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic legacies. His position reflects and perpetuates the late-antique trend of interpreting Aristotle through Neoplatonic theories. Avicenna also significantly builds on Aristotle's theory of abstraction through the lens of the notion of pure essence. Pure quiddity and nature, inasmuch as it is unconditioned, can be abstracted by the mind, in which case it corresponds to the consideration and form of quiddity in itself in the intellect. The form and meaning extracted from concrete beings is no other than quiddity in itself, and the result of this abstractive process is the existence of pure quiddity in the rational soul. At this stage, and if it is stripped of everything else that is not itself, quiddity becomes 'negatively conditioned.' The latter in turn serves as the basis for the universal taken as a complex and synthetic entity in the intellect once it combines with mental concomitants. But the quidditative

meaning or *ma'nā* itself exists both as a common nature in concrete things and as a pure object in the intellect. It is by virtue of this commonality and undeterminedness that nature and quidditative meaning bridge extramental and mental existence and uniformly underlie the existents belonging to these two ontic spheres. As was highlighted already by Jon McGinnis, pure quiddity represents the key link between the concrete existence of essence and its mental existence, as well as between reality and logic.

This interpretation of Avicenna's theories elicits intriguing parallels not only with the late-antique philosophical movements, but also with the Latin scholastic tradition. The following fact is indeed profoundly thought-provoking and arresting: a new phase in the discussion of realism in the philosophical tradition of medieval Europe coincides with the Latin translation and dissemination of Avicenna's metaphysical and logical texts. These Latinized versions of Avicenna's philosophical treatises were assiduously studied in Paris and other urban centers in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and provided the main impetus for a moderate form of metaphysical realism to develop, which is now associated chiefly with the great scholastic thinkers of this age, especially William of Champeaux, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Henry of Ghent.³⁸⁹ For our purposes, what is important is not merely the fact that these philosophers relied heavily on Avicenna's writings to articulate their theory of essence and the universals; it is also, and above all, that they typically interpreted Avicenna as a metaphysical realist. On their view, Avicenna posited a nature in concrete beings that was common and even universal in certain ways; he regarded this nature as being distinct from existence, and more specifically from 'realized' existence, with the result that he posited a real distinction between essence and existence; and, according to some of these Christian thinkers, he even believed that this nature possessed a distinct ontological status due to its correspondence to the forms in the divine mind. If Avicenna's disquisitions about quiddity and universality are a direct continuation of late-antique philosophical culture, the Christian scholastic debates should be regarded as prolonging seminal ideas and doctrines first articulated by the Persian master.

In hindsight, and given Avicenna's influence in the Latin West, it seems hardly surprising that many of these prominent Christian philosophers defend a variant of moderate realism when it comes to the debate about the universals. In this context, Avicenna's novel theorization of common nature proved particularly stimulating. These remarks apply particularly to one of Avicenna's illustrious Latin counterparts, the theologian and philosopher Duns Scotus, who appears to have relied heavily on the Arabic thinker's account of quiddity. It seems appropriate therefore to take Scotus's works as a case study to illustrate the wider phenomenon I am referring to. Similarities between Avicenna's and Scotus's philosophical systems have been highlighted on various occasions in the past. But I believe that the parallels between their

³⁸⁹ See Conti, Realism; Wéber, Le thème avicennien; de Libera, *L'art*.

conceptions of common nature specifically have not been sufficiently emphasized, due to the fact that Avicenna's own realist theories have hitherto not been fleshed out in detail.³⁹⁰ Like Avicenna, Scotus discards the term 'universal' and uses the term common nature (*natura communis*) instead to speak of quiddities in the concrete world. This common nature is the 'nature in itself,' just as it is, for Avicenna, quiddity in itself. Like Avicenna, he upholds a version of moderate realism that strikes a balance between the hard realism of the Platonic forms, which both Avicenna and Scotus reject, and the strict nominalism of other philosophers. Moreover, these common natures can be said to exist in each exemplification in an immanent mode and to constitute the true reality of that entity. This nature can be said to be prior, not only logically or conceptually, because it is prior to the complex and composite existent *qua* its part, but also ontologically, because it has its originative source in the intelligible domain of thought (where it exists without its material concomitants and accidents) and especially in the divine world. Like Avicenna, Scotus also regards these common natures as being non-numerical (or rather "less than numerical unity," to use Scotus's formula). Intriguingly, he also regards the common nature as a part, although he uses this mereological notion in a different way than Avicenna. Regardless, the common nature exists in the individual and is constitutive of it. These parallels make it amply clear that one of Scotus's main sources for his theory of common nature is Avicenna.³⁹¹

From a broader comparative perspective, the fact that prominent philosophers from the Arabic and Latin traditions writing roughly at the same time and relying on a shared heritage of Avicennism all attribute to the master a realist interpretation of the universals/quiddities cannot be coincidental and deserves serious reflection. In spite of the different cultural contexts, there seems to have been widespread agreement among these luminaries that the master regarded quiddities in the exterior world as existing irreducibly, immanently, and intelligibly in every concrete instantiation. Whether one consults Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, or Duns Scotus, Bahmanyār, Suhrawardī, Rāzī, or Ṭūsī, Ghazālī or Averroes, defenders or detractors of Avicenna, the picture that emerges is relatively consistent. It points to a dominant interpretation of the master's writings during the medieval period that allows for a real distinction between essence and existence, as well as for the real existence of quiddity *qua* nature, and even *qua* universal (in a qualified sense), in concrete things. But while this fact has been well known in the Latin context for some time, thanks to the pioneering works of Gilson and others, interpretations of Avicenna's metaphysical realism in the Islamic context constitute in comparison a much more recent avenue of research, and one which requires a painstaking investigation into the postclassical sources.

390 On the relationship between these two thinkers, see Tweedale, *Duns Scotus's Doctrine*. Tweedale's analysis of Avicenna, however, relies entirely on the Latin translations. My analysis of the Arabic texts concurs generally with his conclusions.

391 Cross, *Medieval Theories*.

Part of the difficulty involved in this case is the need to contend with some broad interpretive trends that find their origin in the postclassical period, but which have considerably shaped the modern approaches to this thinker. This is true in particular of the *ishrāqī* philosophers and, on the opposite end of the spectrum, of Mullā Ṣadrā, who defend a purely conceptualist interpretation of the essence/existence distinction and regard pure essence as a mere mental supposition (*i'tibār*) disconnected from reality. I would argue that many of the interpretations articulated by modern scholars and their insistence on a purely mentalist or conceptualist reading of the distinction and of Avicenna's theory of essence was informed by the legacy of these traditions. But one should note that many of the Illuminationists implicitly ascribe to Avicenna a real distinction and elaborate their views in opposition to him. Hence, given that much evidence in Avicenna's writings indicates that he regarded the essence/existence distinction as a real one; that he also endorsed a realist interpretation of extramental quiddities, natures, and even (in a qualified sense) of universals; and that this interpretation seems independently confirmed by the works of many Latin and Arabic commentators on Avicenna in the two centuries following his death, future research should give serious consideration to this line of inquiry.

In hindsight, the evidence on quiddity found in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* is fully commensurate from a doctrinal and terminological standpoint. The outline provided in the former work is fleshed out in the latter, especially with regard to the ontological implications of Avicenna's theories. Quiddity in itself, while it can be envisaged separately from concrete and mental existents, is also said to underlie these existents: it is constitutive of the mental universal (which Avicenna describes as quiddity in itself or nature combined with mental attributes, such as universality), and it also exists in each concrete beings as a common nature (*ṭabī'ah*), a true reality (*ḥaqīqah*), a form (*sūrah*), a quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*), and sometimes—in a qualified sense—as a universal (*kullī*). If the results from chapters II and III are collated, then it appears that Avicenna's logical, psychological, and metaphysical treatises agree fully in presenting quiddity in itself as a kind of *epistemological* and *ontological constant* in his philosophy that transcends different ontological contexts, i. e., the mental and the concrete.

Admittedly, there remains the conundrum of how exactly pure quiddity can be said to exist in this constant and irreducible mode in two such different contexts (in the mind and the concrete world). What mode of existence would this amount to? For, if anything, the previous analysis has intimated that what Avicenna generically calls *al-wujūdāyn*, literally, 'the two existences,' i. e., 'the two modes or contexts of concrete and mental existence,' is not a notion that is precise enough to satisfactorily account for his theory of pure quiddity. There remains, therefore, the hypothesis that an additional ontological mode needs to be posited that would correspond to pure quiddity specifically. Answering this question requires an investigation of a third context in connection with quiddity that has hitherto not been broached: the divine world, God's mind, and the intellection of the separate and immaterial beings. I have until now focused mostly on the sublunary context—on human psychology

and the concrete beings—but will in the next chapters address the query of whether pure quiddity exists in the divine world and explore the theological and metaphysical ramifications of this hypothesis. This inquiry will complement the previous chapters and complete the investigation of pure quiddity in Avicenna's philosophy.

Chapter IV: The Special Ontological Mode of Quiddity in Itself

1 The simple, irreducible, and prior existence of pure quiddity

The analysis in chapters II and III indicates that pure quiddity should be granted a special mode of existence and that Avicenna appears to have elaborated a sophisticated and full-blown ontology of essence, whose exact characteristics nevertheless remain to be elucidated. In the present chapter, my aim is to delineate with more precision the ontological mode and status of pure quiddity through a reconsideration of the various senses, aspects, and modes Avicenna ascribes to existence. This calls for a detailed analysis of his theory of ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*) and the notions of priority and posteriority (*al-taqaddum wa-l-ta'akhhur*). Before moving forward, however, a brief recap of the results generated thus far is called for.

In chapter II, I argued that quiddity in itself can be apprehended by the human mind, not only as a distinct consideration, but also as a distinct form and intelligible, thereby raising the hypothesis of its existence in the human intellect. Following Marmura, I highlighted the differences between quiddity in itself and universal quiddity not only as objects conceived by the mind, but also as entities endowed with a distinct ontological status. I argued that Avicenna describes pure quiddity as something entitative, irreducible, and distinct from the universal forms, but at the same time constitutive of, and logically prior to, the complex mental universals. In chapter III, I argued that Avicenna defends a moderate realist, immanentist, and mereological account of quiddity in the concrete world that revolves around the notion of common nature. I showed how, on Avicenna's view, quiddity in itself underlies not only mental existents, but also concrete individual existents by dwelling as an immanent nature and form in these composite entities. This, in effect, amounts to a kind of compromise between the hard realist position endorsed by the Platonists and what could be called a purely conceptualist position according to which quiddity exists only as a logical notion in the mind. Avicenna's moderate realist theory is directly indebted to Aristotle's metaphysics, as is his rebuttal of the Platonic theory of the forms. But his doctrines are also deeply informed by the late-antique discussions about the various aspects of the universals that reached him in the commentarial works translated into Arabic.

Avicenna's analysis of essence relies on the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model, which enables him to distinguish sharply between pure quiddity and its external concomitants and attributes. This distinction occurs both at the epistemological level—we can conceive of pure quiddity in abstraction from its external concomitants—and at the ontological level—pure quiddity and its internal constituents possess a mode of existence that differs from that of the *sunolon* taken with its external attributes. As in the mental context, quiddity in concrete beings can be considered either with its external accidents or in abstraction from them. These distinctions also lie at

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the core of Avicenna's theory of abstraction, which focuses on the quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) that bridges the concrete and mental existence of pure quiddity. Couched in technical terms, this means that the nature—pure quiddity—that exists irreducibly in concrete things has a pendant in the mind, and it is abstraction that provides the epistemological link between these two ontological states of nature. The abstracted state of pure quiddity in the mind—nature or reality conceived of without its material accidents—in turn serves as the foundation for the elaboration of the universal, which is nature or pure quiddity combined with mental concomitants and attributes.

In view of this, there is a sense in which pure quiddity—*qua* quiddity in itself (*al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya*), *qua* nature (*ṭabī'ah*), *qua* reality (*ḥaqīqah*), and *qua* quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*)—can be said to exist *both* in the mind and in the extramental world. On the one hand, quiddity in itself exists as a part of the concrete beings and as their foundational nature and reality. On the other hand, this nature can be abstracted by the intellect and conceived as such, while at the same time serving as a basis for the elaboration of the universals in the mind. Nevertheless, pure quiddity remains an epistemological and ontological constant in all of these contexts; it is only ever just itself. As a result, the main distinction that emerges from Avicenna's analysis is not between different kinds of quiddity—according to Avicenna, quiddity is just quiddity—but rather between *quiddity in itself considered with other things* and *quiddity in itself considered without other things*. This distinction makes it amply clear that the Arabic expression 'in itself' (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) should be understood in terms of *irreducibility* in addition (in some cases) to *distinctness*. Construed in this light, 'quiddity in itself' can also be envisaged distinctly or as a part of a larger and more complex entity.

The manner in which Avicenna qualifies these various aspects of quiddity with conditions and clauses (*shurūṭ*) is intricate and also liable to being misconstrued. Insofar as it can be regarded either with its material concomitants or without them, quiddity in the concrete world is 'without a condition of something else' (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*), which means that something else can, but need not, be considered together with it for this aspect of quiddity to be apprehended. In other words, quiddity in the extramental world can be considered together with its accidents and concomitants, in which case it will be apprehended at the level of the exterior senses and the imagination and 'with something else' (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*), or it can be apprehended without these accidents and concomitants, in which case it will consist solely of an intellectual cognitive act and will lead ultimately to a conception of quiddity in the mind that is 'with no other thing' (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*). It is this flexibility of quiddity in concrete beings that makes it *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar* with regard to the mode of its cognition; for the mind can attach or abstract its external concomitants at will. To put it differently, quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar* can be considered either *bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar* or *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. What

grants it this capacity to be considered as conditioned in either of these two ways is the fact that it is fundamentally ‘unconditioned.’¹

Thus if quiddity is considered *without* its accidents and concomitants, thereby removing it from the specifications and conditions of exterior concrete existence, it will consist of quiddity in itself and nothing else—*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*, here construed in the sense of ‘distinct.’ This is negatively-conditioned quiddity (*bi-shart lā shay’ ākhar*), a pure object that exists in the intellect. The upshot of the foregoing is that the quiddity in itself that exists in each concrete instantiations, and which can be considered with or without its accidents in its state of being unconditioned (*lā bi-shart*), becomes the negatively-conditioned quiddity when apprehended by the mind in abstraction from all of these concomitants (not only the material and exterior concomitants, but also the mental concomitants). This makes the unconditioned quiddity in its pure state a kind of absolute that underlies all existents and represents the foundation for all the other aspects of quiddity.² Regardless of whether it is associated with concomitants, then, there is a sense in which pure quiddity exists *in* mental and concrete beings. In spite of these results, one may still wonder how the existence of pure quiddity differs from that of other entities, and what sense and mode of existence can be ascribed to it. The purpose of this chapter is to address these questions and to elucidate the rather enigmatic set of terms that Avicenna applies to pure quiddity.

1.1 The enigmas of *Metaphysics V.1*.

Avicenna writes the following in *Metaphysics I.5* of *The Cure*:

Text 25: We therefore resume and say: It is clear that each thing has a proper reality [*ḥaqīqah khāṣṣah*], which is its quiddity [*māhiyyah*]. And it is known that the proper reality of each thing is other than the existence designated as established [*al-wujūd alladhī yurādifu l-ithbāt*].³ Hence, if you say: Such an essential reality [*ḥaqīqah*] exists [*mawjūdah*] either in the

1 Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 5, also regards unconditioned quiddity as a requisite for, and as somehow underlying, negatively-conditioned quiddity in the mind: “the absolute purity or transcendence of the ‘quiddity’ [viz., quiddity in itself and unconditioned quiddity] becomes re-established on the ground prepared by this rational process. The ‘quiddity’ is now in the state of ‘negatively conditioned.’”

2 In this connection, it is understandable why later authors, such as Qushji, *Commentary*, 400.4–9, and Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424, label the unconditioned quiddity “absolute quiddity” (*māhiyyah muṭlaqah*). The premise is that pure quiddity is in itself without any determinations, but can combine with other concomitants to constitute both mental and concrete existents.

3 Avicenna’s choice of terms here is interesting. Marmura translates the verb *yurādifu* as “correspond to,” which is perfectly acceptable, but it should be noted that the root can also convey a sense of ‘coming after,’ ‘riding after,’ ‘following,’ etc., which adequately captures the concomitant status of realized and affirmed existence relative to quiddity.

concrete extramental world, or in the soul, or absolutely [*muṭlaqan*] [in a way that] is common to both [*ya'ummuhā jamī'an*], its meaning would be realized and understood.⁴

This statement, which is part of Avicenna's attempt to elucidate the relationship of essence and existence and disambiguate the term *wujūd*, immediately follows a statement (analyzed below) to the effect that true reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and quiddity (*māhiyyah*) correspond to 'proper existence' (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) and should be contrasted to 'established existence' (*wujūd ithbātī*). As Bertolacci has shown, Avicenna's argumentation in this passage, and more broadly throughout section I.5, relies on a terminological and conceptual argument, on the one hand, and on a propositional argument, on the other.⁵ Only the latter is of immediate importance here. It consists in showing that predicating existence of essence *qua* subject yields new knowledge, thereby ascertaining the intentional difference between the two notions.

Two points are striking in this connection. The first is Avicenna's use of the term *ḥaqīqah*, which is usually translated as 'reality' or 'true nature.' Note that the 'realities' referred to in this passage are undoubtedly the pure quiddities, since the term *ḥaqīqah* is used interchangeably in Avicenna's metaphysics with nature (*ṭabī'ah*), quiddity (*māhiyyah*), and quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*). Reality and nature, as these notions are employed in *Introduction* and in *The Cure*—as well as by subsequent commentators such as Ṭūsī—are synonyms of pure quiddity (*al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya*). Moreover, the notions of nature and reality can be discussed in connection with both concrete existence and mental existence, since they exist in complex mental objects and in composite concrete beings, and since the psychological process of abstraction bridges these two ontological spheres. Second, Avicenna describes an 'absolute' (*muṭlaq*) aspect or state of quiddity, which also happens to be common to these ontological domains. Now, what is common is precisely this essential reality and nature. In this regard, this passage is to be read side by side with another excerpt from *Salvation*, where Avicenna makes precisely the same point, albeit by focusing on the notion of *ma'nā*, stating that the latter exists both in the mind and in the concrete world (see Text 11). Given that all the other things that attach to these existents are external concomitants and accidents (either concrete or mental), reality and nature are the only common denominator between them.

While this much is clear, Avicenna's statement also raises a difficult point: does the absolute existence mentioned here represent a third mode of existence that would belong to quiddity in itself in a manner distinct from concrete and mental ex-

⁴ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.5, 31.10–13. To be precise, this statement is placed in the mouth of a hypothetical interlocutor ("If you say..."). Avicenna often employs this method to refute specific doctrines, and the interlocutor is sometimes identifiable as one of the master's disciples. It acts as a foil against which the master can deploy his own argumentation. Here, however, Avicenna endorses the point that is being made, and the dialogue form is merely rhetorical and intended for didactic purposes.

⁵ Bertolacci, *The Distinction*.

istents? Or does it characterize merely the dual or combined concrete and mental states of certain quiddities? In other words, does pure quiddity possess absolute existence exclusively or cumulatively, because it is common to the two groups that together constitute the realm of mental and concrete existents?

These questions in turn raise another issue: how does this passage of *Metaphysics* relate to Avicenna's discussion of quiddity in *Introduction* I.2? More specifically, can the threefold ontological distinction between concrete, mental, and absolute existence that appears in this passage of *Metaphysics* I.5 be mapped onto the threefold scheme mentioned in *Introduction* I.2, which distinguishes quiddity in the concrete world, quiddity in the mind, and quiddity taken in itself? If there is such an overlap, then this would imply that the absolute existence Avicenna mentions in *Metaphysics* I.5 would correspond to the consideration of quiddity considered in itself and in abstraction from concrete and mental existence mentioned in *Introduction* I.2. Before drawing any conclusions, one needs to understand exactly what Avicenna means by 'absolute existence' in this context. Avicenna's claim that quiddities can be said to exist 'absolutely' (*muṭlaqan*) is ambiguous. One interpretation is that quiddity is absolute when it actually exists *both* in concrete and mental beings. Accordingly, these essences would possess an 'absolute' kind of existence—in the sense of 'complete,' 'exhaustive' or 'cumulative'—whenever they are actually instantiated in the mental and extramental spheres. On this interpretation, Avicenna would not be referring to a third and distinct mode of existence of quiddity, but rather to the sum of the other two combined (e. g., the concrete horses in the world and the universal horses in the human minds). His statement could be understood as being *inclusive* and *cumulative* of the two other modes, rather than *exclusive* of them and an alternative to them. On this reading, 'absolute existence' would mean nothing other than the sum of mental and concrete existence with regard to quiddity.⁶

At first blush, this interpretation seems vindicated by Avicenna's pointed remark that this kind of quidditative existence "combines [or is common] to both of them" (*ya'ummuhā jamī'an*). According to this interpretation, Avicenna's threefold distinction of essences could be schematized as follows: a quiddity, say, horseness, can exist (a) in the concrete world, (b) in the mind, or (c) in both contexts. However, this breakdown seems somewhat inappropriate, because all of the quiddities of natural things would fall in the last category, so that the classification would seem redundant and would not add anything meaningful to Avicenna's far more common statements to the effect that the quiddity horseness can exist in concrete and mental existents (*al-wujūdāyn*).

The second interpretation of 'absolute quiddity' is that Avicenna intended his threefold distinction as a classification of different types of quiddities, not of the same quiddity taken in its various ontological contexts. On this alternate interpretation, the threefold scheme can be broken down as follows: (a) those quiddities that

⁶ This is the line of interpretation adopted by Menn, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 155, note 25.

exist in extramental reality, but not necessarily in the mind (i.e., those essences that are not being actually contemplated by an intellect, or, alternatively, those essences corresponding to the separate immaterial beings, whose quiddities, according to Avicenna, cannot be truly grasped intellectually by humans); (b) essences that exist in the mind only and do not (necessarily) have an external counterpart (i.e., fictional and artificial forms); and, finally, (c) essences that exist both in the extramental world and in the mind (i.e., those essences whose mental existence also has an extramental counterpart, a group that includes all the natural forms). An example of the third kind of essence would be ‘horse’ or ‘horseness,’ which exists both in the mind and in extramental reality. On this model, all the quiddities alluded to by Avicenna in this passage would exist either in the mind and/or in concrete reality, but only those that would bridge these two ontological realms would deserve the appellation ‘absolute.’ Unfortunately, given that the master does not provide an example in this passage, it is difficult to determine precisely the intent of his statement.

In spite of this ambiguity, I believe the former interpretation remains the more likely, for reasons I expound below. Since the master otherwise stresses the concomitance (*luzūm*) and co-extensionality of ‘thing’ and ‘existent’ in *Metaphysics* I.5, this reading makes sense and is consistent with the tenor of the general argument being unfolded in this chapter. For there is a way in which Avicenna wants to claim that the same quiddity underlies both mental and extramental instantiations, or else only either one of the two would exist. The view that the ‘absolute existence’ of quiddity is one that includes *both* mental and extramental existence would also be commensurate with Avicenna’s oft-repeated claim that all things exist either in the mind and/or in the concrete world, without a third group of things/existents being explicitly posited by the master. But this conclusion represents only a partial answer and is not altogether compelling. To begin with, there is no way of ascertaining on the basis of this passage alone whether this ‘absolute’ existence of quiddity is intended to be merely cumulative of the mental and extramental instantiations of quiddity, as opposed to it being a claim for a distinct and autonomous third mode of quidditative existence, which would also happen to be inclusive of the way quiddity exists in concrete and mental existents. One may surmise, for argument’s sake, that quiddity in itself could possess a distinct mode of existence, which would also belong to it whenever it underlies mental and extramental existents *qua* complex, contingent entities. More specifically, it could be that the absolute existence of pure quiddity applies *even when* quiddity exists in concrete beings together with material or mental accidents and concomitants. In this case, what Avicenna would be differentiating here is (a) the mode of existence of quiddity *together with* concrete, material accidents; (b) the mode of existence of quiddity *together with* mental accidents; and (c) the irreducible mode of existence of quiddity taken in itself without these concrete and mental concomitants. Nevertheless, this mode is “common” to the essence in complex mental and extramental beings. After all, it was argued previously that pure quiddity represents a metaphysical constant and is said to exist as such with its own ontological mode, *even when it is with other things*. Avicenna’s claim in that

case could be interpreted as being simultaneously inclusive and exclusive of the modes of contingent concrete and mental existence, depending on how one approaches this passage. It would be inclusive in the sense that quiddity is a part of these beings and participates in their existence as composite substances. But it would be exclusive in that there is a third ontological mode that can be connected with quiddity taken as a distinct intelligible entity. Pure quiddity's inclusiveness of complex concrete and mental entities should therefore not be conflated with the notion of its ontological exhaustiveness.

In support of this interpretation, one may adduce evidence taken from *Notes* to the effect that God knows things “absolutely” or “in an absolute way” (*‘alā l-iṭlāq*).⁷ One may also adduce the following segment (already discussed in chapter II; see Text 4):

The intelligible that is intellected by the First with regard to this individual [existent] is this very intelligible form, which is absolute humanness [*wa-ma‘qūl al-awwal min hādihā l-shakhṣi huwa nafs al-ṣūrah al-ma‘qūlah wa-huwa l-insāniyyah al-muṭlaqah*], that is, not a certain individualized humanness [combined] with accidents and concomitants that can be sensed and pointed to.⁸

Here Avicenna explicitly ascribes knowledge of the pure quiddities to God. While the full theological implications of this passage will be fleshed out in chapter V, what is important for the present purposes is the fact that Avicenna describes pure quiddity—in this particular case humanness—as “absolute” (*muṭlaq*) in the state in which it exists in the divine mind. In this case, the ‘absolute quiddity’ contemplated by God is not identical to the one that exists in, or is connected with, the concrete human being. Nor is it presumably identical to the complex universal form in the human mind, although this point is not spelled out in this particular passage. Rather, absolute quiddity encompasses this particular concrete being as one of its instantiations and at the same time transcends it by being a purely abstract, irreducible, and simple concept that can be intellected ‘in itself.’ Accordingly, its mode of existence in the divine mind cannot be the same as in the sublunary world. So the only constant and common denominator between concrete and mental existents—say, between this concrete horse and the universal horse in the mind—is quiddity in itself, which can be apprehended as a distinct object in the human and divine intellects. This intelligible and distinct object must be the ‘absolute’ aspect of quiddity, which transcends particulars and complex universals. If the mental and concrete existents presuppose nature and pure quiddity, the reverse is plainly not true. Nature and pure quiddity do not in themselves presuppose material or mental accidents, so that quiddity in itself can also be considered in abstraction from them.

If this interpretation is retained, then the statement in *Metaphysics* I.5 about absolute quiddity would be making a point similar to the one in *Introduction* I.2 about

⁷ Avicenna, *Notes*, 55.10, section 39.

⁸ Avicenna, *Notes*, 43.10–12, section 25.

the distinctness of essence, whilst at the same time building on it and placing a new emphasis on the notion of existence. Like the latter text, it would distinguish between (a) quiddity in concrete beings, (b) quiddity as complex universal concept, and (c) quiddity in itself or considered ‘absolutely.’ In these texts, the ability to conceive of quiddity in connection with concrete and mental entities (the epistemic aspect), and the fact that quiddity exists in concrete and mental beings (the ontological and mereological aspect), seem to be predicated on the premise of an absolute and unconditioned state or mode of quiddity that transcends these contexts of complex and contingent existence. In this regard, it is noteworthy that later Arabic authors often refer to quiddity in itself by calling it ‘absolute quiddity’ (*al-māhiyyah al-muṭ-laqah*).⁹ There is little doubt that this passage of *Metaphysics* I.5 lies at the origin of this exegetical trend and that many of Avicenna’s commentators opted to interpret it in light of, and as mirroring, *Introduction* I.2.

To recap, it was shown that what is common to concrete and mental entities are not the accidents and concomitants characteristic of concrete and mental existence, but the quiddity in itself, nature, and reality. Avicenna uses these three terms interchangeably in *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1 to describe pure quiddity. It is the pure essence, nature, or reality that exists ‘absolutely,’ in the sense that it possesses its own ontological mode and that, thanks to this special mode, it exists as a constant within these contingent beings. If mental and concrete existents are what they are by virtue of that nature, and if that nature in addition may be said to exist distinctly and irreducibly in the intellect, in a mode different from that of the universals, then it must exist in a way or mode proper to it. This line of interpretation clearly postulates another mode of existence in Avicennian metaphysics apart from contingent, composite, concrete existence, on the one hand, and complex, universal, mental existence, on the other; this point remains to be investigated.

In the final analysis, this passage of *Metaphysics* raises the tantalizing possibility that the absolute existence of pure quiddity is both inclusive of the composite existents and something else altogether that is proper to it alone. Again, this would suggest an independent mode of existence of pure quiddity that would also happen to encompass, somewhat accidentally, the contingent existence of mental and concrete beings. To delve further into this issue let us once again turn to *Metaphysics* V.1, which contains the bulk of the evidence concerning the existence of pure essence. There Avicenna asserts unambiguously—one might even say boldly—that essence as such possesses some kind of autonomous existence (*wujūd*, *mawjūd*). What is more, he even alludes to the ‘prior existence’ of pure quiddity. One interpretive challenge focuses on whether this existence of pure quiddity is the same as that of the universal being and the concrete being or something else altogether. Historically, it is worth pointing out that the evidence that can be extracted from *Metaphysics* V.1

⁹ See sections I.3 and II.8.

contributed to shaping the Latin scholastic theory of the *esse essentiae*. In light of this fact, these passages need to be carefully evaluated.

The claim that quiddity in itself exists or has existence (*wujūd*) is iterated by Avicenna in *Metaphysics* V.1 with considerable intent and forcefulness. There one reads, for instance, that the pure quiddity animalness “is prior in existence [*mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd*] to the animal that is either particular ... or universal,” and that this priority is similar to “the way in which the simple is prior to the complex and the part to the whole”; and Avicenna adds that “in this kind of existence [*bi-hādhā l-wujūd*], it [pure animal] is only animal.”¹⁰ Equally interestingly for our purposes, Avicenna goes on to argue some paragraphs below that quiddity in itself possesses a divine mode of existence. The key passage reads as follows:

Text 26: Animal, then, taken with its accidents is the natural thing [*al-shay’ al-ṭabī’ī*]. What is taken in itself is the nature [*ṭabī’ah*, here a synonym of quiddity in itself or pure essence], of which it is said that its existence [*wujūd*] is prior to [*aqdam min*] natural existence [*al-wujūd al-ṭabī’ī*] [in the manner of] the priority of the simple to the composite. It is [that] whose existence is specified as being divine existence [*yakhuṣṣu wujūdudu bi-annahu l-wujūd al-ilāhī*], because the cause of its existence [*sabab wujūdihi*], inasmuch as it is animal, is the providence [*ināyah*] of God most exalted.¹¹

Avicenna here speaks of the “divine existence” (*wujūd ilāhī*) that the essential nature or pure quiddity possesses in itself. He contrasts this kind of existence to “natural existence,” which is the aspect of quiddity in concrete extramental beings taken together with its material attributes, and therefore a composite whole made up of quiddity, existence, concomitants, and accidents. Finally, he informs us that essential nature or pure quiddity is prior to natural existence.

Quite understandably, these various statements have puzzled scholars, since they seem to refer to an ontological mode of essence not otherwise discussed in depth in Avicenna’s works. More precisely, these enigmas of *Metaphysics* V.1, as I

¹⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 201.10–11; see Text 9.

¹¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.16–205.2, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 156. This passage has recently been discussed by Benevich, Die ‘göttliche Existenz’; and Faruque, Mullā Ṣadrā, especially 274–288. Given the significance of these two passages, it seems appropriate to point out here that the various manuscripts of *Metaphysics* V.1 I consulted (thanks to the gracious help of Amos Bertolacci) all confirm the fundamental sense and intent of the Cairo edition. There are only minor differences, which, however, do not alter Avicenna’s argumentation regarding the ontology of pure quiddity in these passages. For the record, I include the variants below and highlight the differences between them and the Cairo edition in bold: MS Leiden Or. 4, p.2, ll.33–34: *aw kull wujūdi aw ‘aql ... bal hādhā l-wujūd huwa ḥayawān faqaṭ wa-insān faqaṭ*; p. 3, ll.19–20: *wa-huwa alladhī yakhuṣṣu wujūduhu bi-annahu l-wujūd ala [alif-lam-alif] [sic] li-anna sabab wujūdihi [bi-?]mā huwa ḥayawān min ‘ināyati llāh*; Oxford, Pococke 125, p. 328a, ll. 13–17: *wa-kawmuhu ma’a ghairihi amr ‘ariḍ aw lāzim fa-l-ṭabī’ah al-ḥayawāniyyah aw al-insāniyyah bi-hādhā l-wajh mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd*. The key point is that the notion of a *wujūd* of pure quiddity that is prior to the other modes of existence is articulated in all the manuscripts.

have called them, have led to a bifurcation in the modern scholarship. They have comforted some scholars in the belief that pure essence does after all correspond to a third mode of existence, an essential and divine existence, which is to be identified with existence in God or in the divine beings more generally, viz., the separate intellects.¹² But they have pushed others to doubt that Avicenna genuinely intended these statements.¹³ However, the issue of whether the quiddities can be situated in the divine mind should represent the last step of our analysis, since Avicenna says nothing explicit to that effect in this passage and limits himself merely to connecting the quiddities with God's providence and causality. Hence, this passage needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. What does Avicenna mean by "divine existence," and does it really amount to another, alternative mode of existence, distinct from both mental and concrete existence? How does this remarkable excerpt fit in the picture painted by the previous analysis of Avicenna's theory of quiddity in itself? And what exactly does Avicenna intend when he refers to the ontological *priority* of nature or pure quiddity?

Avicenna's claim that quiddity possesses divine existence is equivocal. There is a sense in which the existence of quiddity could be divine because it resembles the existence of divine beings or shares in its qualities. There is also a more literal sense according to which it could be called divine, namely, because it exists *in* the divine beings or separate intellects. Finally, one could argue that quiddity is divine because it is linked to the causal activity of God. At the very least, then, there are two separate

12 Goichon, Gardet, Bäck, and, more recently, Marwan Rashed, have all defended a variant of the view that the quiddities exist in the divine intellect, although they formulated different interpretations concerning the ontological status of these divine essences. Moreover, they have not all relied on this very passage for their interpretation. See Goichon, *La distinction*, 85–90 (nevertheless, it should be noted that in her study, *La théorie des formes*, 150, Goichon prefers to locate the quiddities primarily in the Agent Intellect); Bäck, *Avicenna's Conception*, 236; idem, *Avicenna on Existence*, 364–365; and Rashed, *Ibn 'Adī*, 122–123; see also Porro, *Universaux*, 44–47; Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*, who provides a brief summary of this issue; and Faruque, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, especially 274–288. As I explain below, however, the issues of the ontological status of quiddity in itself, and of where the latter is to be located, are distinct (albeit interrelated). They should accordingly be treated separately.

13 Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 155, note 25, considers the reference to divine existence as "anomalous" and interprets Avicenna as implicitly attributing this view to "Ibn 'Adī and his school." Given that Menn otherwise rejects the notion of a distinct mode of existence of pure quiddity, it makes sense that he would incline toward this view. However, the reading *al-wujūd al-ilāhi* is confirmed by all the manuscripts of *Metaphysics* V.1 I consulted. Moreover, *Metaphysics* V.1 contains numerous references to the existence of pure quiddity, while other texts, such as *Introduction* and *On the Soul*, explicitly connect quiddity with divine intellection and the divine beings and, hence, with a divine mode of being. Finally, although Menn interprets this passage as referring to the 'species,' I think it is quite clear from the context that Avicenna is referring here to quiddity in itself, which he systematically differentiates from species or 'speciesness' as such. In my eyes, then, the main challenge is to try to understand what exactly this claim means in the context of Avicenna's metaphysics and ontology of essence.

issues at stake here, which have often been conflated in the secondary literature, but which need to be disentangled and investigated separately. The first issue is qualitative and definitional and revolves around what exactly is ‘divine’ and ‘prior’ about the existence of quiddity. What kind of existence and ontological status should be ascribed to the pure quiddities as they exist in concrete and mental beings, and how can this immanentist mode of existence be said to be “absolute,” “prior,” and “divine”? The second issue is one of localization and focuses on whether these pure quiddities exist in God and/or in the other separate intellects, in the sense that their “divine existence” would literally mean existence *in* the divine beings *qua* objects of their intellection. Although it will become clear that they are connected, they are treated separately in what follows: the former is the object of the present chapter, while the latter will be examined in detail in chapter V. At any rate, answering these questions and understanding exactly how existence can be said to apply to pure quiddity require a detour through Avicenna’s concept of existence itself. More specifically, I shall address his theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), which represents another piece of the puzzle.

1.2 The modulation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) and the ontological modes according to Avicenna

Avicenna’s ontology of essence emerged as a result of the confluence of two key problematics he inherited from ancient philosophy: Aristotle’s ontology, and more precisely his theory of a focal meaning of being; and the late-antique discussions of the universals and common things that grew out of Plato’s and Aristotle’s legacies. The latter problematic informed Avicenna’s main framework and doctrine of essence and the universals and was examined in detail in the previous chapters of this book. The former, in contrast, represents the main model for Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation. It is this aspect that I wish to explore in more depth in the present chapter. My main argument in what follows is that Avicenna elaborated on Aristotle’s theory of *pros hen* homonymy to articulate a systematic theory of ontological modulation that could accommodate essential being and the special ontological status of pure quiddity.

Aristotle explains in *Metaphysics* Γ.2 that although being is said in many ways (τὸ δὲ ὄν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς)—a claim he reiterates elsewhere in the same work in Δ.7, E.2, Z.1, and K.8—it is not a purely ambiguous or equivocal notion, because there is a core or focal meaning that ties its various sub-senses together. In other words, the various senses of being can be predicated in relation to a core, focal, or central meaning from which they derive and on which they depend. The Greek expression that Aristotle uses in this passage (πρὸς ἓν καὶ μίαν τινὰ φύσιν) has been at the center of a lively and apparently endless discussion between schol-

ars.¹⁴ Over the years, it has been translated in many different ways, such as *pros hen* homonymy, focal meaning, core-related homonymy, core-dependent homonymy, equivocity, ambiguity, and multivocity, to name only a few. What is important for my purposes is to highlight what may have been Aristotle's original intention in maintaining this theory. In describing being as neither a strict univocal nor a strict equivocal notion, Aristotle allows for a certain methodological flexibility in the way in which metaphysics as a science can be carried out. For the effect of maintaining a core or focal sense of being is that metaphysics can study being in general or being *qua* being, and not just one instance or class of beings to the exclusion of others, which would unduly limit its scope and relevance. Two key implications that derive from Aristotle's theory of *pros hen* homonymy are, first, that it preserves the unity and coherence of the metaphysical enterprise in the face of the apparent multiplicity of the aspects of being (1003b10–12); and, second, that it enables Aristotle at the same time to hierarchize these various aspects in terms of priority or relevance for the metaphysician. Aristotle connects the *pros hen* homonymy of being with the notions of priority and posteriority at $\Gamma.2$, 1003b16–18, and then later at $Z.4$, 1030a21–22. On this view, substance will be prior and more relevant for the metaphysical inquiry than accidents, a claim also articulated in *Categories*. Here we see that Aristotle's theory of a core meaning of being was construed in close relation to his categorial scheme, which defined substance as the primary category and the real object of the metaphysical investigation.

As I will show below, Avicenna inherits and endorses these basic features of the metaphysical project as outlined by Aristotle. For him as well, being is said in many ways, although there is a core meaning that ties its various senses and thus preserves the status of metaphysics as a single and integrated science. In addition, Avicenna is an Aristotelian in that he connects the first and core sense of existence with substance: substance is what exists in a prior and most important or relevant way for the metaphysician. This means that Avicenna also insists, as we shall see, on interpreting the modulation of being in light of the notion of priority. In view of this, the master's understanding of ontology appears to be firmly rooted in Aristotle's work and more specifically in the Aristotelian theory of *pros hen* homonymy. Nevertheless, Aristotle's theory of focal meaning raised certain crucial questions for medieval thinkers who were at the receiving end of the Greek philosophical tradition and approached metaphysics with different aims and intentions in mind. One problem was how being as an instance of *pros hen* homonymy relates to the class of paronymous terms Aristotle discusses in some of his logical works, such as *Categories* and *Topics*. This issue was discussed at length in late antiquity, and these late-antique interpretations in turn shaped the views of Arabic scholars regarding the logical status of

14 The literature is massive; the reader will benefit from the overview and references given in Cohen, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

philosophical terms.¹⁵ Another issue, and one of considerable interest to Avicenna and other medieval thinkers, was how being could be said to have several meanings, to be said ‘in many ways’ (Γ.2, Δ.7, E.2, Z.1, and K.8), and yet to possess only one core and overarching meaning. Indeed, Aristotle’s various statements on this topic could strike one as contradictory, and the difference between sheer equivocity and core-related homonymy as purely rhetorical. The ambiguity of Aristotle’s position on this topic was one factor that later resulted in the medieval controversies regarding the univocity and equivocity of being in Islam and the Latin West. Directly connected to this topic was the question of the types of objects, and the number of the senses of being, that *pros hen* homonymy—and by extension therefore Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation—encompassed. Is the core sense of being recognized by Aristotle and Avicenna limited to the categories, or does it include other senses of being and other types of existents as well? Put differently, what is the relation between Aristotle’s theory of *pros hen* homonymy in Γ.2 and his description of the various senses of being in Δ.7? This question can be reformulated in the context of Avicenna’s philosophy: how is his theory of ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*) related to his recognition of various senses of being in *Metaphysics* I.5, and what types of existents does the former include within its purview?

Our understanding of how Avicenna went about to solve these issues is presently limited and calls for a detailed investigation. With regard to essence specifically, I would surmise that one factor responsible for impeding a proper appreciation of Avicenna’s ontology of quiddity in the earlier scholarship—exemplified by Marmura’s unsuccessful attempts at tackling this problem in his articles—is our incomplete understanding of the shaykh’s theory of ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*). Quite apart from the fact that this theory has been little studied, there remains considerable confusion over what constitutes modes, aspects, and senses of existence in Avicenna’s metaphysics.¹⁶ The metaphysical implications of this theory need to be further fleshed out, particularly in their relation to the Avicennian doctrine of pure quiddity. Only by focusing on this crucial doctrine can one address the question of whether Avicenna’s ontological framework accommodates the special status of quiddity in any significant way.¹⁷ The following analysis intends to shed light on these

15 On this issue and its relevance for Arabic philosophy, see Wolfson, *The Amphibolous Terms*; and Treiger, *Avicenna’s Notion*.

16 Surprisingly, many recent contributions on Avicenna’s metaphysics say nothing or very little about *tashkik*; this is the case, for example, of Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*; Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s Metaphysics*; idem, *Il pensiero*; Lizzini, *Wuğūd-Mawğūd*; eadem, *Fluxus*; Koutzarova, *Das Transzendente*; and Menn, *Fārābī*; and idem, *Avicenna*. Treiger, *Avicenna’s Notion*, which builds on Wolfson, *The Amphibolous Terms*, should be credited for bringing attention to this crucial aspect of Avicenna’s metaphysics. This section of my book benefited from discussions with Rosabel Ansari. I wish to thank her for her valuable comments and feedback on an earlier draft.

17 I suspect that the inadequate understanding of Avicenna’s theory of *tashkik al-wujūd* can account also for many of the later critiques levelled against him; for instance, Averroes’s and Thomas Aquinas’s qualms with Avicenna’s treatment of oneness and being (see Menn, *Fārābī*; and Aertsen, *Medi-*

points and to clarify the manner in which the various modes and aspects of existence Avicenna outlines in his works can be said to relate to pure quiddity. More specifically, I have three main goals: first, I dissect and analyze the various modes or aspects (*anḥā'*, *aḥkām*) that together constitute *tashkīk al-wujūd* according to Avicenna; second, I address the issue of whether *tashkīk* applies to the predicamental or transcendental level or both; third, I explore the way in which this modulationist ontological theory relates to pure quiddity through the lens of its main aspect, priority (*al-taqaddum*). In addition, I examine the problem of how *tashkīk al-wujūd* relates to the two senses of being Avicenna outlines in *Metaphysics* I.5, 'proper existence' (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) and 'established existence' (*wujūd ithbātī*). Building on a key study by Alexander Treiger, I intend to show that Avicenna's understanding of *tashkīk* extends well beyond the logical sphere and the logical discussion of the modulated terms (*asmā' mushakkikah*) and into the realm of metaphysics. There is an organic evolution—which also marks a turning point in the history of early Arabic metaphysics—from the logical theory of the modulated terms (which Avicenna inherited from the previous Greek and Arabic philosophical traditions, especially Fārābī) to the metaphysical theory of the modulation of existence (which is a key Avicennian elaboration).

1.2.1 From the modulated terms (*asmā' mushakkikah*) to ontological modulation

Medieval and modern scholars have approached Avicenna's concept of being in different ways and provided conflicting interpretations of it, to the extent that it has been construed alternatively as a univocal and equivocal notion. In spite of this diversity of scholarly views, some modern studies have convincingly argued that Avicenna's notion of existence is, strictly speaking, neither univocal nor equivocal, but rather rests somewhere between these two poles. As Wolfson and later Treiger showed, Avicenna endorsed and also elaborated on the works of previous thinkers, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, Porphyry, and Fārābī, who had devised an elaborate classification of philosophical terms, and some of whom regarded existence as a notion located midway between univocity and equivocity.¹⁸ In particular, Avicenna appears to be building on the views of his illustrious predecessor Fārābī, who, as far as we know, was the first in Islamic intellectual history to recognize an intermediary class of terms he called *al-asmā' al-mushakkikah*. Like Fārābī, Avicenna believes that the terms *mawjūd* and *wujūd* fall in the category of the *asmā' mushakkikah*, an ex-

eval Philosophy and the Transcendentals, 213–218 respectively) likely stem from their partial understanding—partly due to the limitations imposed by textual transmission and/or translation—of Avicenna's theory of the modulated terms (*asmā' mushakkikah*) and modulation (*tashkīk*), which in his mind apply to both existence (*wujūd*) and oneness (*wahdah*). Hence, this incomplete understanding of Avicenna's theory of *tashkīk* has had the effect not only of unduly limiting the scope of his ontology and the ontological relevance of his doctrine of pure quiddity, but also of generating profound misunderstandings about his ontology in the later Islamic and Christian intellectual traditions.

18 Wolfson, *The Amphibolous Terms*; Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*.

pression which has been translated variably as ‘modulation,’ ‘modulated univocity,’ ‘analogy,’ ‘equivocity,’ and ‘ambiguity.’ It should be noted that Avicenna’s treatment of ‘the modulated terms’—which, following Treiger, is the translation I will adhere to throughout my analysis—typically unfolds in a logical context and can thus be found in the logical sections of his philosophical treatises.¹⁹

19 The main texts (and the ones most commonly cited) in the modern discussion of modulated terms are Avicenna, *Categories*, I.2, 9–11; *Dialectic*, II.2, 117–120; *Elements of Philosophy*, 53; *Philosophical Compendium*, 36–39, section 11; and *Discussions*, sections 647–648, 218–219. Other texts that discuss the modulated terms and ontological modulation, but have received much less attention, are *Guidance*, 71–72, and 232.9–12; *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*, for which see Kalbarczyk, *The Kitāb al-Maqūlāt*, 326 of the Arabic text (it contains a section on *asmā’ mushakkikah*, although it should be said that there is some overlap between this text and *Categories*); *Notes*, 163, section 238; and *Physics* (Avicenna, *Physics*, I.3, 31.13–16; II.2, 128, 132), which describes the principles used in physics as indicating modulation (*dalālat al-tashkik*), in the same way, Avicenna tells us, that the metaphysical notions of existence, oneness, and principle (*mabda’*) are modulated. It has not been sufficiently acknowledged in the secondary literature that the ontological distinctions Avicenna draws in other sections of his works, e. g., in *Metaphysics* VI.3, regarding priority and posteriority especially, pertain directly to *tashkik* and represent some the modes that modulate *wujūd*, even though the term *tashkik* itself is not mentioned in these passages; more on this below. Since the modern scholarship on Avicenna’s notion of existence (*wujūd*) is profuse, I cite here only the most relevant studies that discuss the univocity and equivocity of being in Avicenna and especially the notion of *ism mushakkik* (or *ism mushakkak*): Wolfson, *The Amphibolous Terms*; Lizzini, *Wuğūd-Mawğūd*; eadem, *Ibn Sīnā’s Metaphysics*; De Haan, *The Doctrine*; Treiger, *Avicenna’s Notion*, who provides the most detailed discussion of *tashkik* in Avicenna; Bonmariage, *Le réel*, 54–61; Menn, *Fārābī*; idem, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*; Druart, *Ibn Sīnā*; Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 222–227; and Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*. The ancient philosophical background of the Arabic reception and understanding of the *asmā’ mushakkikah* has been lucidly reconstructed by Wolfson and Treiger, even though numerous thorny questions remain. For example, there is still confusion about the precise translation and meaning of these terms and of *tashkik*. Three main trends in the scholarship can be highlighted that prioritize (a) ambiguity, (b) analogy, and (c) modulation. Goichon, *Lexique*, vol. 1, 162, translates *tashkik* as both “ambiguïté” and “analogie,” anticipating Wolfson’s description of the *asmā’ mushakkikah* as “amphibolous” or “ambiguous.” For Mayer, *Faḥr ad-Dīn*, 213, as well, *tashkik* implies ambiguity. That the *asmā’ mushakkikah* were seen as fundamentally ambiguous by some authors emerges from Ghazālī’s *Doctrines of the Philosophers*, 18. There Ghazālī defines these terms as *mushakkikah* “on account of their ambiguity” (*li-taraddudihi*) (Ghazālī uses the adjectives *muttafiqah*, *mushakkikah*, and *mutaraddidah* interchangeably in his description of these terms). To make things more complicated, Marmura in the index to his edition and translation of *Metaphysics* of *The Cure* lists the expressions *bi-l-ishṭirāk* and *bi-l-tashkik* under the single entry ‘equivocity,’ thereby emphasizing the ambiguous nature of these terms (see Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, Marmura edition, 430). In contrast, the connection between these words and a sort of analogy is emphasized by Goichon, De Haan, Benevich (*Essentialität*, 57–58, 67), and McGinnis (Avicenna, *The Physics*, I.3, 31.15), as well as by scholars working on the reception of Avicenna’s doctrine in the Latin tradition. It finds traction in some Arabic sources, e. g., Averroes’s epitome of *Metaphysics* (see Arnzen’s comments in Averroes, *On Aristotle’s “Metaphysics”*, 199–200; for the relation between the Arabic discussion of these terms and the scholastic theory of analogy, see de Libera, *Les sources*). Following de Libera, I think it would be worthwhile studying in more depth the connection between Avicenna’s theory of *tashkik al-wujūd* and medieval Latin theories of analogy. However, and to my knowledge, Avicenna himself does not explicitly connect *tashkik* with a form of analogical reasoning and reserves other technical

In light of these passages, it becomes quite clear that Avicenna does not regard existence as a perfectly univocal (*mutawāṭīʿi*) term and notion. In *Guidance*, for example, in the section devoted to his treatment of the categories, Avicenna distinguishes between terms or enunciations (*alfāz*) that are equivocal (*muttafiqah*), others that are univocal (*mutawāṭīʿi*), and still others that are modulated (*mushakkikah*).²⁰ These modulated terms lie between the pure univocals and the pure equivocals and allow for a variety of semantic nuances or even sub-senses, even though these differences or variations in meaning are tied together by a single overarching and focal meaning, bringing them closer to the camp of univocal terms. This characteristic of the *asmāʿ mushakkikah*, and the fact that being or *wujūd* is one of them, perhaps explains why the master states in *Metaphysics* I.5 that *wujūd* is said “according to various senses” or “in many ways” (*kathīr al-maʿānī*). In *Metaphysics* VI.3, he states that existence “varies according to a variety of modes” (*yakhtalifu fī ʿiddat al-aḥkām*), a claim reiterated in *Categories* and *Philosophical Compendium*.²¹ Yet, *wujūd* is not for

terms for analogy, especially those from the roots *n-s-b* and *q-y-s*. Finally, according to Treiger, Avicenna’s Notion, especially 329–330, 360–362, *tashkīk* means something like “modulation” or even “transcendental modulation”; cf. Lizzini, Ibn Sīnā’s *Metaphysics*, who describes it as “a nuanced univocality or univocity,” and Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 222, as “focal homonymy.” Treiger claims that the notion of existence in Avicenna is neither a pure univocal nor a pure equivocal, but rather a modulated univocal, which is applied both to God and the creatures. According to Treiger, Avicenna is the first Arabic thinker to have articulated a theory of the transcendental modulation of being. I follow his lead in translating *tashkīk* as ‘modulation.’ Building on these previous studies, my aim in what follows is to show, first, that *tashkīk* is systematically defined and ‘constituted’ by a variety of ‘modes’ or ‘aspects’ (*naḥw*, *ḥukm*), the most important of which is priority and posteriority, and second, that the theory of the modulation of being lies at the core of Avicenna’s ontology and that it underscores most of the ontological distinctions the master establishes, even when he does not explicitly mention *tashkīk*, so that this notion should be connected with other key passages that have been left out from the modern analysis. There is on my view a progression from a purely logical consideration (the *asmāʿ mushakkikah*) to a full-blown metaphysical theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). Finally, it is important to point out that *tashkīk* serves to qualify many other notions in addition to *wujūd* in Avicenna’s philosophy; at the beginning of *Metaphysics* III.2, for example, Avicenna explains that “‘the one’ is said in a modulated way” (*al-wāḥid yuqālu bi-l-tashkīk*), and the same can be said of some of the principles of physics (*The Physics*, I.3, 31.5–16).

20 Avicenna, *Guidance*, 72.1–3. To my knowledge, this text has never been discussed in the modern literature on the *asmāʿ mushakkikah*. This threefold distinction between univocal, equivocal, and modulated terms reappears (with a very close phrasing) in Avicenna, *Physics*, I.3, 31.13–16. McGinnis translates *muttafiq* as meaning “what is agreed upon,” but I think its meaning in this context is closer to “equivocal.”

21 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.5, 31.8; VI.3, 276.14; cf. *Categories*, I.2, 9–11; *Elements of Philosophy*, 53; *Philosophical Compendium*, 36–39. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV.2 and VII.1; and *Topics* I.15. In those texts Aristotle examines how some terms can be said to have many meanings; the Greek term πολλαχῶς clearly corresponds to Avicenna’s *kathīr al-maʿānī* in the Arabic texts. Nevertheless, for Aristotle and Avicenna these terms are tied together by a focal meaning, which deters us from regarding them as completely equivocal. These Aristotelian passages, together with Alexander’s commentary on them, form the basis for the Arabic understanding of the *asmāʿ mushakkikah* as terms lying between equivocals and univocals.

that matter an absolute equivocal (*ism mushtarak* or *ism muttafiq*) either, since the fundamental and focal meaning of existence remains the same across its various uses and contexts. As Avicenna explains in *Elements of Philosophy*, an *ism mushakkik* is a term that “falls under a single meaning but not in an equal way (or not without distinction) [*yaqa‘a ‘alā ma‘nā wāḥid lā ‘alā l-sawā’*].”²² As recent commentators have pointed out, the Avicennian *asmā’ mushakkikah*, of which *wujūd* is a prime example, therefore lie somewhere between pure equivocality and pure univocity, which is why they are described as modulated or ambiguous, although their nature remains closer to univocity.²³ In brief, *wujūd* is best regarded as a modulated notion, which, while it allows for various nuances and even a variety of sub-senses, possesses a single focal meaning.²⁴

The discussion has focused thus far on Avicenna’s treatment of the modulated terms, of which *wujūd* is the primary and arguably the most important instance. However, it is striking that these logical discussions have a metaphysical pendant, namely, the theory of ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*) whose exposition appears, in contrast, in the metaphysical sections of these same works. Accordingly, *Guidance*, *Elements of Philosophy*, and *The Cure*, are three works that each allocate an analysis of the *asmā’ mushakkikah* to their logical section and an analysis of *tashkik al-wujūd* to their metaphysical section. This makes it apparent that Avicenna intended the theory of logical modulation to have a direct application to his ontology and to extend to the metaphysical investigation, unlike, it would seem, Fārābī, who limits *tashkik* mostly to a logical context. But what exactly are the metaphysical implications that derive from regarding *wujūd* as an *ism mushakkik*? How is this notion modulated and implemented in the metaphysical inquiry? What is its metaphysical scope and relevance, and to what objects does it apply? Finally, how, if at all, does it relate to quiddity? In order to answer these questions and contribute to the ongoing reflection on this topic, it is necessary to examine how Avicenna conceives of the metaphysical theory of *tashkik al-wujūd* that grows out of his logical commitment of regarding *wujūd* as a modulated term.

²² Avicenna, *Elements of Philosophy*, 3.13–14.

²³ This explains Treiger’s choice (Avicenna’s Notion, 355) to translate *ism mushakkik* as “modulated univocal.”

²⁴ Building on Treiger, Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*, 285–293, provides a useful summary of the Greek background of *tashkik*. Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation was apparently accepted by some of his immediate disciples; Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 281.10 and 282.1, follows his master in describing *wujūd* as a term predicated according to modulation (*ḥaml al-tashkik*). It later becomes a central feature of the ontology of some postclassical philosophers in Islam, such as Ṭūsī, who defended this notion against the attacks of Shahrastānī; see Ṭūsī, *Downfalls*, 55.17–62.17.

1.2.2 The various modes or aspects (*anḥā*, *aḥkām*) of *tashkīk al-wujūd*

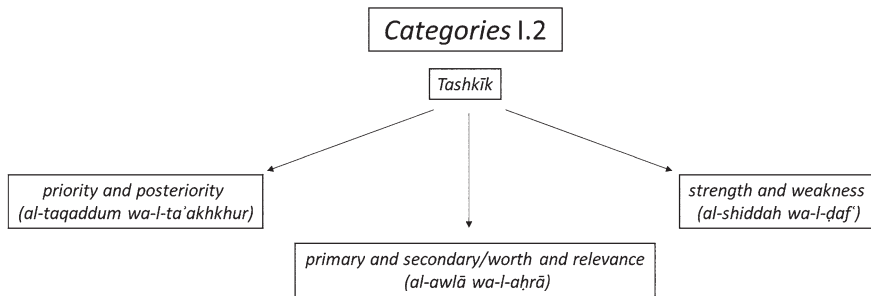
At this stage we need to explore the inner mechanisms of *tashkīk* and identify its constitutive elements.²⁵ For Avicenna, what makes the notion of existence subject to modulation is the fact that it can be qualified by a set of ‘modes’ or ‘aspects’ (sing. *ḥukm*, *naḥw*) that establish differences (*ikhtilāfāt*) in the way it is predicated of things.²⁶ Now, the list of modes or aspects associated with ontological modulation that Avicenna provides varies depending on the text in which this topic is addressed. Some of these aspects appear to have been inherited from the earlier metaphysical tradition and, in the early Arabic context, are mentioned already in Fārābī, while others seem to be an Avicennian innovation. Thus, the *ḥukm* of priority and posteriority, for example, goes back centuries and is already hinted at in Aristotle and his commentators, who believed that being is said in a prior and posterior way. In contrast, Avicenna’s inclusion of the modalities of ‘the possible’ and ‘the necessary’ as aspects that also modulate *wujūd* and are integral parts of *tashkīk* find no precedents in the earlier Arabic tradition.²⁷

25 This task was aptly begun by Treiger. Nevertheless, Treiger’s discussion of the aspects of *tashkīk al-wujūd* is incomplete and neglects to incorporate key texts, which would otherwise have strengthened it. The most glaring omission in this regard is Avicenna’s discussion of the ‘aspects’ (*aḥkām*) of *wujūd* in *Metaphysics* VI.3. Although *tashkīk* is not mentioned by name in that passage, it obviously pertains to it; more on this below.

26 The term *ḥukm* can mean ‘judgment’ or ‘rule’ and is frequently used in Arabic logic; see, for instance, Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 125. In Avicenna’s philosophy, it also appears in a metaphysical context. Marmura translates it as “governing rule,” “value” and “status” (in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 409, note 6). But with regard to the topic at hand it should probably be translated as ‘aspect’ or ‘mode.’ Regardless of the translation, the point is that there are various ‘modes’ or ‘aspects’ that affect *tashkīk*. It is important to stress that these terms do not refer specifically or exclusively to the modalities (*jihāt*) of existence (possibility and necessity), but include other notions that modulate existence. The modalities of ‘the possible’ and ‘the necessary’ are only one of many ways Avicenna devises to modulate *wujūd* and establish ontological differences. The aim here is to understand what exactly ‘performs’ the modulation in *tashkīk al-wujūd*. The key terms listed above are an effective way of determining whether Avicenna is talking about ontological modulation, because they appear in all such discussions. Thus, the passage of *Metaphysics* VI.3 would be a prime example of an *implicit* discussion of *tashkīk al-wujūd*.

27 My point of course is not that earlier philosophers such as Fārābī did not discuss *wujūd* in connection with possibility and necessity, but rather that they did not systematically and programmatically define these notions as aspects of *tashkīk al-wujūd*. In fact, one does not find a consummated theory of *tashkīk al-wujūd* prior to Avicenna, and the idea of *tashkīk* seems to have been limited largely to the logical sphere and thus more strictly to the *asmā’ mushakkikah*. Thus, in Fārābī, it is associated primarily with a theory of intellectual doubt and perplexity and thus with rhetoric and sophistry, rather than with the ontological investigation. This emphasizes the etymological connection between *tashkīk* and the meaning of the root *sh-k-k* (‘to doubt,’ ‘be ambiguous’). In contrast, and while some elements of his doctrine may have been prefigured in Fārābī’s works, Avicenna’s systematization of this theory in a metaphysical context strikes me as a key innovation, which also had a momentous impact on subsequent Islamic intellectual history.

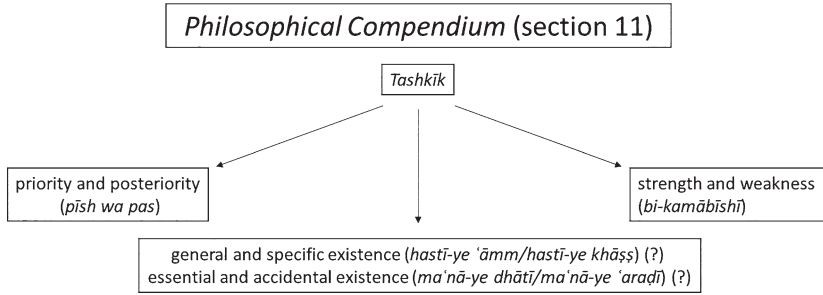
Avicenna is quite consistent in enumerating the modes of *tashkīk* in his various works and in implementing a framework thanks to which existence can be said to differ when predicated of different things. This textual overlap reflects a sustained interest in this methodological question on his part and shows that it is not an exaggeration to suggest that we are dealing here with a systematic theory of ontological modulation. I shall now turn to these texts and examine them individually with the aim of identifying the main aspects of ontological modulation. In a passage of *Categories*, which has already been closely studied by Treiger, Avicenna puts forth a threefold scheme whereby modulation occurs on account of (1) priority and posteriority; (2) worth and relevance, or ‘the primary and secondary’; and (3) degrees of strength and weakness. This scheme is represented in the diagram below:



Two of the notions mentioned in *Categories* I.2 (priority and posteriority, and relevance) also reappear in *Physics* I.3.²⁸ Moreover, as Treiger noted, this scheme is close to the one Avicenna articulates in *Philosophical Compendium*, although there Avicenna appears to introduce another distinction pertaining to modulation, which was not discussed by Treiger, and which relies on the apparent distinctions between general and specific existence and between essential and accidental existence.²⁹ Given the present uncertainty regarding these additional distinctions, however, and the fact that they will be treated in more detail later on, I include them only tentatively in the following diagram:

28 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.3, 31.14: *bi-l-taqdīm wa-l-ta'khūr wa-bi-l-ahṛā*. Oddly, McGinnis's translation leaves out the term *bi-l-ahṛā*.

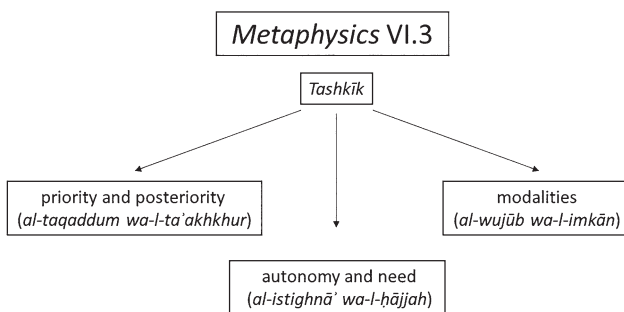
29 Although section 11 of *Philosophical Compendium* is short and forms a single coherent argument, Treiger's translation and analysis focuses only on part of it and omits the last paragraph; no explanation is given for this omission. I discuss the problematic aspect of modulation mentioned above (existence *qua* essential and accidental *ma'nā*) later on, so as not to detract from the present focus. It should be noted that the tripartite scheme of *tashkīk* listed above is reproduced faithfully by Jurjāni in *Definitions*, 86–87. There one finds the following three entries: *al-tashkīk bi-l-awlawiyyah* (modulation in worthiness, or precedence), *al-tashkīk bi-l-taqaddum wa-l-ta'akhhur* (modulation in priority and posteriority), and *al-tashkīk bi-l-shiddah wa-l-ḍu'f* (modulation in strength and weakness). It seems that Jurjāni was relying directly on the Avicennian texts mentioned above when elaborating these entries.



Finally, in *Metaphysics* VI.3, Avicenna provides a slightly divergent breakdown of the modes (*aḥkām*) of existence. Because the importance of this passage for a proper appreciation of *tashkik al-wujūd* has not been previously recognized, I translate it below:

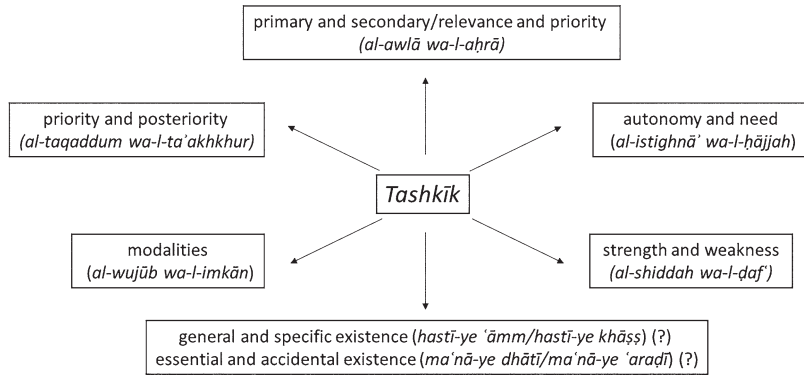
Text 27: Existence inasmuch as it is existence does not differ in strength and weakness [*lā yakhtalifu fī l-shiddah wa-l-ḍuʿf*], nor does it accept degrees in deficiency. Rather, it differs [*yakhtalifu*] according to a number of modes [or aspects, *iddat aḥkām*], which are: priority and posteriority, autonomy and need, and necessity and possibility.³⁰

Although the master does not link these modes expressly to *tashkik* in that passage, there is significant overlap with the other texts mentioned above. In view of this, and given the ontological context in which the passage is found, there can be little doubt that the purpose of the distinctions listed in *Metaphysics* VI.3 is similar: they seek to account for the difference (*ikhtilāf*) in which existence relates to, and is predicated of, various things and therefore to substantiate a theory of ontological modulation. On the basis of this text, we can construct the following diagram:



By discarding the repetitions found in those various passages, one can put forth the following recapitulatory diagram regarding the various modes of *tashkik al-wujūd*:

³⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VI.3, 276.13–15.



As is clear from the foregoing, Avicenna has a quite systematic understanding of *tashkik al-wujud*. In his logical and metaphysical works, he is keen to outline the various aspects that qualify existence and on account of which being is predicated differently of things. In his view, ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujud*) consists of aspects or modes (sing., *nahw*, *hukm*) that introduce diversity or differences (*ikhtilafat*) in the way that existence (*wujud*) is predicated of things. Even though Avicenna does not always explicitly refer to *tashkik* in the texts under discussion, as in the *Metaphysics* passage quoted above, there is little doubt nonetheless that his approach and concern are identical throughout these works: he strives to enumerate the various conditions or aspects involved in the modulation of existence.³¹ These aspects or criteria constitute the justification for regarding existence neither as a strict equivocal nor a strict univocal. Avicenna provides a succinct summary of this key point in *Categories* I.2: “that in which the intended meaning is the same but which becomes differentiated afterwards is like the meaning of existence, for it is one in many things but is different in them [in another respect], since it is not present in them in a completely identical way.”³² Thus, existence possesses a focal or core meaning, but can nevertheless be subjected to certain qualifications that ‘modulate’ or ‘specify’ it.

In this connection, several points are noteworthy. The first one concerns a glaring inconsistency in the various texts presented above. While Avicenna mentions degrees of intensity (or degrees of strength and weakness, *al-shiddah wa-l-duf*) as a

³¹ Another instance of an implicit reference to *tashkik al-wujud* appears in *Metaphysics* I.5, 34.15 ff. when Avicenna argues that existence has a shared meaning but is not predicated equally (*bi-l-tasawi*) (cf. the expression ‘*ala l-sawa*’ that is used in the discussion of the *asma’ mushakkikah* in *Elements of Philosophy*); it applies to substance and accident differently according to priority and posteriority. Here again, although Avicenna does not mention *tashkik* explicitly, there can be no doubt that he is outlining its theory and discussing some of its *ahkam*. Likewise, when at the very beginning of *Metaphysics* I.2 (11.6) the master describes metaphysics as a science that studies the mode of existence that is proper to things (*ayy nahw min al-wujud yakhusshah*), the term *nahw* must be taken as implicitly referring to the modes of *tashkik*.

³² Treiger, Avicenna’s Notion, 353.

valid mode of *tashkīk al-wujūd* in *Categories* and *Philosophical Compendium*, he rejects it in *Metaphysics* VI.3. We know from other passages that Avicenna was reluctant to endorse this aspect. For example, at *Metaphysics* 276.13–15, he cautions explicitly against using this aspect of *tashkīk* with regard to existence. So there appears to be a tension here when all the evidence is collated. Whatever the case may be, this aspect seems to play a restricted role in the master's ontology, and he never delves into this mode of existence in his major writings. On the other hand, the idea of the intensification of being was picked up and amplified by later philosophers, such as Mullā Ṣadrā, who appropriated this notion and made it the cornerstone of their ontology.³³ The theory of the intensity of existence was particularly appealing to postclassical thinkers inscribed in the tradition of the 'foundationality of existence' (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), but it finds little use in an essentialist metaphysics like that of Avicenna's.

Second, one notices that the most important aspect or mode of *tashkīk* that Avicenna mentions in his works—at least with regard to frequency—seems to be ontological priority and posteriority (*al-taqaddum wa-l-ta'akhhur*). This aspect is listed in all the texts dealing with modulation, whether explicitly or implicitly, and Avicenna never fails to mention it. One pointed formulation of the connection between *tashkīk* and priority occurs in the metaphysical part of *Guidance*, when Avicenna states that "the existent [*al-mawjūd*] is said of substance and accident ... by way of modulation [*bi-l-tashkīk*] and occurs with a single meaning according to priority and posteriority."³⁴ As we shall see below, tying the predication of being to priority and posteriority has a long history that harks back to Aristotle and the commentators, and Avicenna in that regard is merely following a well-established trend. Nevertheless, this aspect assumes a new role in his philosophy due to the robust distinction he establishes between essence and existence, which allows priority and posteriority to apply to metaphysical principles in many different ways. Accordingly, in the analysis provided below, I shall retain in particular the notion that existence can be said of things 'in a prior and posterior way' (*'alā l-taqdīm wa-l-ta'khīr*) and explore what this entails for his ontology of quiddity.³⁵

33 For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Bonmariage, *Le réel*; and Rizvi, *Process Metaphysics*.

34 Avicenna, *Guidance*, 232.9–12.

35 Avicenna stresses the correlation between *tashkīk al-wujūd* and priority/posteriority implicitly in *Metaphysics*, I.5, 34.15–16 and VI.3 276.13–15; and explicitly in *Categories*, I.5; *Philosophical Compendium*, section 11; *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic* (Kalbarczyk, *The Kitāb al-Maqūlāt*, 326 of the Arabic text); *Guidance*, 232.9–12; and *Dialectic*, II.2, 119.17–120.1. It is also confirmed by other passages: see notably *Physics*, I.3, 31, and II.2, 132, where the *tashkīk* of *wujūd* is defined solely in terms of priority and posteriority. See also Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*, 358 ff. In fact, Wolfson, *The Ambiguous Terms*, especially 153, had already highlighted the importance of priority in Arabic scholars' understanding of the *asmā' mushakkikah*. According to this scholar, the correlation between priority and posteriority and the problematic class of intermediary terms goes back to Alexander's interpretation of certain specific Aristotelian passages and later made its way into the Islamic tradition. In the early Arabic context, both Fārābī and Ghazālī construe the modulated terms in light of priority and poste-

Third, the Avicennian theory of ontological modulation is much broader than, albeit also inclusive of, what is often called Avicenna's 'modal ontology,' or theory of the modalities. For in reality, the modalities of 'the possible' and 'the necessary' only constitute a part of *tashkīk* and amount to only one of its various aspects or modes. Consequently, and following Avicenna himself, I use the term 'mode' (*naḥw*, *ḥukm*) in this context in deliberate contrast to the way this term is often used in the modern scholarship to express the modalities of 'the possible,' 'the necessary,' and 'the impossible.' Again following Avicenna, I will call these instead 'the modalities' (*jihāt*) in order to distinguish them from the ontological modes that qualify *tashkīk*.³⁶ Hence, it is noteworthy that Avicenna himself usually makes a distinction between 'the modalities' (*al-jihāt*), which are discussed in a logical and metaphysical context, and 'the modes of existence' and 'senses of existence' (sing., *ḥukm* or *naḥw al-wujūd*, *ma'ānī l-wujūd*), which are typically discussed in a metaphysical context. According to what was shown above, the modalities (*jihāt*) are only one mode (*ḥukm*, *naḥw*) of *tashkīk al-wujūd*.³⁷ Consequently, although the modalities as applied to existence are highly significant in Avicenna's philosophy and have deservedly been the focus of much recent research, they are merely one among several aspects Avicenna outlines in his works and implements to modulate existence. Moreover, and with regard to the present purpose, it turns out that they are somewhat inadequate to characterize or define the mode of existence of pure quiddity. This is because, construed from a metaphysical perspective, possibility and necessity are *concomitants of quiddity*, and, to boot, concomitants that relate exclusively to realized or acquired existence, to the kind of existence that is acquired from an external cause and encompasses essence taken with its concomitants and accidents. But quiddity in itself, by definition, is devoid of concomitants entirely and can be conceived of in abstraction from them. Instead, in order to elucidate the ontological mode of quiddity, it is necessary to turn to the other distinctions and modes of *tashkīk* Avicenna outlines in his works, first and foremost the notion of ontological priority, to which I shall return shortly.

riority; see *Answers to Questions Posed*, 321–322, section 15; and *Doctrines of the Philosophers*, 18.14–22, respectively. For the relation of these concepts in Averroes, see Arnzen's comments in Averroes, *On Aristotle's "Metaphysics"*, 199–200. According to Arnzen, the *asmā' mushakkikah* in Averroes are construed and employed as a sort of analogical method based on the notions of priority and posteriority. ³⁶ See, for instance, Avicenna, *Salvation*, 29.8 ff., which discusses the three modalities (*jihāt*) of the necessary, the impossible, and the possible.

³⁷ It should be noted in this connection that Avicenna, in his various analyses of *tashkīk*, remains silent about actuality and potentiality, in spite of the fact that Aristotle had made this distinction one of the four main senses of being. In fact, Avicenna subsumes the investigation of actuality and potentiality under that of necessity and possibility and that of priority and posteriority (see notably *Metaphysics* IV), so that the first distinction is implicitly included in the other two and, hence, in *tashkīk*. This suggests also a direct connection between ontological modulation and the various senses (*ma'ānī*) of existence; but then again, these various senses remain to be clarified and are the focus of another section.

Fourth, and in light of the foregoing, one may propose a differentiation between ‘senses’ or ‘meanings’ of existence (*ma‘ānī l-wujūd*), ‘aspects’ or ‘modes’ of existence (*ḥukm, naḥw al-wujūd*), and ‘contexts’ of existence in Avicenna’s philosophy. With that being said, it remains unclear how the ‘senses’ or ‘meanings’ of existence relate to the ‘modes.’³⁸ In the meantime, and before addressing this question, I propose the following tentative scheme to clarify the various ontological distinctions Avicenna draws in his works:

- a. *Contexts or domains of existence:*
intellectual, intramental, universal ~ concrete, extramental, particular
material ~ immaterial
human ~ divine
- b. *Senses (ma‘ānī) of existence:*
affirmed (*wujūd ithbātī*) and realized or acquired (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) ~ special or proper (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) ~ God’s unique existence and *ma‘nā*
- c. *Aspects or modes (sing., ḥukm, naḥw) of ontological modulation (tashkīk al-wujūd)*
priority and posteriority (*al-taqaddum wa-l-ta’akhhur*)
autonomy and need (*al-istighnā’ wa-l-ḥājjah*)
primary and secondary/relevance and priority (*al-awlā wa-l-aḥrā*)
modalities (*al-wujūb wa-l-imkān*)
strength and weakness (*al-shiddah wa-l-ḍu‘f*)
general and specific existence (*hasī ‘āmm/hasī khāṣṣ*) (?)/essential and accidental existence (*dhātī/‘araḍī*) (?)

Accordingly, what Avicenna often calls *al-wujūdayn*, which encompasses *intellectual or intramental existence*, on the one hand, and *extramental or concrete existence*, on the other, is a broad distinction between different *contexts* of existence. As such, it does not seem to impact directly on the notion of *tashkīk* or even on the senses of existence.³⁹ Likewise, it is unclear whether the *senses (ma‘ānī)* of existence Avicenna

³⁸ This issue may be reformulated as follows: how does the passage of *Metaphysics* I.5 that distinguishes between the meanings or senses (*ma‘ānī*) of ‘established (or acquired) existence’ and ‘proper existence’ relate to the passage in *Metaphysics* VI.3 that distinguishes between the various aspects or modes (*aḥkām*) of *tashkīk al-wujūd*?

³⁹ ‘Contexts’ of existence consist broadly of *mental existence* and *concrete or extramental existence*. But the latter needs to be further subdivided into *material* and *immaterial* existence, since this group includes material things like trees, rocks, and humans, as well as immaterial things like souls and intellects. None of these items or considerations are mentioned in Avicenna’s various breakdowns of *tashkīk al-wujūd* as schematized above. As will become clear in chapter V, intellectual existence also requires a division between *human* intellectual existence and *divine* intellectual existence. Hence, what are sometimes described as *modes* of existence by other scholars (namely, concrete and intellectual existence), I here call *contexts* or *domains* of existence. It is true that these may also be regarded as modes of existence in a general or schematic sense, and the way Avicenna himself sometimes refers to them (*al-wujūdayn, naḥw al-wujūd*) would seem to lend weight to this view.

alludes to in *Metaphysics* I.5 affect the classification of the *modes* of existence in other passages where *tashkīk* is discussed. That this is the case may be hypothetically suggested from the evidence of chapter 11 of *Philosophical Compendium*, but only if one accepts that the distinction between essential and accidental existence, which appears to be intimated in this passage, is regarded as an additional aspect of *tashkīk*. Put differently, the assumption would be that the implementation of ontological modulation goes hand in hand with the recognition of various senses or subsenses of existence, which are nevertheless tied by a focal meaning and predicated in a *pros hen* manner.⁴⁰

Finally, it is apparent that many of the ontological modes that the master enumerates in his works are interrelated and co-implicative. The modalities, for example, amount to one ontological mode of *tashkīk*, and in that regard, their importance should not be underestimated, inasmuch as they can be applied theoretically to all entities. All of the existents are liable to being qualified by the modalities, regardless of what category they fall into and what mode of existence they possess. In other words, they are *all both possible and necessary*, according to Avicenna's theory of the modalities, with the notable exception of God.⁴¹ This means, in turn, that these entities are all *caused, contingent, and intrinsically composite or complex*, i. e., they possess a multiplicity of essential concomitants and attributes, which prevents them

However, this approach is of little help for our inquiry, since such broad categories as 'existence in the concrete' (*fī l-a'yān*) can encompass beings as different as a horse and a separate intellect, while throwing little or no light on *how* they exist; the same applies to intelligible existence, which can be that of a concept in the mind or of a separate intellect. Hence, quite confusingly, the expression *fī l-a'yān* can encompass beings possessing either a material or an immaterial existence, the latter having a kind of intellectual existence which is comparable in some regards to those entities that exist in the intellect (*fī l-'aql*), which are also immaterial. Hence, it is inaccurate to describe these various entities as sharing a similar mode of existence simply on account of their being in the extramental concrete world or *fī l-a'yān*. Much more helpful and precise is to approach them through the various modes and aspects that Avicenna outlines in connection with *tashkīk al-wujūd*.

40 The *aḥkām* are what enable the fragmentation and modulation of the senses of being, although these are tied together by a focal meaning and *pros hen* attribution. This issue as it crystallizes in Avicenna's works emerges partly from the challenge of having to reconcile Aristotle's various claims about the predication of being as well as the various interpretations articulated by later commentators. For Avicenna, one particularly daunting question appears to have been the following: if being remains closer to a univocal notion—which it presumably must in order for the metaphysical investigation to be possible and coherent—then in what way are we justified in speaking of its various senses (*ma'ānī*), and what can account for them? Although Avicenna inherited some of the key elements of his interpretation from the earlier Graeco-Arabic tradition, he contributed significantly to this issue by systematizing a theory of *tashkīk al-wujūd*, which not only rests on the notion of a focal meaning and integrates the notion of *pros hen* predication, but also systematically outlines a cluster of modes that 'perform' and can 'account for' the modulation of being.

41 The First is the only exception to this rule, since It is absolutely necessary and necessary in Itself. But the distinction between 'the possible' and 'the necessary' applies jointly to all the other beings, and so in itself provides only limited insight into their mode of existence. Other modes or aspects of *tashkīk* must be implemented to refine the analysis.

from existing autonomously. Accordingly, each one of these existents requires *an external cause*. In Avicennian parlance, each one of these existents is ‘possible of existence in itself’ and ‘necessary of existence through another.’ What is more, each one will be *conditioned*, since its very quiddity determines what kind of existence it can have and also what kind of cause it can have. Thus, the modalities intersect with some of the other aspects of *tashkik* Avicenna outlines in his works, notably priority and posteriority (*al-taqaddum wa-l-ta’akhhur*), autonomy and need (*al-istighnā’ wa-l-ḥājjah*), and primary and secondary/relevance and priority. These various sets of distinctions are to some extent interrelated and mutually dependent on one another. For example, what is possible and contingent will necessarily be ‘in need’ of a cause, and it may also be ‘secondary’ and ‘posterior’ with regard to that cause. The various modes of *tashkik* are therefore complementary and interconnected, rather than exclusive and incompatible.

1.2.3 *Tashkik*, the theological inquiry, and essential being

There is another issue that calls for attention. As Treiger insightfully suggested in his article, Avicenna appears to have devised the theory of ontological modulation partly as a solution to the problem of how God could be said to exist, and, thus, to differentiate between a divine mode of existence and other modes of existence, while at the same time skirting the pitfalls associated with the strict univocity and equivocity of being.⁴² This hypothesis had been previously suggested, albeit much more implicitly, in an article by Toby Mayer dealing mostly with the reception of Avicenna’s theory of *tashkik* in the later Islamic tradition.⁴³ This would endow *tashkik* with a transcendental or theological dimension extending beyond the purely predicamental or categorial level. But here we need to engage in a bit of additional analysis to confirm this hypothesis, all the more so because this issue has recently proven somewhat controversial in the literature.⁴⁴ It is a fact that Avicenna often mentions the

⁴² Treiger, Avicenna’s Notion, especially 329–330 and 360–362. This is why Treiger in his article refers to *tashkik al-wujūd* as a kind of “*transcendental modulation*,” in that its range of application transcends the categories and the predicamental level and encompasses the divine beings as well.

⁴³ Mayer, Faḥr ad-Dīn, 214 ff., is extremely cautious—and one might add, ambiguous—regarding Avicenna’s endorsement of *tashkik* and the issue of its application to his theology. He teases out the contradictions regarding Avicenna’s view of *tashkik* in *The Cure* and in *Discussions* and interprets the latter text as a key transitional moment between Avicenna’s interpretation of ontological modulation and that of later authors, such as Ṭūsī, who explicitly apply it to their theology. Yet, it seems that Mayer does allow for the possibility that this trend has its incipency in Avicenna. Mayer, however, focuses most of his analysis on the aspect of strength and weakness (*al-shiddah wa-l-ḍu’f*) of being, which is arguably the least important of all the modes of *tashkik* for Avicenna, although it does play an important role in the later Islamic tradition.

⁴⁴ See Treiger’s (Avicenna’s Notion, 351–352) response to Vallat; and Wisnovsky’s (On the Emergence, 293, note 69) response to Treiger. Wisnovsky contests Treiger’s claim of transcendental modulation in Avicenna and makes later thinkers and Avicennian interpreters, notably Ṭūsī and Ḥillī, re-

modulated terms and ontological modulation in connection with the categories, and also sometimes in the very context of his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. In those passages and others, the master rather tersely indicates that *tashkik* applies to substances (*jawāhir*) and accidents (*a'rāḍ*). In fact, the explanation that being is said in a modulated way of substances and accidents recurs in numerous passages of his corpus, surely as an illustration of the kinds of objects *tashkik al-wujūd* is supposed to encompass and in order to indicate its most immediate field of application. Thus, in *Elements of Philosophy*, in his discussion of the modulated terms, he notes that "the very term 'existent' applies to [both] substance and accident"; in *Guidance*, that "the existent [*al-mawjūd*] is said of substance and accident ... by way of modulation [*bi-l-tashkik*] and occurs with a single meaning according to priority and posteriority"; and in *Philosophical Compendium*, that "existence first belongs to substance, and only through substance, to other things [i.e., accidents] ... and this is called 'modulated' [*mushakkik*]." Now, since most, albeit not all, of these statements occur in a logical context, and since it is these texts that have received the lion's share of the attention when it comes to modulation, it is easy to misconceive that *tashkik* would be limited strictly to the categories and have no real application beyond the investigation of concrete primary substances and their accidents.

But this conclusion would be hasty. We saw above that *tashkik* undeniably plays a role in Avicenna's metaphysical works and in the metaphysical inquiry as he conceives it. I suggested above that it makes an implicit appearance in at least two key

sponsible for transferring *tashkik* to the transcendental level. On my view, there is no ground for denying a priori the theological relevance of *tashkik al-wujūd* in Avicenna's works; quite the contrary. By implication, this means that, in this case as well, later authors such as Ṭūsī and Ḥillī are not so much elaborating a new doctrine as re-interpreting Avicenna to further their own theological agendas and to address specific concerns arising from their respective socio-political contexts. In this regard, I think Shahrastānī was being quite perceptive when he argues in *Struggling with the Philosopher* that Avicenna, realizing that existence cannot apply in exactly the same way to God and to the composite and caused existents of his ontology, decided to introduce the category of modulated or ambiguous terms (*asmā' mushakkikah*) as a way of skirting a rigid univocity and equivocality of being; yet, on Shahrastānī's mind, Avicenna's project ultimately failed, and the latter ended up upholding a kind of univocity that makes existence a single genus for all things whose species would be 'possible existence' and 'necessary existence.' In contrast to Shahrastānī, however, I do not think that the problem or incentive in Avicenna's eyes had to do with the modalities. For the idea that God alone is Necessary of Existence in Itself is clear and compelling in the context of Avicenna's philosophy, and it is a doctrine that the master defended consistently his entire life. Rather, as I see it, the problem Avicenna was grappling with pertains to how the generic notion of 'realized existence' (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) and 'established or affirmed existence' (*wujūd ithbātī*) mentioned in *Metaphysics* I.5 could be differentiated when applied to God and to the other beings, and whether they could be applied to God at all in the first place. It is because this most general and indiscriminate notion of realized existence does not apply in certain cases that Avicenna, I would surmise, felt the need to introduce further ontological distinctions and qualifications and, ultimately, to propose other modes and senses of existence. As I try to show here, the notion of realized existence ultimately proved inadequate to describe the ontological mode of pure quiddity, as it did also to describe God's special mode of existence.

passages of *Metaphysics of The Cure*, in chapters I.5 and then again (and especially) in VI.3. This is congruent with Avicenna's understanding of metaphysics as a science. Since, on his view, metaphysics is designed to study not only material and concrete existents and their accidents, but also the fundamental principles of these beings, which happen to be immaterial beings, it is only sensible that *tashkik* should apply to them as well. There are a few important elements that would seem to confirm such a hypothesis. First, recall that, for Avicenna, substance (*jawhar*) is not limited to hylomorphic form and matter and their composition, i. e., to the principles of the concrete primary substances, but also includes intellect or immaterial form or what Avicenna calls in *Elements of Philosophy*, "quiddity without matter." "Quiddity without matter" (*māhiyyah bi-lā māddah*) is not only one of the definitions of *jawhar* Avicenna provides in that passage, it is also the first and—in the order of existence—the most important one. In this divine or superlunary context, immaterial form, intellect, and substance refers to one and the same thing. Thus, given that for Avicenna substance extends beyond the hylomorphic and encompasses the intellectual beings, such as the separate existents, then it only makes sense that *tashkik* would apply to them as well.⁴⁵

The second element has to do with the various aspects of *tashkik* as outlined above. If I am correct in suggesting that the Avicennian theory of *tashkik* rests on a systematic and distinctive set of modes (sing., *ḥukm, naḥw*), and if, among these modes, one finds the notions of priority (*taqaddum*), deservedness (*awlā*), necessity (*wujūb, wājib*), and autonomy (*istighnā'*), then it would be inconceivable that Avicenna had not intended to apply *tashkik al-wujūd* to God and to the separate intellects as well. For God, on Avicenna's mind, is prior, necessary, most deserving, and autonomous vis-à-vis all other existents. In fact, it is precisely on the basis of these *anḥā'* or *aḥkām* of ontological modulation that the *shaykh* is able to differentiate between God's mode of existence and that of all the other things, including that of the other eternal beings of his cosmology. More specifically, the *ḥukm* of 'the possible' and 'the necessary' assumes a vital importance in the metaphysical framework Avicenna articulated in order to set the First apart from all other things and to allocate to God a special and unique mode of existence, since God's existence is not possible in any way, but necessary in itself.⁴⁶ Hence, rather than excluding theological consid-

⁴⁵ Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 225–227, on the fact that substance, for Avicenna, includes the immaterial beings. Kalbarczyk argues that Avicenna broke away from a "Plotinian-Porphyrion paradigm," to which Fārābī before him had adhered, and which consisted in limiting the categories to concrete things. Avicenna, like many other Arabic philosophers, is sometimes reluctant to call God a substance or *jawhar*. But substance, for Avicenna, is also intellect, and God is an intellect, and so, on one special construal of the term, God must be a substance.

⁴⁶ For Avicenna's project of elaborating a metaphysical framework that enables him to distinguish between various classes of eternal beings, i. e., between God and the separate intellects, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna*. Mayer, Fahr ad-Din, focuses on the least important aspect of *tashkik* in his discussion of Avicenna (strength and weakness of existence). It is also one that Avicenna at times explicitly excludes from ontological modulation. This probably explains why Mayer is uncertain about whether

erations, the theory of *tashkīk al-wujūd* would seem to culminate with them, and more precisely with Avicenna's proof of God as the only being that is necessary of existence in itself. The fact that Avicenna also regards 'the one' (*al-wāḥid*) as a modulated notion strongly supports this view. Otherwise, how could the oneness of God be affirmed, while at the same time being contrasted to the oneness of all other things? Existence, necessity, and oneness are all subject to modulation, and it is thanks to this that they can be applied to both the categorial and supracategorial entities of Avicenna's ontology.

While some of the distinctions and notions provided above apply only to contingent beings and seem therefore to pertain chiefly to the predicamental level (e.g., possibility, priority in time, causal dependency), others (necessity, essential priority, autonomy) seem particularly relevant to a discussion of the special ontological mode of the First. In other words, it appears that some of the ontological notions and aspects associated with *tashkīk* can be applied to God in addition to the caused concrete existents of the sublunary world. One of their functions would be to differentiate between different classes of beings and explain how God's mode of existence is unique and an exception—or even a metaphysical aberration—when compared to all the other existents that make up the dual realm of *al-wujūdayn*. This, after all, is the alleged purpose of *tashkīk* as Avicenna enounces it: to help account for and establish differences (*ikhtilāfāt*) according to which being is predicated of things.

In the final analysis, *tashkīk*, far from being devoid of theological or metaphysical relevance, would appear to occupy a central place in Avicenna's conception of the metaphysical inquiry, since it enables a wide array of subtle distinctions to be drawn regarding the state or mode of existence of things. It is foundational in accounting for the various modes of existence in Avicenna's ontology, not only between substances and accidents, but also between different kinds of substances. Ultimately, one primary purpose of *tashkīk al-wujūd* would be to distinguish God's unique mode of existence from the ontological modes of all the other beings. The propositions that God's existence is essentially prior; absolutely necessary; autonomous and without a cause; most deserving of existence, etc., which all correspond to *ahkām* or *anhā'* of *tashkīk*, indicate that ontological modulation applies to the transcendental beings in addition to the beings of the categories. In that sense, *tashkīk* directly underpins Avicenna's theological project or special ontology in addition to his general ontology. There is quite decisive textual evidence to the effect that Avicenna extends *tashkīk al-wujūd* to God as well. It can be found in the following passage of *Discussions*, which, surprisingly, was cited neither by Mayer nor by Treiger in their articles:

Text 28: As for applying 'existence' [*wujūd*] to the First [*al-awwal*] and to what comes after It, [this notion] is not among the equivocal terms [*al-alfāz al-mushtarakah*], but rather among

the Avicennian *tashkīk* applies to the divine being. But I believe that including the other aspects of modulation removes this ambiguity entirely.

the modulated terms [*al-alfāz al-mushakkikah*]. And so the referents of the modulated term may be placed [i. e., studied] in a single science.⁴⁷

47 Avicenna, *Discussions*, section 692, 232; I read *tudkhalu* instead of *yudkhalu*, which does not make sense grammatically. The above passage seems quite decisive in settling the issue of the theological applicability of *tashkik al-wujūd*. But there are two counterarguments that can be submitted and need to be addressed here. The first is that *Discussions* should be regarded as an Avicennizing work, or a work emanating from Avicenna's circle, rather than an Avicennian work proper, so that the doctrines it contains cannot forthrightly be ascribed to the master himself. The second point is that Avicenna in *Notes* (section 989, 563) appears to say the exact opposite of what is asserted in this passage of *Discussion*. This excerpt, as it is edited in the main text, reads as follows: "Since 'existence not in a subject' [*al-wujūd lā fī mawḍūʿ*] is not predicated of the existence of the Necessary Existent [viz., God] and the existence of the rest of the existents according to univocity or modulation [*lam yakun bi-l-tawāṭuʿ wa-lā bi-l-tashkik*], the predicate 'existence not in a subject' is said neither according to genus nor to modulation [*laysa ḥamlan jinsiyyan wa-lā bi-l-tashkik*]. Likewise, the consideration of modulation [*i'tibār al-tashkik*] with regard to the existence of accidents and substances is also annulled." In fact, neither argument is really tenable upon closer examination. With regard to the first, it is true that the late works *Notes* and *Discussions* display some minor departures from Avicenna, but they are by and large quite faithful to the main doctrines the master puts forth in his other works. What does change in these works, one might say, is the emphasis placed on certain questions or themes under discussion, as well as the mode of exposition. When it comes to *tashkik* in particular, the previous detailed analysis of this theory and the evidence culled from Avicenna's main philosophical works should make it clear that section 692 of *Discussions* is fully compatible with, and explicitly formulates, views and ideas that are articulated more implicitly by the master in his other works. The onus is therefore on those critics who would challenge the authenticity of this passage of *Discussions*, since they would have to ignore, or do away with, much independent evidence that coheres with it. The second point is more delicate and requires some philological investigation. Although both Badawi and Mousavian—who produced the two main modern editions of *Notes*—opted to keep this variant of section 989, it is quite blatantly corrupt and would need to be drastically revised. I suspect it was tampered with by a later scribe who was hostile to the theory of *tashkik*. But in the critical apparatus of his edition (563, notes 5 and 6), Mousavian lists an alternative reading that radically changes the meaning of the passage. If these variants are retained, they yield the following reading, which coheres perfectly with Avicenna's view on *tashkik* as exposed above: "Since 'existence not in a subject' [*al-wujūd lā fī mawḍūʿ*] is not predicated of the existence of the Necessary Existent [viz., God] and the existence of the rest of the existents according to univocity, *but by modulation* [*lam yakun bi-l-tawāṭuʿ bal bi-l-tashkik*], the predicate 'existence not in a subject' is not said according to genus, *because predication by genus is not said by modulation* [*laysa ḥamlan jinsiyyan li-anna ḥaml al-jins lā bi-l-tashkik*]." As we can see, with this variant the meaning of the passage shifts entirely and amounts to a vindication of the transcendental scope of *tashkik al-wujūd*. The point—which is well established in Avicenna's other works—would be that *tashkik* is incompatible with regarding existence as a genus and thus in a strictly univocal way. It should be noted that in *Discussions* (sections 647 and 648, 218) Avicenna articulates this very argument to substantiate modulation: it is valid precisely because existence is not predicated as a genus (*jins*). In spite of this, the reconstruction suggested above still excludes the last sentence of the passage in *Notes*, for which Mousavian provides no alternative reading. But it is so plainly at odds with what Avicenna stresses elsewhere—namely, that existence applies in a modulated way to substances and accidents—that it cannot be retained either, although more research into the manuscript transmission of *Notes* is required to amend it. Overall, then, and given these manuscript variants, this section of *Notes* has to be regarded as (orig-

In this section of *Discussions* Avicenna explicitly applies *tashkik al-wujūd* to God, in addition to the caused entities, thereby showing the theological implication of this doctrine. The latter's ontological scope is therefore inclusive not only of sublunary substances and accidents, but also of the immaterial beings that are the separate intellects, as well as of God as the only being that is necessary of existence in itself.

This move makes perfect sense when placed in the broader context of Avicenna's analysis of being and his conception of metaphysics as a science. For being, on his mind, must be studied by a single science. This is true not only of being *qua* being, or of being in its most general or abstract conceptualization, but also of God's mode of existence, which falls under the subject matter of metaphysics. Now, since Avicenna, as we saw earlier, rejects the strict univocity of being, he must either embrace its equivocality—which would threaten the unity and systematicity of the metaphysical inquiry as he conceives it—or—and this is the third option—its modulation (*tashkik*). Only the last option enables him to avoid the pitfalls of univocity and equivocality and to preserve the unity of metaphysics as a science that studies being *qua* being as well as God's special existence. This process of elimination seems to confirm the place of *tashkik* at the very heart of Avicenna's metaphysical project. According to the master, it is the dual ontological and theological scope of *tashkik al-wujūd* that ensures the unity and validity of metaphysics as a single, integrated science.⁴⁸

It should be noted that Avicenna extends this approach to other notions as well. In his commentary on 'The Chapter of Pure Faith' (*Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*) of the Qur'ān, the master argues that oneness can be predicated of God and of all other things only "in a modulated way" (*bi-l-tashkik*).⁴⁹ Accordingly, God is one in the truest and strongest sense, since His essence cannot be divided in any way, whereas other things are one in a lesser sense, because they can be divided either conceptually or physically. As Daniel De Smet and Meryem Sebtı have shown, much of the material that can be found in this text is commensurate with the philosophical views Avicenna expresses in his core works.⁵⁰ In this particular case, the idea that oneness applies to God and the caused entities only through modulation seems perfectly aligned with the evidence I reviewed, especially the passage of *Discussions* mentioned above. Not only does ontological modulation encompass the divine being, but it would seem that

inally) endorsing ontological modulation, rather than excluding it. Like the cognate passage in *Discussions*, it also explicitly extends *tashkik* to God in addition to the caused existents.

48 It is because *wujūd* applies to God and the caused existents not in an equivocal way, but by means of modulation, that the various instances of being are treated by the single science of metaphysics; see *Discussions*, section 690, 232, where the master argues that if existence is equivocal (*min al-asmā' al-mushtarakah*), then this would mean that the necessary of existence would not fall within the scope of the metaphysical investigation. As we can see, *tashkik* is intimately connected in Avicenna's mind with the coherence and unity of the metaphysical enterprise.

49 Avicenna, *Commentary on 'The Chapter of Pure Faith,'* 109.13–110.11.

50 De Smet and Sebtı, *Avicenna's Philosophical Approach*.

the other notions Avicenna ascribes to Him, such as oneness and necessity, should be equally understood according to this modulationist approach.

In hindsight, Mayer's intimation and Treiger's argument regarding the transcendental nature of *tashkik* appear to be fully substantiated. Nevertheless, there is one remarkable upshot from the foregoing, which was picked up neither by Mayer nor Treiger, and which to my knowledge has not been highlighted in the previous scholarship on *tashkik*. If ontological modulation applies to God as well, as seems to be the case, then it would include at least one instance—but a highly significant one at that—of essential being. In other words, *tashkik* would also include God's special mode of existence, His proper existence, which is essential being or being *per se* in the strictest sense. It is this essential being that would set Him apart from the existence of all the other quiddities.⁵¹ By further implication, *tashkik* would encompass not only existence construed as an external and non-essential concomitant of essence, a *lāzim* or *lāhiq*, but also essential, intrinsic, and uncaused existence. Returning to the passage of *Philosophical Compendium* mentioned in the course of the analysis of the various aspects of *tashkik*, one understands better why Avicenna discusses essential being or being *per se* (*ma'nā-ye dhāti*) and *per accidens* (*ma'nā-ye 'araḍī*) in his exposition of *tashkik* in that passage, and why he also contrasts proper or specific existence (*hastī-ye khāṣṣ*) and general existence (*hastī-ye 'āmm*). If ontological modulation encompasses the divine essence, as much evidence seems to indicate, then it must per force include the essential being of God and His proper existence. Uncaused, essential existence vs. caused, external, concomitant or accidental existence thus emerges as a crucial distinction or aspect involved in the modulation of *wujūd*.

It is remarkable that these various aspects of ontological modulation, as well as the correlation between ontological modulation and the divine essential being, are later picked up by Bahmanyār, one of Avicenna's leading disciples. In his magnum opus entitled *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, Bahmanyār argues that *wujūd* is not a genus and is not predicated univocally of things; rather, it is a modulated notion.⁵² He then proceeds to enumerate the various aspects that underpin ontological modulation, which he derives directly from Avicenna's works, notably 'being caused' and 'being uncaused,' priority and posteriority, and strength and weakness.⁵³ In another passage of the same work, Bahmanyār modifies this list somewhat and men-

51 Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*, 362–363, comes close to this argument, but does not develop the notion of essential being. Nevertheless, he does implicitly acknowledge the role of quiddity in *tashkik al-wujūd* when he writes: "in Avicenna's view, existence is differentiated into the Necessarily Existent and the contingent existents, and further into the ten categories. It is differentiated not as a genus (or a quasi-genus) by differentiae, but by the very quiddities of the things of which it is predicated; this becomes possible precisely because it does not form a part, and is not a constituent of, these quiddities." But in the unique case of the Necessary Existent, Whom Treiger includes in *tashkik*, and in Whom essence and existence are one, this reasoning implies a kind of essential being.

52 Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 28.9–11; 281.10–12; 282.1; 301.13–302.1.

53 Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 281.10–13.

tions instead priority and posteriority, autonomy and need, and necessity and possibility. These aspects are also found in a shorter metaphysical treatise penned by the same author.⁵⁴ Basing himself directly on the master, Bahmanyār notes that these are the ‘aspects’ or ‘modes’ (*aḥkām*) by which *wujūd* is modulated. Furthermore, it is apparent from these texts that Bahmanyār extends *tashkīk al-wujūd* to God. In this connection, he states the following in *The Book of Validated Knowledge*:

Know that existence [*wujūd*] is predicated of what is under it by way of modulation [*tashkīk*], not by way of univocity. The meaning of this is that the existence that does not have a cause [*al-wujūd alladhī lā sababa lahu*] is prior in essence [*muqaddim bi-l-ṭabʿ*] to the existence that has a cause. Likewise, the existence of substance is prior to the existence of accident.⁵⁵

This passage argues that being caused and being uncaused are modes that modulate existence. In this connection, “existence that does not have a cause” appears to be a reference to the First, whose existence is fully and unconditionally autonomous and uncaused. The hypothesis that Bahmanyār has the First in mind in that passage is substantiated some pages later, when he defines “the existent that is necessary in itself,” i.e., God, as “that which has no cause” (*al-mawjūd al-wājib bi-dhātihī aʿnī al-ladhī lā sababa lahu*).⁵⁶ What is more, Bahmanyār, following Avicenna, defines ontological modulation in terms of priority, and more specifically in this case, in terms of essential priority. Thus, uncaused existence is prior in essence (*muqaddim bi-l-ṭabʿ*) over caused existence. Again, this seems to be a thinly veiled reference to the priority of God’s essential being over that of the caused and realized existence of His effects. Bahmanyār further argues that whereas the existence of all the caused entities is “accidental” (*araḍ*) and “a concomitant” (*lāzim*) of their essence, uncaused existence is not accidental, nor is it an external concomitant of essence, with the implication that it is essential.⁵⁷ Only God, the necessary existent, has this kind of uncaused and essential existence.⁵⁸ In sum, Bahmanyār in these texts appears to endorse three crucial features of Avicenna’s theory of existence or *wujūd*: (a) that it is a modulated notion, and that its modulation depends on various sets of modes, the most important of which is priority and posteriority; (b) that ontological modulation applies to God as well, inasmuch as it encompasses the distinction between uncaused existence and caused existence (as well as that between necessity and possibility, and autonomy and need); and that, as a corollary, (c)

⁵⁴ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 529.13–15; idem, *Treatise on the Subject Matter of Metaphysics*, 14.8–11.

⁵⁵ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 281.10–12.

⁵⁶ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 284.15.

⁵⁷ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 282.2 and 14–15.

⁵⁸ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 283.6; 284.15–16; and 530.11–13 where it is said that “God’s essential [or true] reality is existence” (*ḥaqīqatuhu l-wujūd*); idem, *Treatise on the Subject Matter of Metaphysics*, 15–16.

ontological modulation also deals with essential and uncaused being and with what is ‘prior in essence’ taken in an absolute sense.

These doctrinal points were later thoroughly integrated in the theological systems of the most prominent Muslim thinkers of the following centuries, such as Jurjānī, Ṭūsī, and Ḥilli. These later commentators mostly retained the theological potential of ontological modulation and did not hesitate to implement it in their discussions of God’s existence. The notion of *tashkīk* was thus thoroughly ‘theologized’ and applied specifically to the topic of divine essence and existence. This process can be observed in Jurjānī’s *Definitions*, where the three aspects of *tashkīk* that are outlined by this author are defined expressly in reference to ‘the necessary’ (*al-wājib*), viz., the Necessary of Existence.⁵⁹ A similar, yet amplified, phenomenon occurs in the earlier works of Ṭūsī. As Mayer, and more recently Wisnovsky, have shown, Ṭūsī extends ontological modulation to his theological disquisitions, notably in his *Commentary on Pointers*. He also relies on it heavily in his response to Shahrastānī’s critique of Avicennian ontology.⁶⁰ What is remarkable here is that, on Naṣīr al-Dīn’s theological model, *tashkīk* comprises God’s proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), a notion which constitutes the cornerstone of his account of how God’s existence can be differentiated from that of the caused entities.⁶¹ Thus, Ṭūsī writes, “according to Avicenna, the generic existence [*al-wujūd al-mushtarak*] that can be divided into the necessary and possible is other than the existence that is necessary in itself [or in its very essence, *li-dhātihī*].”⁶² Since *tashkīk* encompasses God’s being, and since God’s being is proper being and essential being (as Ṭūsī contends), then *tashkīk* also includes God’s proper being.

Now, although both Mayer and Wisnovsky appear to regard the extension of *tashkīk al-wujūd* to theology as a deliberate elaboration—and ultimately as an innovation—on Ṭūsī’s part, the foregoing analysis enables us to seriously consider the possibility that this move had already been anticipated by Avicenna himself. It is true that Ṭūsī focuses intently on the intensity and weakness (*al-shiddah wa-l-ḍuʿf*) aspect of modulation, which plays a negligible role in Avicenna’s philosophy. But the fundamental ideas that *tashkīk* extends to the divine being; that it therefore includes the essential being of God and His proper existence; and that it serves to differentiate between this special case of essential being, on the one hand, and the ex-

⁵⁹ Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 86–87. Jurjānī bases his account of the aspects of *tashkīk* directly on the Avicennian texts, although their connection to the notion of ‘the necessary’ appears to be his own elaboration.

⁶⁰ See Mayer, Faḥr ad-Dīn; and Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*. The key texts in Ṭūsī are *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 458–461, and *Downfalls*, 55.17–62.17. Mayer (202, note 17) makes it a point to reject the theory of *esse essentiae*, but it did not occur to him that the theory of ontological modulation the Avicennian thinkers extend to God constitutes a case of essential being. I do not address here the thorny issue of whether God can truly be said to have an essence; for this issue see section 2.4.

⁶¹ Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 461.12–24.

⁶² Ṭūsī, *Downfalls*, 70.11–12.

ternal, concomitant, and accidental existence of all the other entities, on the other, seem firmly rooted in Avicenna's own understanding of ontological modulation. Without denying philosophical acumen to later commentators such as Jurjānī, Ṭūsī, and Ḥillī, I would nevertheless argue that this theory was implicitly developed by Avicenna himself, who, as in many other cases, should be regarded as its originator. The key point I am trying to make here is that the connection between God's essential being and ontological modulation, or, put differently, the recognition of the transcendental and theological potential of *tashkīk*, which were certainly well established by Ṭūsī's time and formed the cornerstone of his theological argumentation, can be traced back to Avicenna's own works. They emerge as a logical outcome of the previous analysis of *tashkīk* in the master's philosophy.

But this in turn raises a tantalizing thought: if ontological modulation encompasses the divine existence as something that can be considered purely 'in itself,' as something essential, intrinsic, and irreducible, then could it be extended to all the quiddities regarded solely 'in themselves'? My hypothesis at this juncture is that there is the distinct possibility that Avicenna also regarded pure quiddity as another ontological exception, albeit one which, like God's special existence, would fall under the various modes posited by the theory of *tashkīk*. As in the case of God, pure quiddity does not fit in the basic ontological framework Avicenna applies to all caused beings, so *tashkīk* could serve as a way to bypass this problem by enabling a certain mode and sense of existence to be attributed specifically to pure quiddity, in contradistinction to the ones ascribed to the caused and composite substances. Accordingly, there would be a need to postulate an additional mode of existence in Avicenna's ontology, which, a priori, would correspond neither to God's mode, nor to the ontological mode associated with complex mental and concrete entities.

The methodological justification for asserting this hypothesis is rooted in Avicenna's theory of modulation, which allows for extremely nuanced and tenuously cognate senses of being to be predicated of different things. But, at core, this hypothesis emerges from what Avicenna himself says about essence and ontological modulation: pure quiddity, he tells us, has existence (*wujūd*) and is prior (*mutaqaddim*), and priority is one of the ways—perhaps the main way—in which existence can be modulated through the lens of *tashkīk*. Furthermore, we saw above that there seems to be a connection, which remains to be fleshed out, between essential being and *tashkīk*, at the very least in the special case of God. This would seem to validate a more general investigation into the issue of whether pure quiddity also has a kind of essential being that falls within the scope of *tashkīk*. Finally, additional doctrinal momentum for this idea can be found in the narrow relationship between substance and quiddity Avicenna promotes, as is reflected in the passage from *Elements of Philosophy* cited above, where *jawhar* is glossed in terms of *māhiyyah*. For recall that, according to the theory of ontological modulation, existence belongs first and foremost to substance. But if *jawhar* is primarily *māhiyyah*, how does this impact the ontology of quiddity? This requires exploring the interface between sub-

stance and essence in Avicenna's philosophy, which is another task picked up below.⁶³

In this connection, one understands why *tashkīk* may prove such a helpful tool to qualify quiddity. Quiddity exists in different contexts and under different aspects, depending on whether it is taken 'in itself' or 'with other things.' Although all of these ontological aspects and contexts refer back to a single and overarching concept of existence (*wujūd*), it would be misleading to speak of them in a strictly univocal manner or, alternatively, to reduce them to the two contexts of complex and contingent existence Avicenna routinely describes in his works (i.e., intellectual and concrete, or *al-wujūdayn*).⁶⁴ This is because (a) universal mental existence, (b) individual concrete existence, (c) God's existence, and (d) the existence of pure quiddity, present significant differences (*ikhtilāfāt*), which can be accounted for by modulation, but not by a purely univocal kind of predication. What is more, the analysis suggests that these are different ontological modes that can be distinguished according to the various elements or aspects that make up the modulationist theory. Since existence is not predicated univocally for Avicenna, and since, as we saw in chapter II, pure quiddity seems at the very least to possess a distinct mode of intelligible existence in the mind, the theory of ontological modulation would appear to lead to the postulation of various distinct modes of existence.

It was argued in previous parts of this book that to the unconditioned and absolute aspect of pure quiddity corresponds a distinct, irreducible, and simple *mode* of essential being that transcends the various *contexts* of existence. I intend in what follows to pursue this argument in light of *tashkīk* and its various aspects. It should be recalled, however, that the problem of how quiddity can be said to exist is compounded by the fact that it is found in different contexts and *together with* other things. Essence spans the realm of concrete beings and the sphere of universal forms in the human intellect. It also coincides (as I shall argue in chapter V) with God's perfectly unitary essence and self-intellection. When it is taken 'with other things,' namely, its concomitants, quiddity can be said in a sense to share in the other modes of conditioned, composite, and contingent existence that constitute *al-wujūdayn*, e.g., the mode of existence of the concrete horse and of the universal horse. Yet, pure quiddity possesses its own distinct mode of existence regardless of these various contexts. Thus, it should not be collapsed with the other two general modes or contexts (*al-wujūdayn*), which Avicenna reserves for composite or complex

⁶³ My point here is not that quiddity *per se* is subject to modulation, for essence in a logical context is predicated univocally of things; for instance, 'animalness' does not apply more to horse than to human, or vice versa, but is predicated equally of both. Rather, I am suggesting that the being or existence of essence could fall within the scope of *tashkīk* and be subjected to some of its aspects.

⁶⁴ As I mentioned above, for many of the later Avicennian commentators as well, such as Ṭūsī, existence is not strictly a univocal concept, but a modulated one, very much along the lines advocated by the master himself; see *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 462.8–11; Mayer, Fahr ad-Din; and Wisnovsky, *On the Emergence*.

substances. Now, given his theory of ontological modulation (which prevents *wujūd* from being construed in a strictly univocal way), one may say that, in his metaphysical system, things exist according to different modes and, hence, ultimately, in different ways, even though the focal meaning of existence remains fundamentally the same in these various contexts. One of these ontological differences—and arguably the most important one, as we saw—revolves around the concepts of priority and posteriority, which, on Avicenna’s mind, directly inform *tashkīk*. Because of its central position in Avicenna’s ontology, and because Avicenna also explicitly describes pure quiddity as being *prior in existence*, the investigation must now turn to this mode of modulation in order to cast more light on the ontological status of pure quiddity.

1.3 *Tashkīk* and ontological and essential priority

In the foregoing we saw that Avicenna conceives of the modulation of being—or of *wujūd* considered as a modulated term (*ism mushakkik*)—as consisting of various ontological aspects or modes (*anḥāʾ*, *aḥkām*). Together they can account for the differences (*ikhtilāfāt*) in the way this notion is predicated of things. Arguably the most important of these, together with the modalities of ‘the possible’ and ‘the necessary,’ is the dual notion of priority and posteriority (*al-taqaddum wa-l-ta’akhhur*).⁶⁵ It is this aspect that is systematically connected with the ontological investigation into substances and accidents. For, according to Greek and Arabic Aristotelians, substances are prior to accidents, and some substances are prior to other substances and some accidents to other accidents. All of this harks back to some passages in Aristotle regarding variations in the way being is predicated, such as *Metaphysics* IV.1.1003b16–18, which establishes the primacy of substance, “on which the other things depend”; VII.4.1030a21–22, where existence is said to belong “to one sort of thing primarily and to others in a secondary way”; and especially V.1.1019a1–11, where Aristotle states that “some things are called prior ... in respect of nature

⁶⁵ These notions, of course, correspond to the *per prius et posterius* of the Latin scholastic tradition. As I explained above, the correlation of priority and posteriority with the special class of ‘ambiguous,’ ‘analogical,’ or ‘modulated’ terms—that is, terms lying between univocal terms and equivocal terms—harks back to passages in Aristotle and especially to the later commentaries on his works, notably those of Alexander and Porphyry (see Wolfson, *The Ambibolous Terms*, 153; de Libera, *Les sources*; and Treiger, *Avicenna’s Notion*). In the Arabic tradition, it becomes standard, at least from the time of Fārābī onward (*Answers to Questions Posed*, 321–322, section 15), to construe the *asmāʾ mushakkikah* and *tashkīk* chiefly in terms of priority and posteriority. This becomes true particularly of *tashkīk al-wujūd*, ontological modulation, which Avicenna elaborates into a systematic and sophisticated doctrine that incorporates priority in addition to many other notions. Thus, although the main building blocks of this Avicennian theory are to be found in the previous Greek and Arabic traditions, nothing there approximates the use and analysis of *tashkīk* Avicenna implements in his works.

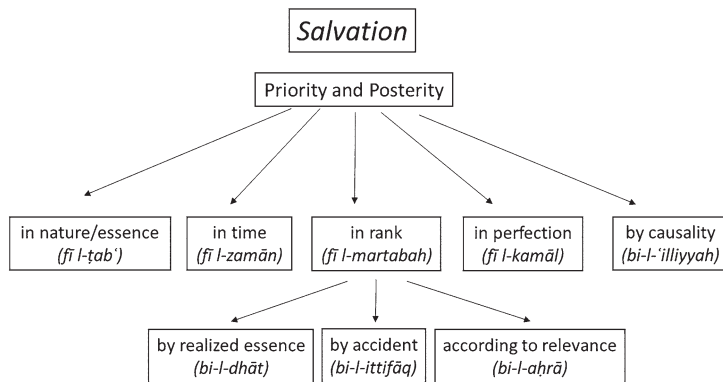
and substance,” and that “if we consider the various senses of ‘being,’ firstly the subject is prior, so that substance is prior.” Thus, the Aristotelian conception of the priority and primacy of substance was bequeathed to Fārābī, Avicenna, and the other Arabic philosophers via the long line of commentators that flourished in the interim. Nevertheless, the systematic manner in which the notions of priority/posteriority become tied to ontological modulation appears as an Avicennian elaboration.

Now, given that for Avicenna priority and posteriority are a key feature of *tashkīk al-wujūd*, and perhaps the most important one; that he refers on several occasions to the priority of pure quiddity and even to its priority ‘in existence’; and that he otherwise also maintains in *Metaphysics* V.1 that quiddity exists and has existence; then it stands to reason to presume that the Avicennian notion of *tashkīk al-wujūd* also extends to the pure quiddities. As a corollary, Avicenna’s theory of *tashkīk* would contribute directly to an ontology of quiddity. My objective in the following paragraphs is to explore in what way the various ontological modes and distinctions he introduces to differentiate *wujūd* can apply to quiddity. The differences and interrelationship between them need to be elucidated, especially with regard to how they apply to quiddity in itself. Nevertheless, this first calls for an exposition of the various senses of priority in Avicenna’s philosophy. For not only are priority and posteriority rich and complex notions; the master also believes that they themselves are modulated terms and that they possess multifarious aspects. As he writes in *Metaphysics* IV.1, “they are predicated according to many aspects” (*maqūl ‘alā wujūh kathīrah*) and they are said “according to modulation” (*‘alā sabīl al-tashkīk*). So it remains as yet unclear exactly which sense of priority, if any, can be ascribed to quiddity.⁶⁶ The following analysis seeks to disambiguate this point by adumbrating the various senses of priority Avicenna discusses in his works and exploring how they relate to *tashkīk al-wujūd*. The focus is not on the notion of priority *per se*—a digression that would take us too far from the present topic—but rather on the aspects of priority that can most readily be connected with those passages in which Avicenna expressly refers to pure quiddity as ontologically ‘prior.’ Avicenna conveniently outlines and discusses various aspects and senses of priority and ‘the prior’ in his

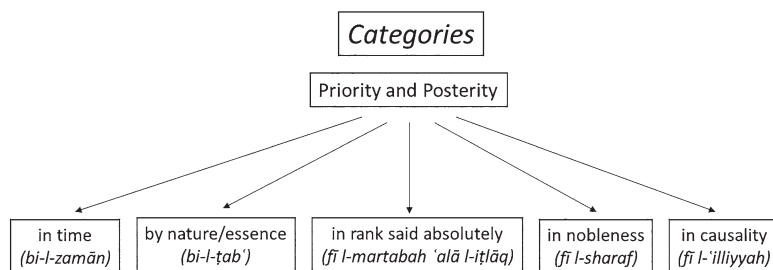
⁶⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, IV.1, 163. For the master, priority and posteriority are notions that are said “in many ways” or “according to different aspects” (*‘alā wujūh kathīrah*), and in I.4, 26.13–15, he also states that they possess various kinds (*aṣnāf*) and species (*anwā’*). These notions are thus themselves modulated. In spite of this, like existence, they share a focal or overarching meaning that binds their various senses together, allowing us to describe them more precisely as modulated terms and to impart to them the same linguistic status as to the term *wujūd* (i. e., they are all *asmā’ mushakkīkah*). It is of course highly significant that Avicenna regards both existence and priority as notions possessing various aspects and senses, given their intertwinement in his ontological analysis. This suggests that specific or qualified senses of priority, like specific or qualified senses of existence, can be ascribed to quiddity, and others to the realized and complex entity taken as a whole (i. e., with its concomitants and accidents). We see that modulation plays an absolutely crucial role in the way Avicenna perceives and understands philosophical terminology and concepts.

works. Perhaps the most famous Avicennian usage of the notion of priority has to do with his theory of causality, whereby the cause can be said to essentially precede the effect, even if the two are synchronous in existence (the hand turning the key) or if the causal act occurs atemporally (the causation of one separate intellect by another). Yet, this is only one among many aspects of priority Avicenna discusses in his works. Accordingly, the immediate task is to distinguish the various aspects of priority and to assess their relation to *tashkīk al-wujūd*. Do the various aspects of priority all refer to ontological modulation in some way? And how do they relate to the ontology of quiddity specifically?

A convenient starting point for this inquiry is a passage of *Salvation* entirely devoted to the various senses and aspects of priority.⁶⁷ For the sake of clarity, I adumbrate them in diagram form below:



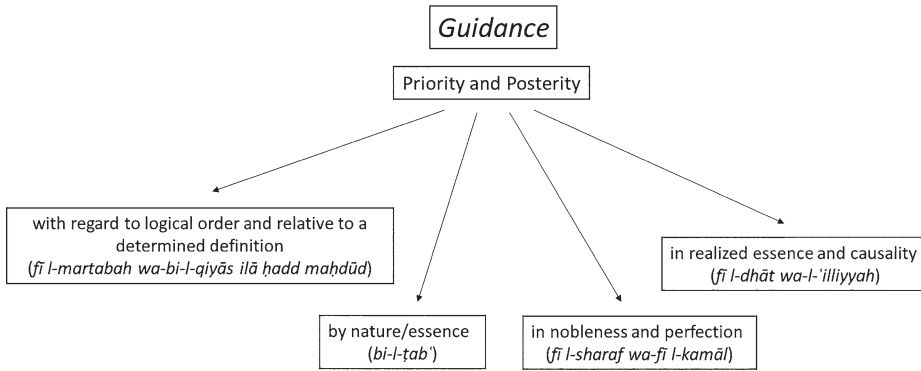
Some of these senses of priority had already been discussed at length in chapter VII.4 of *Categories*, which puts forth an alternative but quite similar scheme:



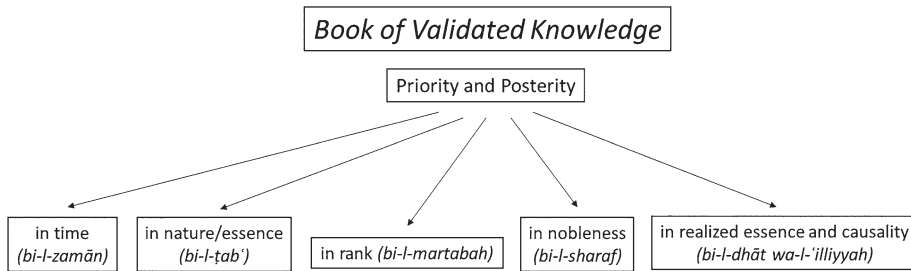
Another quite lucid and schematic treatment of the question can also be found in *Guidance*⁶⁸:

⁶⁷ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 540.7–542.13.

⁶⁸ Avicenna, *Guidance*, 239–242.



It should be noted that Bahmanyār provides a similar scheme in *The Book of Validated Knowledge*,⁶⁹ which he models closely on the Avicennian sources:



The accounts provided in *Categories*, *Salvation*, and *Guidance* are no doubt helpful, thanks chiefly to the clarity of Avicenna’s exposition in these works. However, they are by no means intended to be exhaustive of all the senses and modes of priority Avicenna broaches in his philosophical output. In fact, the master refers to many other aspects of priority in his logical and metaphysical treatises. For instance, in *Metaphysics*, he refers to what is “prior in nature” and “prior according to the intellect [i.e., in conception]” (*mutaqaddiman fī l-ṭabīʿah wa-mutaqaddiman ʿinda l-ʿaql*),⁷⁰ to what is prior “in conception and definition” (*fī l-taṣawwur wa-l-taḥdīd*),⁷¹ as well as to what is “prior in existence” (*mutaqaddim al-wujūd, bi-l-wujūd*),⁷² while in *Introduction* I.12 (Text 21) he mentions what is “before multiplicity” (*qabl al-kathrah*), thereby intimating a kind of intelligible or immaterial priority. Furthermore, and of immediate concern here, Avicenna states in *Metaphysics* V.1 that pure quiddity is “prior in existence” (*mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd*), in the manner in

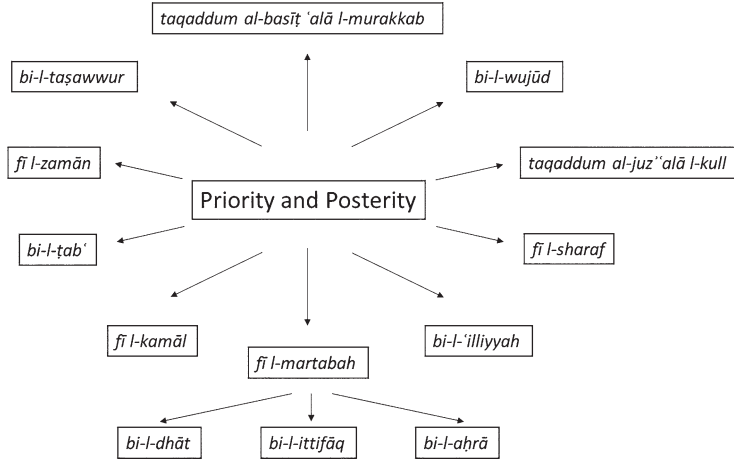
⁶⁹ Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 467–471.

⁷⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics* I.4, 26.13–15; cf. *Categories*, II.4, 75.14 ff. where Avicenna speaks of what is prior conceptually (*mafhūman*).

⁷¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, IV.2, 184.12.

⁷² Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, I.2, 15.15; IV.1, 164.12ff.; V.1, 201.10–13 and 204.16–205.2; VI.3. 276.13ff.

which the part (*juz'*) is prior to the whole (*kull*) and the simple (*basīt*) prior to the complex (*murakkab*). On the basis of these additional passages, a more complete classification can be proposed:



At this juncture, it is important to stress that these various aspects of priority are not exclusive of one another and can be combined in various ways. In fact, these distinctions are somewhat artificial, and they are based on the raw data that can be collected from the Avicennian sources. For instance, something may be prior in time and in essence, and both will represent a kind of priority in existence as well. This is the case of the celestial bodies relative to the sublunary beings. It is also the case of the father, who, Avicenna tells us, is “prior in time” (*yataqaddum bi-l-zamān*) and “prior in existence” (*yataqaddum bi-l-wujūd*) relative to the son.⁷³ Thus, many of these notions can be combined conceptually. Avicenna illustrates this pointedly in *Salvation* when, in the midst of a discussion of the soul-body relationship, he notes that the soul is “prior in existence by essence” (*mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd bi-l-dhāt*).⁷⁴ What is more, different aspects or senses of priority can apply to the same objects. For example, some of the main objects to which these distinctions are applied are substances and accidents. Avicenna returns time and again in his works to these objects with the aim of illustrating how priority and posteriority participate in *tashkīk*: substances are prior to accidents, and some substances are prior to other substances, and some accidents to other accidents.⁷⁵ Yet, substances can be said to be prior to accidents or to other substances in many ways: in existence, in time, in

⁷³ For that example, see Avicenna, *Categories*, II.4, 4–6.

⁷⁴ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 378.5–10.

⁷⁵ See the passages already cited in *Categories* I.2; *Metaphysics* I.4, I.5, and VI.3; *Philosophical Compendium*, section 11.

causality, in essence, in rank, etc. These various distinctions express different aspects of modulation and of metaphysical priority.

Finally, it is important to note that there is also much overlap between these various senses of priority, and that some even appear to be collapsible. This seems to be the case, notably, of priority with regard to causality (*bi-l-'illiyyah*), to actual essence (*bi-l-dhāt*), and to existence (*bi-l-wujūd*), notions which Avicenna and his disciple Bahmanyār appear to use interchangeably.⁷⁶ The reason for this is that causal priority, for these thinkers, necessarily entails a kind of ontological priority and has to do with the prior thing causing the existence of the posterior thing. Causal priority therefore pertains to the efficient cause responsible for the effect's existence. Furthermore, these two aspects of priority also relate to priority 'in realized essence' (*bi-l-dhāt*), which here refers to the actual essence of a thing, and not to its quiddity taken as an abstract notion. In the case of simultaneous events, such as the motion of the hand turning the key, the hand is regarded as being causally and essentially prior to the hand. But this priority amounts also to a kind of ontological priority.

As an upshot, it is apparent that most—if not all—of these modes of priority relate directly or indirectly to existence. They all participate in the task of elucidating the notion of ontological modulation or *tashkīk al-wujūd*. This explains why the notions of priority and posteriority occupy such an important place in Avicenna's philosophy and why the master consistently returns to this issue in his various works. The ontological relevance of priority is obvious in the case of priority 'in time,' 'in causality,' and 'in existence.' It would appear to apply to priority 'in perfection,' 'in honor,' 'in rank,' and 'in status' as well.⁷⁷ Arguably the only aspect of priority that need not relate to existence directly is 'prior in conception.' This would seem to be the case, for instance, of the purely conceptual or logical "priority and posteriority in the order of meanings" (*taqdīm wa-ta'khīr fī tartīb al-ma'ānī*) Avicenna sometimes mentions in his works, notably when discussing the three notions of 'intellect,' 'object of intellection,' and 'intellection' in relation to God.⁷⁸ Another context in which the notion of priority appears to be used in a non-ontological way is logic. Avicenna remarks at *Physics* I.1 that "the knowledge of the genus must be prior to

⁷⁶ See Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 467–471.

⁷⁷ The prior 'in honor' and 'in rank' presuppose the priority of some actual concrete existents over others in this particular fashion and so also participate in the modulation of existence. Priority in rank (*fī l-martabah*) is a notion that is often applied by Avicenna to his cosmology in order to describe the various levels of the cosmological hierarchy consisting of intellects, souls, and celestial bodies. But since Avicenna does not provide concrete or specific examples of all the senses of priority he mentions—and, for that matter, of all the modes of *tashkīk*—it is sometimes arduous to differentiate between them. It should be noted that one of the three sub-senses of prior 'in rank' that Avicenna lists in *Salvation* (namely, *bi-l-aḥrā*) is identical to one of the three aspects of modulation he provides in *Categories* I.2; except that in the latter work, it is not explicitly connected with priority. At any rate, this connection makes it clear that *al-taqaddum bi-l-aḥrā* relates to *tashkīk*. It also shows that Avicenna's treatment of these various distinctions and notions is relatively fluid, albeit consistent.

⁷⁸ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 590.4.

[*aqdam min*] the knowledge of the species, because the knowledge of the part of the definition precedes the knowledge of the definition.”⁷⁹ When it comes to logical concepts and their arrangement in the mind, priority need not be construed in a hard, ontological sense.

Even then, it would be a mistake to detach this sense of priority entirely from existence, since what is prior in conception is, in some sense, also prior in existence in the mind. This is because, according to Avicenna, universal concepts exist in the mind and are thus also subject to considerations of ontological priority and posteriority. One might argue that some concepts are essentially and ontologically prior to others *in the intellect*. Thus, the primary intelligibles, such as ‘the existent,’ ‘the thing,’ and ‘the one,’ can be said to be essentially and ontologically prior to other, more derivative concepts or propositions in the mind. What is more, mental existence can also be said more fundamentally to precede material existence, inasmuch as the intelligible precedes the material in the order of being. Thus, the noetic activity and thought content of the separate intellects essentially precede the material beings. In this regard, the ‘prior in conception’ can be connected with priority in causality (with regard to the final cause in the intellect) as well as with essential priority (see section IV.3), all of which amount also to a kind of ontological priority (of mental existence over material existence). The conclusion is that virtually every aspect or mode of priority Avicenna broaches in his works is directly or indirectly related to existence and therefore participates in the articulation of *tashkīk al-wujūd*. This explains why he rarely fails to mention priority in his various expositions of ontological modulation. It is a basic criterion that enables us to differentiate between, say, substances and accidents, as well as between the various eternal entities and all the material and immaterial existents of his ontology. For the purposes of the present analysis, however, only three of these sub-senses of ‘the prior’ will be taken into consideration. By far the most important with regard to quiddity are priority in existence (*bi-* or *fī l-wujūd*), priority in causality (*bi-l-‘illiyah*), and priority ‘in nature’ or ‘in essence’ (*bi-l-ṭab’*), and it is accordingly on these notions that the following analysis will focus. The objective is to clarify whether priority ‘in nature’ or ‘in essence’ also amounts to a kind of ontological priority or something completely different, as well as to address the issue of exactly how this aspect of priority informs Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation.

Avicenna formally distinguishes between ‘priority in existence’ (*al-taqaddum fī l-wujūd*) and ‘in causality’ (*bi-l-‘illiyah*), on the one hand, and ‘priority in nature’ or ‘in essence’ (*al-taqaddum bi-l-ṭab’*), on the other. In fact, these two basic senses of ‘the prior’ are always distinguished in Avicenna’s and Bahmanyār’s treatises. On a first and straightforward account, the former deals with existence proper and the causality associated with it (i.e., the efficient cause), whereas the latter deals with

⁷⁹ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.1, 5.5–8.

essence in abstraction from existence.⁸⁰ Because of the narrow link between existence and causality, Avicenna and later Bahmanyār conceive of ‘priority in existence’ and ‘priority in causality’ in very close terms and even as interchangeable notions. For Bahmanyār, the ‘prior in causality’ (*bi-l-‘illiyah*), ‘in existence’ (*bi-l-wujūd*), and in ‘realized essence’ (*bi-l-dhāt*) are all interchangeable notions that are contrasted to the prior ‘in nature’ or ‘in essence’ (*bi-l-ṭab*).⁸¹ In a similar fashion, Avicenna explains in *Metaphysics* IV.1 that the prior ‘in causality’ and ‘in existence’ deal with the “realization of existence” (*ḥuṣūl al-wujūd*). They imply that the effect acquires its existence from its cause.⁸² This is true of both temporal and atemporal events. Accordingly, these thinkers describe the famous case of the atemporal causal priority of the hand that turns over the key that is turned as an instance of priority ‘in causality,’ ‘in existence,’ and in ‘realized essence’ (*bi-l-dhāt*).⁸³ The existence of the motion of the key is caused by the existence of the motion of the hand. To take another example, the separate intellect that causes another lower intellect to exist is its atemporal efficient cause, and it is also prior ‘in causality,’ ‘in existence,’ and ‘in realized essence.’ Of course, the same can be applied to the First, given that the relation of God to the eternal world is the same: God causes the world to exist, and in so doing He is prior in existence, in causality, and in essence.

This basic differentiation between onto-causal priority (*bi-l-wujūd*, *bi-l-‘illiyah*, *bi-l-dhāt*) and essential priority (*bi-l-ṭab*) no doubt reflects the more fundamental distinction in Avicenna’s philosophy between quiddity and existence. More specifically, since Avicenna believes that we can conceive of pure quiddity in abstraction from existence, it seems that these two modes of priority overlap neatly with the conception of essence and the conception of existence respectively. On this theory, we can reckon the essential priority of oneness over twoness in the mind by considering their quiddities and without engaging in thoughts about their actual existence. Priority in essence establishes the dependence of one quiddity on another quiddity for its conceivability to obtain. Thus, oneness is logically and essentially prior to twoness, and animalness to humanness, because twoness and humanness are not conceivable without oneness and animalness, but the opposite is not true. In this regard, Avicenna’s and Bahmanyār’s understanding of priority in essence appears to hark back to what Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* Δ.5.1019a1–5 concerning the things that are “prior

80 Cf. Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 468.5–7. Relying heavily on Avicenna, he contrasts “the prior in essence” (*al-mutaqaddim bi-l-ṭab*), which deals with “quiddity in abstraction from existence” (*fi l-māhiyyah dūn al-wujūd*), with “priority in causality” (*al-taqaddum bi-l-‘illiyah*), which pertains to realized existence. In the case of ‘the prior in essence,’ the existence of what is prior is not a cause for the existence of what is posterior. Bahmanyār regards these two senses of priority (in causality/existence, and in essence) as being the only two real and essential senses (*ḥaqīqī*) of ‘the prior’ in the long list he surveys.

81 Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 467.13, 468.9–17, and 469.7.

82 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, IV.1, 164.18; see also Marmura, Avicenna on Causal Priority.

83 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, IV.1, 164.18–165.15; Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 469.3–7.

with respect to nature and substance.” They concern “those which can be without other things, while the other cannot be without them.” Avicenna reproduces a similar phrasing in *Guidance* and *Salvation*.⁸⁴

One upshot of the foregoing is that it would appear to remove priority in essence (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) completely from the realm of actual existence and causality. Since priority in essence deals with quiddity, not existence, this seems like a valid conclusion. It would also explain why, in his long discussion of priority and posteriority in section IV.1 of *Metaphysics*, Avicenna dissociates ‘the prior in nature or essence’ completely from his analysis of the various senses or aspects of causal and ontological priority, which he tackles only later on.⁸⁵ Moreover, it is also consistent with the master’s theory of modulation, which pertains only to notions that are *not* said univocally of things. So priority, as an aspect of modulation, applies to existence, because existence, for Avicenna, is modulated and not predicated in a univocal way, unlike, for instance, the quiddity ‘humanness,’ which does not apply first to Zayd and then to ‘Amr. Thus, ‘priority in essence,’ inasmuch as it focuses primarily on nature or essence, would seem at first glance to be excluded from Avicenna’s theory of *tash-kīk al-wujūd*.

But this conclusion appears problematic for a number of reasons. As mentioned above, priority in essence is one of the two fundamental senses of ‘the prior’ that Avicenna and his student Bahmanyār recognize, and it is undoubtedly one of the most important, since it reappears in all their lists of the various senses of priority. Moreover, Avicenna applies this sense of priority to actual beings, so it is legitimate to think that it is also narrowly connected with existence as well. This seems substantiated by the fact that he often relies on ontological terms and notions to describe priority in essence. Accordingly, in the two passages of *Guidance* and *Salvation* mentioned above, he describes the prior in essence as that which must have existence (*wujūd*) for the posterior thing to exist. A careful interpretation of these notions indicates that essential priority, for Avicenna, is in most cases also tantamount to a kind of ontological priority, or at the very least, coincides with an aspect of priority in existence. For what is essentially prior for Avicenna is also, usually, and by the same token, ontologically prior. In many cases, what is essentially prior will also be ontologically prior simply because it exists as such in the intellect. For example, when Avicenna discusses the priority of ‘oneness’ over ‘twoness’ in *Metaphysics* IV.1 and in *Salvation*, he presents this as illustrating *both* a kind of ontological precedence, or something related to existence (*bi-l-qiyās ilā l-wujūd*) (in *Metaphysics* IV.1), and an instance of the prior in nature or essence (*bi-l-ṭabʿ*) (in *Salvation*). Never-

⁸⁴ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 240.4–5: *fa-innahu lā yakūn li-l-mutaʿakhhir minhumā wujūd illā wa-kāna li-hādihā min ghayr inʿikās*; idem, *Salvation*, 540.8–10: *wa-huwa idhā kāna lā yumkin an yūjada l-ākhar, illā wa-huwa mawjūd, wa-yūjādu wa-laysa l-ākhar mawjūd*.

⁸⁵ There is a natural progression in Avicenna’s discussion of priority in IV.1 from essence to existence, which culminates with his analysis of causality and the ontological priority of the cause over the effect.

theless, in these texts he speaks of *the existence (wujūd)* of oneness preceding the existence of twoness. In fact, the essential and ontological priority of oneness is regarded as a condition (*shart*) for the existence of twoness. Thus, even when the relation between these notions is framed chiefly in terms of essence and essential priority—this is the case especially if these notions are considered abstractly in the mind and with regard to their pure quiddities (two ‘in itself’ or ‘twoness’ and three ‘in itself’ or ‘threeness’)—Avicenna appears to correlate it also with a kind of priority in existence, which is to be construed in connection with mental existence and the intelligible being of these notions. The same conclusion can be reached from a passage in *Categories*, which also discusses the relation between numbers, in this case threeness (*thalāthiyyah*) and fourness (*rubā‘iyyah*). There Avicenna states that “it has become clear, then, that the priority of threeness over fourness is only in existence [*fī l-wujūd*].”⁸⁶ Even though threeness is essentially and logically prior to fourness in the mind, and in that sense can be said to be conceptually prior (*bi-l-taṣawwur*) and essentially prior (*bi-l-ṭab*), this priority amounts to a kind of *ontological priority* as well, either because this priority of pure quiddity exists intelligibly in the mind or because whenever instances of fourness exist in the world they are conditioned by and dependent on the essential prior existence of threeness.⁸⁷ So the prior in essence is what is necessary for the existence of what comes after it, even if no direct efficient causality is involved. Even though oneness does not literally cause twoness to exist in the sense implied by efficient causality (*bi-l-‘illiyyah*) and realized existence (*ḥuṣūl al-wujūd*), the latter remains essentially and ontologically dependent on the former.

Yet, the idea that the prior in essence is entirely devoid of causal or ontological agency—an assumption that relies on the traditional interpretation of essence in Avicenna—can be challenged on the basis of certain texts. The notion of essential priority as amounting to a kind of intrinsic causality is developed in a passage of *Notes* (Text 35 below). There Avicenna describes “the prior in essence” as that which pertains to the internal and essential causality of a thing, that is, the causality responsible for the internal arrangement of an essence’s constituents (*muḡawwimāt*). The prior in essence is in this text described as a certain “cause” (*‘illah*), but one that is fully intrinsic and limited to the internal constituents of essence, and which does not extend to its external concomitants and accidents. The latter, in contrast, are caused by an external cause, which Avicenna, in accordance with what was said above, describes as ‘the prior in causality’ and ‘the prior in existence,’ and which is unequivocally to be identified with the efficient cause responsible for a thing’s realized or acquired existence (recall the expression *ḥuṣūl al-wujūd* found

⁸⁶ Avicenna, *Categories*, II.4, 76.3–12; cf. *Guidance*, 240.4–5: “Likewise, the prior in essence [*al-mutaqaddim bi-l-ṭab*]: I mean [for example] like ‘one’ and ‘two.’ For the posterior does not have existence [*wujūd*] unless the [prior] does, without the converse being true.”

⁸⁷ It is unclear which sense Avicenna intends here, but since he is referring to threeness in itself and fourness in itself, I assume he means first and foremost a kind of intelligible existence in the mind. At any rate, recall that for Avicenna essences exist both in the mind and in the exterior world.

in *Metaphysics* IV.1 in connection with priority ‘in causality’ and ‘in existence’). Fundamentally, then, the prior ‘in essence’ has to do with the essential or intelligible being and internal causality of quiddity, and the prior ‘in causality’ or ‘existence’ with the realized existence of its concomitants or of the thing taken as a complete substance. Nevertheless, essential priority implies a kind of intelligible being and internal principle of organization, since pure quiddity exists in the intellect and can be conceived of in abstraction from its external concomitants, and therefore also from notions of efficient causality and realized existence. This kind of essential priority has important implications for the notion of essential being as applied to God’s existence, a point to which I return later on in this chapter.

One noteworthy feature of the passage of *Notes* mentioned above is that Avicenna does not limit essential priority to objects in the mind, but rather extends it to concrete beings as well. This can be inferred quite plainly from the fact that the passage ends by stating that priority can be either in concrete reality or in the mind, and that the example that is used to illustrate the former is that of oneness and twoness, the very same one Avicenna had earlier used to illustrate ‘the prior in essence.’ This shows that the relationship between oneness and twoness involves *both* essential priority *and* causal or existential priority, and that this example pertains *both* to the conceptual and the concrete spheres. The rationale for this hypothesis is that essential priority has to do with the internal, essential, and constitutive nature of an essence, which concerns concrete beings in addition to mental beings. These two kinds of priority—essential priority pertaining to the being of the essence, and causal or existential priority pertaining to the external concomitants of a thing—extend to all the entities of the exterior world and in the mind. They point to a different ontological aspect of existing entities.

The upshot is that the mode of the prior ‘in essence’ seems to directly inform Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation, as well as his account of the ontology of quiddity, whether it is quiddity in the human mind *qua* pure concept and final cause, or quiddity as an ontological principle in concrete individuals. In the frame of Avicenna’s metaphysics, the notion of priority contributes not only to the discussion of being in general—as it had for various philosophers from Aristotle onward—but also to the more specific query of the ontological status of quiddity. The various steps of the analysis conducted thus far can be summed up as follows: ontological modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*) is made up of various aspects; one key aspect is priority; Avicenna outlines various aspects and senses of ‘the prior,’ one of which is ‘the prior in essence’; ‘the prior in essence’ pertains to quiddity as a self-constituted entity that precedes the complex structures or *sunola* in which it is instantiated, and which also asserts the priority of essence as an intelligible principle; as such, it connects with the intelligible being of pure quiddity and amounts also to a kind of internal and reflexive essential causality; this sense of priority applies to mental and concrete beings inasmuch as they have quiddities, although it emphasizes in particular the intelligible priority of pure quiddity as an intelligible notion; thus, ‘the prior in essence’ also marks a distinct mode of *ontological priority*, one that specifically

pertains to essence in abstraction from its external concomitants and attributes, which are characterized by other aspects of priority and causality.

These observations notwithstanding, the essential and ontological priority of pure quiddity vis-à-vis the composite entities calls for additional comments. Recall that Avicenna claims on two occasions in *Metaphysics* V.1 that pure quiddity or nature is prior *in existence*. The first occurrence, at *Metaphysics* V.1, 201.10–13, states that the consideration of animal in itself is “prior in existence” (*mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd*) to the particular and universal animal, whereas the second passage at V.1, 204.16–205.2 states that “the existence of the quidditative nature is prior [*wujūduhā aqdam*] to the existence of the natural [thing].” In both instance, Avicenna specifies that quiddity is prior in the way that “the simple precedes the complex and the part [precedes] the whole” (*taqaddum al-basīf ‘alā l-murakkab wa-l-juz’ ‘alā l-kull*). These statements raise the issue of exactly how quiddity can be said to be prior in the various contexts in which it is found: in the human mind; in the divine intellects; and in the concrete beings, where quiddity is a part of the composite individuals.

Perhaps the most literal and straightforward inference to be drawn from the statements in *Metaphysics* V.1 is that pure quiddity is prior to complex and composite beings. Here there can be little doubt that ‘mereological priority’ and ‘priority by simplicity,’ which pertain to the essence specifically, also amount to a kind of ontological priority vis-à-vis these *sunola*. This point is otherwise ascertained by Avicenna’s use of the formula *mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd* in those passages. Now, the analysis deployed in the previous chapters has already intimated that pure quiddity, *qua* metaphysical principle of complex beings, is irreducible and simple (*basīf*), as well as a part (*juz’*) of their composite existence. What Avicenna says in those passages of *Metaphysics* V.1 regarding the priority of essence therefore coheres perfectly with his general account of pure quiddity as an irreducible and constitutive principle of composite beings. Accordingly, pure quiddity can be said to be ontologically prior to these existents, because, relative to them, it is simple, constant, and irreducible, and it is also a principle of their own composite or complex existence. The essential and ontological priority of pure quiddity occurs on account of its irreducibility, even when it is *with* other things. Avicenna is elaborating here on the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model, which underpins the notion of the priority of essence over its external attributes and accidents. This idea is further developed in two sections of *Notes*. In the first, the master explains that “essence is not constituted by the concomitant; rather, essence necessitates and entails it. Thus, [essence] is the cause [of the concomitant], whose existence depends solely upon it” (*lā tataqawwamu l-dhāt bi-l-lāzīm bal al-dhāt tūjibu l-lāzīm wa-taqāḍihi fa-hiya ‘illatuhu wa-bihā wujūduhu*). In the second, he states that “the concomitants are not internal to the true essences, but follow after the constitution of the essences” (*al-lawāzīm lā tadkhulu fī l-ḥaqā’iq bal talzamu ba’d taqawwama [or taqawwum] al-ḥaqā’iq*).⁸⁸ In addition to priority, Avicenna is

⁸⁸ Avicenna, *Notes*, 362, section 641; and 544, section 959.

also making an implicit argument for the unity and simplicity of quiddity versus the compositeness of concrete and mental existents. By juxtaposing these dual sets of notions—simplicity/complexity, part/whole, and quiddity in itself/composite or complex substance—Avicenna obviously intends the reader to associate or correlate oneness, priority, and simplicity with quiddity in itself, and multiplicity, posteriority, and complexity with quiddity taken with its external attributes.

In addition to this mereological construal of essential priority, Avicenna also implicitly intends to affirm a more drastic kind of essential priority, which has to do with the status of pure quiddity as an intelligible in the human and divine intellects. Anticipating the discussion in chapter V, there is a sense in which pure quiddity *qua* object of thought of the divine intellects ontologically and essentially precedes the beings of the sublunary world. In this context, essential priority is to be connected chiefly with the intelligible being of essence, which is distinct from the kind of priority attached to realized existence. This intersects with Avicenna's claim at *Introduction* I.12 that some meanings (*ma'ānī*) are “prior to multiplicity” (*qabl al-kathrah*). Thingness or quiddity *qua* final cause and intelligible object in the divine mind precedes the realization of the thing in existence and, thus, also, the efficient cause associated with it. Although these comments may apply to the human intellect, they are true *a fortiori* of the divine intellects, whose intellection and its content are prior to the material beings. Thus, the forms (*ṣuwar*) and intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) that exist in the separate intellects—including the Agent Intellect, also known as the Giver of Forms (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*)—will be prior to matter and multiplicity and thus to the particular beings as well.

There can be little doubt that this sense of the prior in essence that appears in Avicenna's argumentation in *Introduction* I.12 also underpins the discussion in *Metaphysics* V.1.⁸⁹ This is made clear by the claim that pure quiddity or nature (*al-ṭabī'ah*) precedes “the natural thing” or “the natural being” (*al-ṭabī'ī*). It is in this ontological state of intelligible priority vis-à-vis the sublunary contingent beings that nature or pure quiddity can be said to have “divine existence” (*wujūd ilāhī*). It should be noted that Avicenna's notion of essential priority as something pertaining strictly to the essence in a “divine” context finds an important parallel in Yaḥyā b. 'Adī's metaphysics. In some of his treatises, Yaḥyā ascribes a kind of priority in essence to the “divine forms” and the “divine essences,” arguing that they are “prior in essence to the natural beings” (*aqdam bi-l-ṭab' min al-mawjūdāt al-ṭabī'iyah*).⁹⁰ This statement vividly brings to mind not only Avicenna's notion of essential priority,

⁸⁹ It should also be noted that, in this intellectual context, priority and posteriority are themselves intelligible notions or meanings for Avicenna (*ma'ānī 'aqliyyah*); Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, III.10, 159.15–160.9. This allows for subtle distinctions at the purely intelligible level and the possibility of devising a certain hierarchy of intelligibles (intellection of other vs. self-intellection, etc.).

⁹⁰ Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 66b12; Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 165.

but more specifically his own statement in *Metaphysics* V.1 to the effect that the “divine being” of essence precedes the “natural” existents.

The claim that essence in its purely intelligible state is prior to the composite substances is partly based on epistemological considerations, which pertain to the cognitive priority of simplicity over complexity. According to Avicenna, our intellects are more inclined to apprehend unity and simplicity than multiplicity and complexity. Intellectual unity in fact characterizes the highest state of intellective life, as can be seen in the case of the separate intellects and especially in the case of God, whose intellection is perfectly unitary and simple. This suggests that the essence in itself has an intelligible and conceptual priority over the particular concrete and complex mental existents, just as the simple has an intelligible and conceptual priority over the multiple. Accordingly, pure quiddity conceptually and epistemologically precedes the universal concept in the human mind. Since it is the nature or pure quiddity that forms the basis for the elaboration of the universal, quiddity in itself will be prior and simple when compared to the consummated universal form that derives from it.⁹¹

However, this point obviously carries an ontological thrust as well, because on Avicenna’s view concepts exist in the full sense, so that intellectual or essential priority also implies ontological priority.⁹² I argued previously that quiddity in itself, *qua* distinct form and consideration in the mind, is a simple intelligible entity when compared to the concrete or universal instantiations of quiddity. In the mind, it is only itself and is free of all the external concomitants and attributes that qualify the universal. As such, in this state of quidditative simplicity, it possesses an existence that precedes the conditioned, concomitant existence of the full-fledged universal. The universal depends on the ontological priority of pure quiddity, but the reverse is not true. What is at stake here is not temporal priority, but rather essential and ontological priority, whereby the intelligibility of what comes after depends on what comes before and on a prior principle (*mabda*). Thus, ‘human in itself’ is perfectly intelligible as a concept, by and of itself, but apprehending the universal concept ‘human’ as something predicated of many depends on, and is essentially posterior to, the quiddity in itself humanness, since it is combined with

91 To use the terminology of *Introduction*, the ‘nature’ or ‘natural genus’ will be prior to the ‘intellectual genus’ (the universal), which is a composite of the ‘natural’ and ‘logical’ genera.

92 As was shown above, Avicenna attributes an ontological and essential priority to concepts such as ‘the one’ and ‘the many’ and ‘oneness’ and ‘twoness’; see Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, IV.1, 164.12ff.; cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, 12.14a29–35. Although this point remains implicit throughout the passage, one may surmise that the master intends the ontological priority of ‘the one in itself’ over ‘the multiple in itself.’ This is because the latter depends on the former for its intelligibility and essential meaning, and, hence, also for its existence as a valid concept in the mind, whereas the converse is not true. This is an observation that applies to the notions of unity and plurality, to ‘the one in itself’ and ‘the many in itself,’ i.e., to their pure quiddities, and not merely to concrete things that can be said to be one or many. Quite relevantly, Avicenna describes these things as objects sought in the science of metaphysics.

other mental intentions and accidents. Whereas the pure quiddity humanness must exist for the universal concept human (and for concrete human beings) to exist, it, on the other hand, does not depend on material and mental concomitants and accidents for its very intelligible existence. Accordingly, Avicenna asserts quite plainly in *Metaphysics* V.1 that the quidditative nature is ontologically prior and simple when compared to the composite, contingent, and concrete natural being, viz., to quiddity taken with its material accidents. Pure quiddity is therefore epistemologically (or conceptually) and ontologically prior when compared to the composite and contingent beings it inheres in. As we will see in chapter V, if this is true of human intellection, it is eminently true of the intellection of the divine beings. Hence, according to Avicenna, oneness and simplicity are intellectually more germane and cognitively closer to the intellect than multiplicity, since their apprehension represents a unitary intellectual act, whereas apprehending multiplicity does not, since it requires analysis and discursiveness. What is more, simplicity is also prior in the order of existence, since the First, which is the originative source of all things, is absolutely simple. Bearing these two aspects in mind, it appears that in *Metaphysics* V.1, Avicenna is emphasizing the conceptual and ontological simplicity of quiddity in itself in addition to its priority, because in his reckoning these notions are intertwined. It is *because* quiddity in itself is simple vis-à-vis the composite natural being that it is prior.⁹³ In contrast, universal concepts and concrete entities, which are composed of quiddity and adjoining concomitants and accidents (*lawāzim*, *lawāḥiq*, *‘awāriḍ*), are complex and thus also posterior and caused.

Avicenna's insistence on the interrelationship between essential priority and simplicity recalls Neoplatonic metaphysics, as found for instance in some of the principles outlined in Proclus's (d. 485 CE) *Elements of Theology*. This work was translated and adapted in Arabic during the ninth century and was therefore available by the time Avicenna was writing. According to Proclus's metaphysics, the simple and the one always precede the complex and the multiple, and the last two notions derive essentially and ontologically from the first two. Moreover, the higher one proceeds along Proclus's hierarchy of divine intellectual and intelligible beings, the stronger the notions of oneness and simplicity are manifested in their pristine states, until one reaches the One (*to hen*), which is absolute oneness and simplicity, so much so that it is usually described as lying beyond, and excluding, all other things, including being itself. Finally, it is noteworthy that, alongside these notions, Proclus establishes a threefold classification of the universals—'before,' 'in,' and 'after' multiplicity—that corresponds in key respects to Avicenna's own understanding of the various modes or contexts in which quiddities exist.⁹⁴

⁹³ This reasoning intersects with Avicenna's argument for the priority and unicity of the Necessary Existent: it is necessary and prior, because it is the only entity that is one and simple.

⁹⁴ Proclus, like Avicenna later on, regards only the common thing in the human mind as constituting a 'universal' proper, whereas the common things 'before' multiplicity and 'in' multiplicity are not, *sensu stricto*, universals. On this point, see Helmig, Proclus and other Neoplatonists. Furthermore,

It is noteworthy that Proclus in his account correlates universality with ontology, in a manner comparable to how Avicenna discusses the threefold division of quiddity together with ontological considerations and his scheme of mental and concrete existence. Proclus ascribes three distinct ontological modes or “three modes of being” to the various classes of universals, one of which corresponds to the universals in the divine world that are *before* multiplicity, and which Proclus identifies with the Platonic forms. As the Greek philosopher explains in section II.1 of his commentary on Euclid’s *Elements*, “according to these three modes of being [*tas triplas hupostaseis*], I think we shall find that some universals are prior to their instances, some are in their instances, and some are constituted by virtue of being related to them as their predicate.”⁹⁵ Hence, the universals that precede material multiplicity can be said to have a simple and prior ontological mode in a robust sense.

Even though Avicenna does not adhere to Proclus’s broader Platonic framework, which is grounded in the theories of the forms and participation, he seems to defend a sense of priority that is quite close to that of the Greek philosopher. If, on Avicenna’s mind, the pure quiddities do not exist in an archetypal realm of their own, they do exist in the divine intellects, where they assume some of the same characteristics as Proclus’s forms, especially simplicity and priority, as well as a distinct ontological mode that corresponds only to them (see chapter V). These parallels between the Greek and Persian thinkers are reinforced by the central position of the Proclus arabus in Avicenna’s philosophy. The master endorsed the theological model it describes in its broad outline. Following this work, he describes the First Cause as corresponding to necessary existence, rather than as an entity lying beyond existence, as was argued by some of the late-antique Neoplatonists. In any case, what is crucial here is that Avicenna transfers to the divine being many of the qualities that were discussed extensively in Proclus’s philosophy, especially oneness, simplicity, and priority.

I believe this Neoplatonic affiliation helps to explain why the Arabic thinker construes the ‘divine existence’ of quiddity in itself as entailing ‘priority’ and ‘simplicity’ when compared to composite and complex mental and concrete existence, all the more so because, on my interpretation, Avicenna locates the quiddities in the divine essence Itself. Thus, his position on the ontological priority and simplicity of the pure quiddities appears to be indebted to a well-established Neoplatonic stance that explained divinity (*theoteta / ilāhiyyah*) in terms of simplicity and priority of existence, substance, or constitution. In this manner, if Avicenna’s mention of ‘divine existence’ is, first and foremost, suggestive of the essential and intelligible simplicity, priority,

what was said above concerning the essential and ontological priority of quiddity as an intelligible object would seem to locate the pure quiddities and common things ‘before multiplicity’ in the divine intellects, thereby establishing another parallel with Proclus’s metaphysics, where the forms and universals ‘before’ matter or multiplicity are contained in the superlunary intellects.

⁹⁵ Proclus, *Commentary on Euclid’s Elements*, 51.6–9; Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 137; Thomas Taylor’s translation has “modes of subsistence” instead.

and constancy of quiddity, which are, generally speaking, the qualities of ‘things divine,’ it also allows for the localization of these essences in the divine intellects. This last point, however, will have to be investigated in more detail. At any rate, the notion of essential and ontological priority applies differently to the various *aspects* and *contexts* of quiddity encountered thus far. When it comes to the intellectual and intelligible domain, essential priority applies in a strong or primary sense to the distinct conception of pure quiddity in the divine intellects and, to a lesser extent, in the human mind. The conception of pure quiddity as a distinct intelligible object in the mind is prior from an epistemic, essential, and ontological perspective to the consideration of pure quiddity together with its concomitants. In this connection, the priority of pure quiddity is also closely tied to the notion of final causality in Avicenna’s philosophy. According to Avicenna, final causality precedes efficient causality in the intellect, so that the consideration of quiddity in itself *qua* final cause will always be prior to any consideration of realized existence. This in turn should be connected with Avicenna’s belief that the pure quiddities exist in the Agent Intellect in a manner prior to the way in which they exist in the material world and in the human mind and, hence, also in a mode of essential priority vis-à-vis their actualization in the concrete.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, pure quiddity is also in some weaker sense prior when it is construed mereologically as a part of the complex mental existent that is the universal. It is essentially and conceptually prior, because it is an irreducible part of the whole and because it is the foundational nature of this complex existent, to which mental accidents and concomitants are added.

Remarkably, Avicenna believes that this mereological sense of ‘the prior’ can be extended to the context of concrete extramental existence. This means that quiddity is also essentially and ontologically prior in composite, material beings vis-à-vis the existent taken as an existential cluster or a complex of substance and accidents. This might look more surprising at first reckoning and is by far the most difficult aspect of priority to tease out, given that Avicenna often insists that nothing precedes existence and efficient causality in the concrete world. But Avicenna does not intend this statement in a temporal manner or as implying a sequentiality of metaphysical stages, whereby, first, quiddity would somehow exist on its own, and then would begin to exist as a realized or actual being. In that sense, he is not an ‘essentialist’ in the way that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is sometimes described, whereby existence would be “added to” (*zā'id ‘alā*) floating essences that precede it in the concrete

⁹⁶ See chapter V for more insight on this point. The priority of the intelligible over the concrete is well established in Avicenna’s philosophy and has to do with the vertical structure of his ontology, where the first principles of existence are immaterial. Inevitably, then, one sense of the ontologically and essentially prior will pertain to the priority of the intelligible over the material. If concepts in the divine mind are intelligible and exist, this same priority will apply to them as well. Black, *Mental Existence*, 12: “So, if there were any order of priority between the two existential modes, it would be mental being, not concrete being, that would claim priority in the Avicennian system.”

world.⁹⁷ Rather, Avicenna's claim is more subtle and should be construed in light of the mereological and essential priority of the part over the composite whole. As in the case of the complex mental existent, quiddity enjoys an essential and ontological priority in the concrete composite existent by virtue of being an essential part of it and, more specifically, an irreducible, constant, simple and foundational principle. This kind of priority is to be likened to the ontological priority that form has vis-à-vis the composite whole, or that soul has vis-à-vis animal body. In these cases as well, Avicenna posits a kind of essential and ontological priority, even though no temporal priority is involved. So even though one cannot affirm that quiddity already existed independently in the concrete world prior to the existence of the substance it constitutes, one equally cannot state that the existence of quiddity in that realized and complex substance is exactly the same as the existence of that realized and complex substance.

To conclude, the various applications of essential and ontological priority to pure quiddity in *Metaphysics* V.1 should be contextualized and construed within the larger framework of *tashkik al-wujūd*, of which priority and posteriority are only one—but arguably the most important—mode. Drawing on a long Aristotelian tradition that associated priority and posteriority with the predication of being, Avicenna elaborates on it by systematically weaving these notions into his theory of ontological modulation and extending them to all the beings of his ontology. Remarkably, he extends these notions to the modulation of the being of quiddity. In the final analysis, it appears that *tashkik al-wujūd* also serves to qualify the ontological mode of pure quiddity in Avicenna's philosophy and, more precisely, to clarify its ontological status in the various contexts in which it is found. Just as ontological modulation has a transcendental application and can be extended to God, it should also be extended to encompass the proper existence of quiddity and thingness. Quite tellingly, these two 'special' cases overlap to some extent: they highlight the centrality of the notion of priority in Avicenna's understanding of how *tashkik al-wujūd* relates to the First and essence, since there is nothing prior to God's quiddity, and since His quiddity is also the principle of all the other quiddities. The latter point in turn explains the essential priority of quiddity vis-à-vis complex entities, multiplicity, and materiality. In terms of Avicenna's philosophical motivation, the foregoing strongly suggests that his daring and innovative elaboration of *tashkik* targeted a special group of entities—the pure quiddities and God—that a traditional or standard ontological system could not satisfactorily accommodate.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ For this characterization of Rāzī's metaphysics, see Mayer, Faḥr ad-Dīn; and Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*.

⁹⁸ Bäck, *The Triplex*, 135, also seeks to connect a certain theory of modulation with quiddity. But he argues that it is quiddity itself—or rather, its three aspects or modes—that is modulated according to *pros hen* attribution: "Ibn Sina seems to view the connection between these different senses of quiddity as similar to the relation between the different senses of 'healthy' or 'medical' that Aristotle discusses in *Metaphysics* IV.2 ... In effect, Avicenna is now extending this doctrine [of the focal mean-

1.4 Pure quiddity as ‘divine’ and ‘absolute’

In light of the foregoing, I wish to return briefly to Avicenna’s description of pure quiddity as “absolute” (*muṭlaq*) and “divine” (*ilāhī*). It is easy to see how the latter epithet could be understood as locating the pure quiddities *in* the divine beings, meaning that they would exist *in* the First Cause and/or the separate intellects. Although I believe this reading is ultimately correct, for Avicenna as well as for the Greek forebears he is relying on, the term *theoteta* / *ilāhiyyah* may be understood in a more general way as connoting the ‘divine world’ or the ‘divine order’ or even merely ‘the quality of what is divine,’ of what is endowed with simplicity and priority in the order of being.⁹⁹ In this connection, it can be construed as implying primarily a ‘divine *mode* of being’ characterized by notions of simplicity, priority, permanence or constancy, and immutability, in contradistinction to the notions of complexity, contingency, causedness, and mutability associated with the lower caused existents. According to this reading, then, the “divine existence” of quiddity in itself would refer to the quidditative meaning’s (*ma‘nā*) being prior relative to its concomitants and accidents, as well as simple relative to the composite of quiddity and its attributes. It would adequately describe the constant and unchanging nature of pure quiddity, which, like divine things, remains eternally identical to itself. Furthermore, and more generally, it would designate an exalted and intelligible mode of existence that is prior and simple when compared to that of the composite material beings. If the term *ilāhī* is construed in this fashion, then it refers primarily to a *mode* or *state* of existence rather than a *locus* or *place* of existence, with the implication that pure quiddity always exists as such regardless of its context. Pure essence would enjoy this mode of existence even in a sublunary context, when embedded in concrete things or as part of an intelligible form in the mind.

This gloss on the notions of quidditative priority, simplicity, and unconditionedness also enable us to return to the statement in *Metaphysics* I.5 according to which quiddity in itself possesses an “absolute” (*muṭlaq*) existence. As in the case of these other notions, the quality of being “absolute” suggests that a thing cannot alter or vary in its state. It is that thing in itself that exists as such, regardless of whether it is posited with other things or not. Accordingly, it is also related to the simple

ing] to essences in general in his threefold distinction of quiddity.” However, according to Avicenna, it is not quiddity itself that is modulated, but rather existence as it is predicated of quiddity. So it is not quiddity, but existence, which is subjected to *tashkīk* and, through this process of modulation, applied to quiddity. Quiddity in itself is just quiddity in itself and thus not subject to any variation. Bäck’s mention of various “senses” of quiddity is particularly misleading and attributes to quiddity statements that Avicenna intends for existence; for Avicenna, there is only one *ma‘nā* of *māhiyyah* (which is why quiddity is predicated univocally), but several *ma‘ānī* of *wujūd*, which goes hand in hand with its status as an *ism mushakkik*.

⁹⁹ Precedents for this practice in the early Arabic philosophical literature may be found in *The Book of Pure Good* (ed. Badawī, 1977, 5–6), where the action of soul is described as ‘divine’; and in Fārābī, *Acquisition*, 63, which mentions “the divine principles” (*al-mabādi’ al-ilāhiyyah*).

(*basīṭ, haplos*), since what is simple does not alter or change. Nevertheless, there is another crucial consideration at stake here. In Avicennian logic, ‘the absolute’ is what holds irrespective of modal, temporal, and spatial conditions. Is absolute what exists at all times and in an indeterminate manner, and hence irrespective of specific conditions. By extension and in a metaphysical setting, the absolute for Avicenna can refer to what has no determination or specification in existence, to what is unconditioned and undetermined.¹⁰⁰ It is precisely in this sense, I believe, that the qualifications “divine” and “absolute” should be construed with regard to quiddity in itself. Pure essence is such precisely because it is in an absolute state of existence remote and free from all the conditions and determinations that otherwise apply to contingent being. It is unconditioned or *lā bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*. It cannot even be said to be possible and/or necessary, since these are concomitants that attach to the basic quidditative meaning subsequently. Avicenna regards this absence of modal conditions to be a characteristic of the absolute, and this is why he may have applied it to quiddity in itself as well in this passage of *The Cure*.¹⁰¹

Avicenna’s description of pure quiddity as something absolute (*muṭlaq*) should be compared to other metaphysical usages of this term in his works. He regards pure existence or existence in itself as being in an absolute state: he refers to absolute being (*al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq*) in *Salvation*.¹⁰² Like pure quiddity, being *qua* being

100 Avicenna discourses on the logical absolute in various works; see, for example, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 308–316 and 353 ff. Jurjānī, *Definitions*, 272.12, defines the absolute (*al-muṭlaq*) as “what points to a one [thing] that is not determined [*mā yadullu ‘alā wāḥid ghayr mu’ayyan*].”

101 Interestingly, Jurjānī in *Definitions*, 272.16, defines the “conceptual absolute” as “the quiddity that the examiner considers even if it is not [ontologically] realized [or verified] in the [sphere of the] thing itself [*al-muṭlaqah al-i’tibāriyyah: hiya l-māhiyyah i’tabarāhā l-mu’tabir wa-lā taḥaqquqa la-hā fī nafs al-amr*]. This is a reference to an abstracted form of quiddity in the mind, but it could be one that, on the author’s view, does not entail an ontological status, since by this time the term *i’tibārī* was often used expressly to contrast a mere suppositional object to a ‘mental existent’ (*mawjūd dhihnī*). The fact that this consideration is not verified by reference to “the thing in itself” or “the fact of the matter” (*nafs al-amr*) certainly goes in this direction. For a detailed discussion of the expression *nafs al-amr*, see Fazlōğlu, *Between Reality*, 24 ff. At any rate, Jurjānī’s connecting one aspect of quiddity with the absolute is any case relevant here.

102 Avicenna describes the subject of metaphysics, being *qua* being, as ‘absolute’ existence, but he usually refrains from describing God Himself as an absolute being. Yet the correlation of absoluteness with divine existence is a leitmotiv in Arabic philosophical literature. It can be convincingly traced back to Neoplatonic sources via the Arabic Neoplatonic corpus that developed in early Islam as a result of the translation movement and especially the Kindī circle. Plotinus regards the One as having an absolute (*apolutos*) internal activity, and in *Theology of Aristotle* one reads that God is true, absolute, simple One (Badawī (ed.), *Theology of Aristotle*, 271). For Fārābī as well, the absolute is connected with divine existence. In his *Commentary on On Interpretation*, 90, he outlines three senses of the term necessity, the third of which he calls unconditional and absolute necessity, a sense he correlates with divine existence. Before Fārābī, Kindī also refers to the Absolute One (*al-Kindī’s Metaphysics*, 104, 112). Avicenna, for his part, describes God as a principle of existence who creates “in an absolute manner” (*‘alā l-iṭlāq*), since nothing can qualify or condition the *ex nihilo* divine creation, emanation, or causation issuing from Him. But whether the application of absoluteness to God’s existence is

is unconditioned. Interestingly, in this connection, Avicenna also describes pure potentiality and prime matter as ‘absolute’ notions. Prime matter, which is pure potentiality for form, is in an absolute state of receptivity or potentiality. It is accordingly absolute matter (*al-hayūlā l-muṭlaqah*).¹⁰³ Now, most scholars would concur in saying that according to Avicenna prime matter does not *actually* exist, and it may be said at most to possess a kind of absolute potential existence.¹⁰⁴ Yet, this suggests that even something that is actually nonexistent like prime matter can be described as being in an “absolute state.” Prime matter and pure existence are a kind of intelligible or conceptual absolute, just as pure quiddity is a kind of intelligible or conceptual absolute. All these things may be considered or conceived of without any added determinations, conditions, or concomitants, and as such are among the building-blocks of theoretical thought. After all, they allow humans a glimpse into pure intelligibility and conceptualization. The parallel between prime matter, being *qua* being, and pure quiddity in this regard is an important one.¹⁰⁵

strictly speaking correct in Avicenna’s metaphysics remains an open question. One of the problematic implications of such a view would be that ‘absolute being’ or ‘the existent taken absolutely,’ which Avicenna regards as the general subject matter of metaphysics, would coincide fully with God’s existence. At any rate, if the pure quiddities are hypothetically situated in the divine intellect, as they probably should be (see chapter V), and if there is a sense in which the divine being can be called absolute (*muṭlaq*), then this would by extension establish a correlation between these meanings. This interpretation would have the merit of connecting Avicenna’s claim about the absolute existence of pure quiddity with his claim concerning its divine existence. The quiddities in themselves would share God’s divine and absolute existence, to the exclusion of all other things. The conceptual precedence, simplicity, and indeterminacy of quiddity that make it “divine” and “absolute” would mean that it shares a mode of existence that only the Necessary of Existence possesses. But this requires an interpretive leap inasmuch as Avicenna does not develop a clear concept of absolute divine existence in the way that followers of Ibn ‘Arabī and other mystics would.

103 Avicenna, *Definitions* 83; idem, *Notes*, 342.2; idem, *Salvation*, 497.10–11.

104 In *Notes*, 342.2, “absolute first matter” (*al-māddah al-ūlā al-muṭlaqah*) is said to exist and is connected with, or dependent on, divine creation. Interestingly, these ‘absolute modes of existence’ are always somehow tied to God’s direct causation in Avicenna’s metaphysics.

105 The theories of the absolute quiddity (*al-māhiyyah al-muṭlaqah*) and absolute existence (*wujūd muṭlaq*) are discussed in many post-Avicennian works, although they more often than not diverge from Avicenna’s doctrine of quiddity in itself. The expression *al-māhiyyah al-muṭlaqah* becomes a standard way to describe quiddity detached from all other considerations; see, for instance, Qushjī, *Commentary*, 400.4–9; Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424. In contrast, the concept of ‘absolute existence’ underwent a rich and ramified development in the Akbarian and Sufi traditions and assumed complex meanings and ramifications proper to these movements. Even then, the discussion of absolute existence is sometimes related to that of quiddity. For example, in Jāmī’s *The Precious Pearl* (*al-Durrah al-fārikhah*), as well as in the commentaries that were later attached to that work, one finds references to ‘absolute existence’ (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), which the author correlates with God, and which is contrasted to individuated (*muta‘ayyin*) existence. But the author of this treatise elaborates these ideas in direct reaction to the position of the primacy of quiddity, which, he says, others call ‘absolute’ (see Jāmī, *The Precious Pearl*, 35–36, 40). It is noteworthy that while for Avicenna terms such as ‘absolute reality’ (*ḥaqīqah muṭlaqah*) are used to describe pure quiddity, they get

1.5 Reassessing the conditions (*shurūf*) of pure quiddity

The foregoing discussion appears to validate the hypothesis that although quiddity in itself can be considered according to a variety of aspects and conditions, as well as in different contexts, it nonetheless possesses a special and positive mode of existence. However, the ontological mode that is proper to pure essence falls within the bounds of ontological modulation and can be qualified by priority, which is a key aspect of *tashkīk al-wujūd*. Nevertheless, this mode corresponds neither to mental existence nor to concrete existence as Avicenna usually describes them, *if these are taken with the condition that accidents or concomitants exist together with quiddity*. For these ontological modes imply, on Avicenna's doctrine, a composite and contingent existence, an *existential cluster* made up not only of the constitutive elements of quiddity, but also of its concomitants and accidents brought together and unified through causality. In contrast, the evidence adduced above calls for a distinction between three or even four ontological modes in Avicenna's philosophy, which would accommodate the special cases of the First and the pure quiddities.¹⁰⁶ My contention is that it is crucial to distinguish these various modes of existence in Avicenna's metaphysics, lest his doctrine of quiddity in itself be rendered incoherent either by making quiddity an ontological 'nothing' or 'void' or by collapsing it within the sphere of contingent and composite existence, to which it does not belong.¹⁰⁷ Being endowed with simple, irreducible, and unconditioned existence means that quiddity in itself exists, but not in a manner identical to the composite, contingent existents, even when it exists in them or as a part of them. This special mode of irreducible and simple existence in turns explains how quiddity can be said to underlie the various kinds of contingent existents Avicenna describes in his works, while being reducible to neither. It is this unconditioned and absolute mode of existence that allows quiddity to exist in an intelligible manner in concrete individuals and in the mind and, hence, to subsist as an irreducible part (*juz'*) of these existents.¹⁰⁸

Accordingly, this special mode of existence characterizes pure quiddity not only when it exists in composite or complex existents—such as pure quiddity as part of the universal horse or the concrete particular Bucephalus—but also when it exists

applied instead to God and pure existence in the *aṣālat al-wujūd* tradition, partly in reaction to Avicenna's essentialist doctrine.

106 See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.2, 16.6, where he mentions "the mode of existence" (*naḥw al-wujūd*); cf. VIII.7, 364.16, which refers to the "state of existence" (*ḥāl wujūd*) of the intelligibles in God.

107 This partly explains Wisnovsky's puzzlement at this issue at *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 159–160.

108 These results overlap partly with Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz.'* I agree with Benevich's contention that the description of 'divine existence' in *Metaphysics* V.1 can be said to apply to the existence of pure quiddity in composite beings, that is, to its existing as an irreducible part in those beings, thanks to a mereological interpretation. However, I believe that this expression also refers to the intrinsic intelligible nature of pure quiddity and points to a divine localization of these pure quiddities in God's mind.

as a distinct intelligible form in the mind. In either case, this special mode of existence refers to the simple, irreducible, and unqualified state of pure quiddity, *regardless of whether other things are attached to it*. In that sense, one can propose that *Metaphysics* V.1 aims to emphasize not only the epistemic irreducibility and distinctness of pure quiddity, but also its ontological irreducibility (even when it exists in composite beings) and distinctness (as it exists distinctly in the mind). It is pure quiddity's ability to exist as an irreducible principle in composite things, as well as in abstraction from all other things, that makes it absolute, divine, and unconditioned. The unconditioned state of quiddity makes it *an ontological constant*, regardless of whether it is considered 'with other things' or 'without them' and 'in abstraction from them.'¹⁰⁹

One important result of the previous analysis is the methodological and conceptual need to distinguish between *contexts* of existence and *modes* of existence in Avicenna's philosophy. It is true that Avicenna posits, *grosso modo*, two *contexts* of existence: mental or intellectual, and concrete or extramental. However, these two contexts of existence do not exhaust all *modes* of existence. In fact, we saw above how sophisticated Avicenna's conception of *tashkik* is, and how many distinctions and aspects he introduces to modulate the notion of existence. For one thing, God or the Necessary of Existence does not exist in the same mode or way as the rest of the concrete existents, even though it is an extramental being from the perspective of human thought. Similarly, simple, intellectual beings, such as the Agent Intellect, do not exist in the same mode as a horse or a rock. Even with regard to the ontology of concepts in the human soul specifically, we saw that this single context or sphere—mental or intellectual existence—calls for a further distinction between two modes of existence: the composite, contingent, and conditioned existence of the universal, and the simple, irreducible, and distinct mode of existence of pure quiddity. The rationale for this distinction is that pure essence exists both as a distinct form in the intellect and mereologically in the composite, universal concept. Hence, the intelligible existence of essence is not reducible to the universal concept, nor is the existence of the universal taken as a synthetic entity or whole the same as that of pure quiddity when it constitutes a part of it. In that manner, the ontological mode of pure quiddity is always the same, regardless of whether it is taken distinctly or with other things, as a part of the universal. Clearly, then, *contexts of existence* are not the same as *modes of existence*. It is these matrices of distinctions, which, when taken together with the theory of *tashkik*, form the cornerstone of Avicenna's ontology.¹¹⁰

109 I refer the reader back to my interpretation of the passage at *Metaphysics* V.1, 196.10–13, which, on my view and if properly translated, explicitly aims to distinguish the special mode of existence of pure quiddity from that of caused, composite, contingent existence, i. e., the existence of the concomitants and accidents of quiddity. These various modes and aspects, as was shown earlier, are at the core of Avicenna's theory of *tashkik*.

110 Naturally, these are my categories, and they are not always explicitly reflected in the Arabic terminology Avicenna relies on. Yet, I think he deliberately introduced these matrices of distinctions to

But how do these ontological considerations intersect with Avicenna's application of the various conditions (*shurūṭ*) to quiddity? This question opens another interesting perspective from which to approach the problem of the special existence of pure quiddity. Recall that Avicenna in his works draws a distinction between quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*, quiddity *bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*, and quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. I have referred to these distinctions on numerous occasions throughout my analysis, so there is no need here to describe each one of them in detail. Suffice to say that, on my interpretation of the evidence, Avicenna uses these various clauses to refer to *quiddity in itself*, yet in different *contexts* (concrete, mental) and with reference to various ontological *aspects* or even *modes*, depending on whether the external concomitants and accidents of quiddity are taken into account. These conditions, to be sure, express epistemic and logical aspects and determine how quiddity can be conceived of, but they also amount to ontological qualifications about how quiddity exists in the intellect and in the concrete world. In this regard, one of the main distinctions that was endorsed in the previous analysis was between an unconditioned (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) mode of existence proper to pure quiddity, nature, and essential reality taken in themselves and in abstraction from all other things, and a conditioned (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) mode of existence, which, I would argue, corresponds to what Avicenna usually calls *al-wujūdayn*, *al-wujūd bi-sharṭ* or *al-wujūd al-sharṭī*, or even *al-wujūd fī l-dhihn* and *fī l-a'yān*, when these are taken indiscriminately to apply to all composite concrete and mental existents. Pure quiddity is invariable, simple, prior, and constant, which explains why it is also described as being divine, absolute, and unconditioned. We have seen above how, following a well-established Greek tradition, the notions of simplicity, priority, constancy, and absoluteness are often reserved to describe the divine world in the works of Arabic philosophers. Nevertheless, pure quiddity exists in a *distinct* or *separate* state only in the intellect and, hence, according to an intelligible mode, where it is found 'on the condition of no other thing' (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*). In contrast, composite or complex existence (whether as a universal or as a concrete thing) is conditioned, concomitant, posterior, caused, and contingent, and is necessarily accompanied by a cluster of accidents. This is quiddity 'with something else' (*bi-sharṭ shay'*).

advance the ontological investigation. But this came at a cost for the later commentators, since all the nuances of the Avicennian position were not easy to grasp, a fact rendered even more complicated by the textual transmission of Avicenna's corpus; hence the debate that harks back to some of the main postclassical interpreters of Avicenna, notably Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Shahrastānī, and Tūsī, and which focused on Avicenna's understanding of *wujūd*. In this connection, it is appropriate to mention that Rāzī, a great compiler of previous philosophical views, frequently refers in his works to the proponents of the equivocity of existence or to those who consider existence an equivocal term (*ism mush-tarak*). Although he rarely cites thinkers by name in his works, there is little doubt that Rāzī included Avicenna in this group; see, e.g., *Collection*, 76.5–6, 98–99. It appears that for him, the various Avicennian ontological distinctions and the theory of *tashkīk* posed some serious interpretive problems, to the point of making Avicenna a proponent of the equivocity of being.

Of particular relevance here is the epistemic aspect that most directly corresponds to the irreducible and special ontological mode of pure quiddity. Avicenna, as well as most of the post-Avicennian thinkers, commonly associate pure quiddity, quiddity in itself, and absolute quiddity—all three expressions being synonymous—with unconditioned quiddity or quiddity *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*. Recall that this is the aspect of quiddity that Avicenna—and, again, most of his followers—rely on to describe the mereological existence of quiddity in composite beings and especially in concrete beings. It is not immediately obvious why Avicenna and the post-Avicennian thinkers would want to connect unconditioned quiddity with the concrete individuals specifically. This seems counterintuitive, because quiddity in the concrete world is always ‘with other things.’ One explanation is that by referring to the ‘unconditioned’ state of pure quiddity in composite beings (including in the concrete material beings of the exterior world) Avicenna is allowing for it to be considered either ‘with other things’ or abstracted as a pure, negatively-conditioned object in the intellect. The idea that quiddity somehow exists in concrete beings according to a qualified sense of universality (and in line with Avicenna’s theory of modulation) would go some length in supporting his theory of abstraction—of how quiddity can be abstracted or extracted from the particulars and apprehended in itself. Hence, when regarded as a nature dwelling *in* concrete existents, albeit one which can also be abstracted and conceived of in itself by the mind, pure quiddity is *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*. So the latter formula would, so to speak, encompass the other two forms of condition (*bi-sharṭ shay'* and *bi-sharṭ lā shay'*).

On this interpretation, the expression *lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar* would point to pure quiddity as an irreducible epistemic principle and metaphysical part of composite concrete existents. In contrast, when considered as a distinct object in the intellect in abstraction from all material *and* mental concomitants, essence is *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. Strictly speaking, then, only the latter clause applies to quiddity in itself when regarded exclusively and in abstraction from all other things, and in this state of pure autonomy and distinctness it is an object that exists only in the intellect. As Avicenna and most of his later commentators contend, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* can exist *only* as a pure object or concept in the mind, if at all.¹¹¹ It is therefore important to grasp that the difference between these two expressions, unconditioned quiddity and negatively-conditioned quiddity, is largely one of context (mental vs. extramental) and epistemic priority (since its unconditioned state *in concreto* precedes its negatively-conditioned state *in intellectu*, at least when it comes to the process of abstraction performed by the human minds), but that the ontological *mode* pertaining to quiddity in itself remains the same, namely, simple, irreducible, and identical with itself, regardless of whether it is a part of an existent (unconditioned) or distinct

¹¹¹ There are, however, exceptions to this rule in the postclassical tradition. Qushjī posits quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* as existing both in the mind *and* in the concrete world. This view—unorthodox when compared to the earlier Avicennian tradition—is to be explained in terms of Qushjī’s idiosyncratic dual interpretation of the condition *bi-sharṭ lā*; on this point, see Izutsu, *Basic Problems*.

from all other things (negatively-conditioned). Hence, the immanent mereological (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) and negatively distinct (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*) dimensions of quiddity do not affect its purely intelligible, irreducible, and constant ontological nature and mode, which remain at all times the same. This explains why the former, namely, unconditioned quiddity, is related to the latter (through the process of abstraction), inasmuch as unconditioned quiddity can be potentially regarded—when rationally considered in the mind—as essentially and ontologically the same as ‘negatively-conditioned’ quiddity.¹¹²

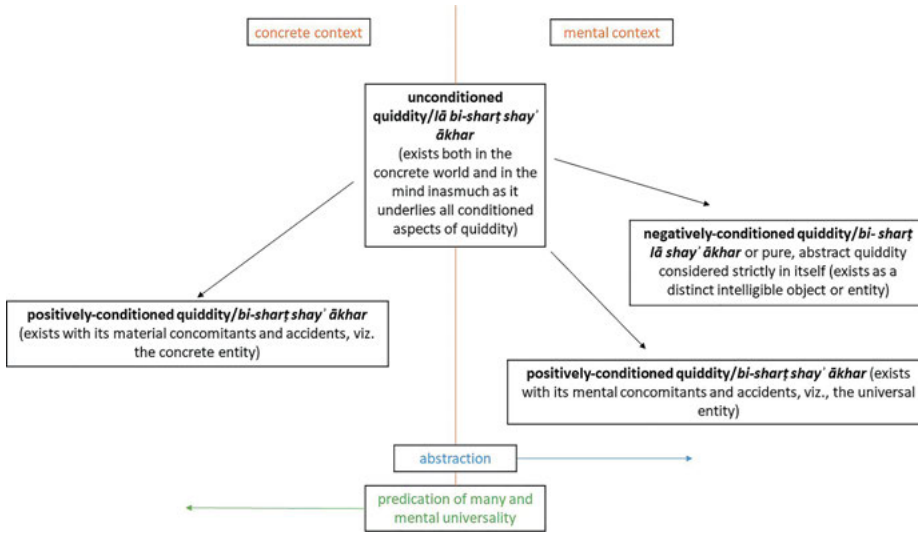
Yet, an important distinction is to be made between how quiddity in itself exists in the concrete extramental world and how it exists in the mind. In the exterior world, quiddity in itself exists only *together with* its material accidents and concomitants. Avicenna is adamant that it cannot exist on its own and autonomously, lest one end up positing the Platonic forms. Hence, the absolute mode of existence of quiddity in itself in the concrete world is *in* or *with* the particular and conditioned concomitants that individualize this being, although pure essence remains unaffected and untouched by these external concomitants, since it exists as an intelligible part within the existent. This is the first aspect of unconditioned quiddity or quiddity

112 In the post-Avicennian tradition, pure quiddity is more commonly and systematically identified with unconditioned quiddity (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) than with negatively-conditioned quiddity (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*). Unconditioned quiddity is then also frequently identified with ‘absolute quiddity’ (*māhiyyah muṭlaqah*) and nature (*ṭabi'ah*) or ‘the natural universal’ (*kullī ṭabi'ī*); see Qushjī, *Commentary*, 400.4–9; Tahānawī, *Dictionary*, vol. 2, 1424; Izutsu, *Basic Problems*, 5 and note 2; and the section below reserved to the post-Avicennian period. How these various terms and notions relate to one another represents a intricate problem in the postclassical literature. The reason for the strong connection between pure quiddity and unconditioned quiddity—rather than negatively-conditioned quiddity—is the importance of the notion of *i'tibār* in this later discussion and the designation of the negative condition as a consideration that is itself added to the consideration of pure quiddity, with the implication that we are dealing with two distinct and cumulative considerations. Consequently, some thinkers regard negatively-conditioned quiddity as not referring to pure quiddity, but already to some synthetic or composite quiddity in the mind, and this in spite of the purely negative nature of the condition attached to it. Avicenna, in contrast, quite lucidly identifies negatively-conditioned quiddity with pure quiddity in *Metaphysics* V.1—at least in the context of his discussion of mental existence and the universal. There is little doubt that the consideration of pure quiddity mentioned in *Introduction* I.2 also corresponds to negatively-conditioned quiddity as described in *Metaphysics* V.1. Yet, as I explained earlier, it is crucial to realize that pure quiddity for Avicenna is *both* negatively-conditioned quiddity *and* unconditioned quiddity, depending on the *context* in which one conceives it: it is negatively conditioned when conceived of in itself in an intellectual context, but unconditioned when conceived of in the context of concrete reality, in which case it can be viewed either purely in itself (*qua* pure nature or quiddity) or together with external concomitants and accidents (in which case it becomes positively conditioned or *bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*). I surmise that one major reason why the consideration of unconditioned quiddity takes on such importance in the later tradition flows from the reluctance of many thinkers to recognize the mental existence of pure quiddity. This in turn could have led to the demotion of negatively-conditioned quiddity to signifying merely another, composite, concomitant aspect of quiddity in the mind and not pure quiddity.

lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar. In addition, pure quiddity exists absolutely in the mind in a manner *distinct* from universal quiddity or quiddity combined with intelligible concomitants. This is the second aspect of unconditioned quiddity, which results from the process of abstracting the nature of concrete individuals. This second aspect of unconditioned quiddity also corresponds to negatively-conditioned quiddity, quiddity *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*, if the emphasis is on its pure abstraction and distinctness from everything else.¹¹³

Furthermore, this second aspect of absolute and unconditioned quiddity also in turn forms the basis for the universal, since it can combine with mental concomitants. Note that the absolute, unconditioned state of pure quiddity enables it to become conditioned once more, but this time in the mind, and to acquire a new condition linked with the mental attributes. Thus, unconditioned quiddity branches out into two states of conditioned quiddity, in the concrete and in the mind. In the case of concrete beings, quiddity can be regarded “with the condition of another thing” (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*), where “thing” corresponds to the material accidents. In the case of the universal, it can also be considered “with the condition of another thing,” where “thing” this time refers to the mental attributes, such as universality, and to the predicability of multiplicity that characterizes the universal proper. In brief, there is a sense in which unconditioned quiddity underlies *all other instances and aspects of quiddity*. Below is a diagram that recapitulates these various points:

113 The same interplay between the epistemic and the ontological applies to Avicenna’s theological doctrines. For instance, he claims that God is purely one and simple, that He is “with the condition of no other thing,” that He is at the same time thinker, thought, and object of thought—all of these are posited from the perspective of human rationality and are therefore conceptual and epistemic in nature, but they are also intended to describe an ontological reality in the extramental world: God is one and simple, He is thinker, thought, and object of thought, albeit with no multiplicity arising, and He does exist with no other things attached to Him.



These three cases of condition—the two *bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar* and the single *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*—are rendered possible in the first place by the absolute, unconditioned state of pure quiddity. In all three instances, quiddity in itself remains the same and exists as an *epistemic* and *ontological constant*, even when it is considered with these conditions and when it underlies the various instantiations of contingent existence (both mental and extramental).¹¹⁴ All three conditional states therefore presuppose the fundamental mode of existence of absolute and unconditioned quiddity. Put differently, the existence of quiddity in itself *qua* absolute and unconditioned underlies the other aspects of quiddity, including those associated with mental and extramental conditioned existence. By extension, when taken together with its concomitants, quiddity in itself can be said to exist either concretely or mentally. When considered purely in itself, it exists separately in the mind alone as a mental or intellectual existent of a special kind.

One important upshot of the foregoing is that in Avicenna's metaphysics conditioned existence, i.e., composite concrete and mental existence, should be contrasted not only to nonexistence, but also to simple, absolute, and unconditioned exist-

114 Given the terminological evidence and the nature of the conceptual distinctions established by Avicenna, it is difficult to agree with those scholars who regard the 'divine existence' of quiddity in itself as a purely epistemic, not ontological, state, and one that would not be in any way distinct from the status of complex universal entities in the mind. As mentioned previously, it seems to me counterproductive to want to establish strict separations between the ontological and epistemic spheres, inasmuch as what can be conceived of intellectually for Avicenna necessarily also somehow exists intellectually or intelligibly. In contrast to this approach, my contention is that the absolute, divine state of quiddity marks a new epistemic and ontological state or mode in Avicenna's metaphysics. In this regard, my results are close to those of Rashed, Ibn 'Adī, although I depart from Rashed's intimation concerning the neutrality of pure quiddity.

tence. What does not exist in a composite and contingent mode *either* does not exist at all *or* exists in an absolute, simple, and unconditioned mode. Put differently, when Avicenna discourses on the two modes of existence (mental and extramental)—what he calls *al-wujūdayn*—his account should not be taken as an *exhaustive* description of existence *simpliciter*, but rather as a description that is exhaustive only of *contingent and composite/complex existence*.¹¹⁵ Avicenna intimates this very idea of contingent complex existence in a passage of *Pointers*, when he states: “Know that each thing [*shayʿ*] has a quiddity [*māhiyyah*], and that it [the thing] can be verified as existing either in the concrete world or as [being] conceivable in the mind, *inasmuch as its parts are present together with it* [*bi-an takūna ajzāʿuhu ḥāḍirah maʿahu*].”¹¹⁶ As this quotation shows, *al-wujūdayn* encompasses only composite or complex things. These things consist of quiddities taken together with their accidents and concomitants—referred to in this quotation by the term “parts” (*ajzāʿ*). In those cases, Avicenna notes that “existence is a concomitant notion [or attribute] connected with the essence [of the thing]” (*fa-l-wujūd maʿnā muḍāf ilā ḥaqīqatīhi lāzim*).¹¹⁷ The inference is that things that do not have parts and are not therefore composite cannot exist according to these two contingent modes of existence. By implication, this expression does not cover certain special cases of existence, such as God’s special existence. God cannot be described according to the definitions of mental and concrete existence typically outlined by Avicenna in his works, on account of the fact that the two classes of existents they presuppose are characterized by a conditioned, contingent, and complex mode of existence. Rather, God possesses His own special mode of existence.¹¹⁸

115 Avicenna uses the formula “the two modes of existence” (*al-wujūdayn*) in numerous instances: *Pointers*, vol. 1, 202.6; *Introduction*, I.2, 15.3 and 18 (where he mentions the “two aspects of existence,” *naḥwā l-wujūdayn*), 34.9. This formula was subsequently picked up by post-Avicennian exegetes in their commentaries. See, for instance, Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 1, 202.17 ff., who explains that by *al-wujūdayn*, Avicenna means “the exterior and mental [existence]” (*al-khārijī wa-l-dhīmī*). Interestingly, Ṭūsī goes on to talk about the “special existence” (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*), which belongs to God, and which he therefore contrasts sharply to the two previous modes of existence.

116 Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 202.4–5. The pronoun *hu* attached to *ajzāʿ* and the term *maʿahu* hark back to *shayʿ*, not *māhiyyah*. This indicates that Avicenna is referring to the various parts of the composite whole (essence, concomitants, accidents) according to a mereological analysis, and not to the intrinsic and constitutive parts of essence, in spite of the section’s title.

117 Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 202.8.

118 One passage that seems to draw a strong distinction between the mode of being of God and the mode of being of the other entities is *Notes*, 180, section 265. In that passage, actual existence (*al-wujūd bi-l-fiʿl*) is identified with pure necessity (*al-wājibīyyah*), and both in turn are identified exclusively with God’s essence. In contrast, existence said in an absolute or general sense (*al-wujūd muḥ-laqan*) is ascribed to all the other beings, and it presumably corresponds to the undifferentiated acquired existence that contingent beings receive from their cause. As Lizzini, *Ibn Sinā’s Metaphysics*, explains: “If the uncaused Principle is itself *part* of being, then It is the principle of only *part* of being: of being insofar as it is caused, and not of all being or of being as such. Indeed, if the Principle were the principle of all being, it would, paradoxically, be Its own principle.” Accordingly, I believe the

In light of the foregoing, I would argue that the pure quiddities also represent an exception to the ontological scope that *al-wujūdayn* encompasses. It is precisely with this intent in mind that Avicenna asserts in *Metaphysics of The Cure* V.1, 201.1 that we can consider quiddity in itself in abstraction from oneness and multiplicity, of particularity and universality, and of “whether it is in actuality or with the consideration of potentiality.” Since these concomitants are associated with conditioned, contingent, and composite existence, even they are inadequate to describe the ontological mode of quiddity. What Avicenna is saying, in effect, is that quiddity cannot ever exist in the mode in which the contingent beings exist *qua* actually existent composites (e. g., this particular horse). Now that the modes of ontological modulation, and especially the notion of priority, as well as the conditions, have been addressed in some detail in connection with quiddity, I wish to turn to the other major aspect of the problem related with existence in Avicenna, namely, his contention that *wujūd* is said according to many “senses” or “meanings” (*kathīr al-ma‘ānī*). More specifically, I wish to discuss how the two main senses he mentions relate to quiddity and impact on the link between quiddity and substance.

2 Senses of existence in Avicenna's ontology

2.1 ‘Affirmative’ or ‘established’ existence’ and ‘realized existence’ (*wujūd ithbātī*, *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*)

Avicenna's claim in *Metaphysics* I.5 that being has several ‘senses’ or ‘meanings’ (*kathīr al-ma‘ānī*) might at first sight strike one as somewhat perplexing, because in other passages—building on Aristotle and his commentators—he describes existence as a modulated term and notion, which implies that it possesses a single focal or overarching meaning.¹¹⁹ As we saw in the section on *tashkīk*, Avicenna defines *wujūd* (or *mawjūd*) as a modulated term (*ism mushakkīk*), which he contrasts to the equivocal terms proper (*asmā’* or *alfāz mushtarakah*). Thus, when the master claims that *wujūd* has several senses or meanings, he does not intend to say that it is polysemous and that its various meanings are completely unrelated to one an-

expressions *mawjūdāt fī l-a’yān*, *al-wujūdayn*, *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, etc. apply primarily in Avicenna's works to the caused, composite, and contingent beings existing in extramental reality, and, hence, are not usually intended to include the mode of existence of the First Cause. It is even questionable on my view whether Avicenna in most cases would include the separate intellects in the context he describes as *fī l-a’yān*; this expression seems to refer first and foremost to the contingent beings of the sublunary world. Yet, since the separate intellects are themselves caused, contingent, and affected by multiplicity—each one of them possesses intelligible multiplicity—they can also under one aspect be encompassed by this expression.

119 In writing this section of my book, I benefited tremendously from conversations with David Twetten, to whom I express my gratitude. All errors or misunderstandings of Avicenna's text are entirely mine.

other, which would make it a truly equivocal notion, but rather that *wujūd* has various sub-senses, all of which are tied together by a focal or core meaning. Avicenna's statement in I.5 therefore needs to be read in light of his theory of ontological modulation, which builds on Aristotle's theory of core-related homonymy. In attempting to extricate the various semantic nuances of being and in clarifying its predication, Avicenna is also following Aristotle directly, for the latter also believed that being is "said in many ways."¹²⁰ On the other hand, there is no consensus that has emerged in the secondary literature regarding the nature and scope of the two senses of existence Avicenna distinguishes in this passage of *Metaphysics* I.5 and how they relate to the various senses of being Aristotle discusses in Δ7 and other passages. Furthermore, their relation to quiddity remains problematic. In what follows, I go over some of the main interpretations that have been offered and strive to generate new insight into the difficult task of interpreting this key passage of *Metaphysics* I.5. According to my interpretation, and following a brief indication by Marmura, *Metaphysics* I.5 is to be connected directly to the discussion of the ontology of quiddity that is articulated in section V.1 of the same work.¹²¹

Starting with the first sense, most interpreters of Avicenna have construed *wujūd ithbātī* as referring to what is 'established' or 'realized' in existence or in external reality, and thus to what can be 'affirmed' as actually existing. Since Avicenna recognizes both concrete and mental beings, the implication is that *wujūd ithbātī* would apply to both. Moreover, this sense would be identical to the one conveyed by another Avicennian expression, 'realized existence' (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*). On this interpretation, *al-mawjūd*, *al-muthbat*, and *al-muḥaṣṣal* all point to an actually existing entity, primarily in the concrete world, but also in the mind.¹²² If this interpretation is re-

120 The key passages in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*—surely known to Avicenna—are as follows: Γ2, especially 1003a33–1003b19, Δ7, and E2.1026a33–1026b5, where it is said that "the unqualified term 'being' has several meanings." It is noteworthy that Uṣṭāth's translation (as it appears in Averroes's *Great Commentary on Metaphysics*, vol. 1, 300.13, and vol. 2, 714.15–16) departs from the Avicennian terminology. There one reads: *fa-l-huwiyyah tuqālu 'alā anwā' kathīrah* and *tuqālu bi-anwā' kathīrah* respectively. Although the term *huwiyyah* is used instead of *mawjūd* and *wujūd* in the translation, the meaning is the same, i.e., that being is predicated in many ways.

121 That Marmura saw V.1 as developing the senses of existence introduced in I.5 is made clear in Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, Marmura edition, 404–405, notes 9 and 10.

122 As Goichon, *Lexique*, 73–79, notes, the root *ḥ-ṣ-l* can mean "exist" in Avicenna, and when used in conjunction with *wujūd*, it usually means something like "realized in actuality"; for *muḥaṣṣal* specifically, Goichon has "ce qui est parvenu à l'acte" and "ce qui est réalisé"; Marmura for his part (in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 381–382, note 3; 386, note 6; 405, note 10) translates *wujūd ithbātī* as "affirmative existence," but seems to construe it in a manner close to that of Goichon. He takes it to refer to the existents both in concrete reality and in the soul, whereas *wujūd khāṣṣ* refers to quiddity. Moreover, according to Marmura, affirmative existence is excluded from the description of quiddity in itself in *Introduction* I.2, with the implication that it pertains to 'actual' or 'realized' beings and that *al-muthbat* and *al-muḥaṣṣal* should be tied with mental universals and concrete existents, which are the two other aspects attached to quiddity that are exposed in this chapter of *Introduction*. For Bertolacci, *The Distinction*, 266–267, 273, as well, this first sense of *wujūd* is to be interpreted as meaning "estab-

tained, then the meaning of these terms would be co-extensional with that of 'thing' (*shay'*) and also of 'the thing that can be designated or pointed to' (*al-mushār ilayhī*), since every existent is also a thing. Ultimately, this set of terms would embrace the two main classes of existents that constitute Avicenna's ontology (concrete and mental beings), and thus all the things comprised by the expressions *al-wujūdayn* and *al-mawjūdāt*. By further implication, and excluding God from this picture, they would refer to all the contingent and caused entities of Avicenna's ontology (*al-mumkināt, al-ma'lūlāt*).¹²³

Approaching this topic from another angle, Stephen Menn has proposed to construe this first sense of *wujūd* in close relation to Fārābī's sense of 'being-as-truth.' In a series of articles devoted to Fārābī's, Avicenna's, and Averroes's metaphysics, Menn has delved into these thinkers' conception of being-as-truth and traced a common argumentative thread leading from Fārābī to Averroes via Avicenna, which can account also for an important aspect of the critical reception of Avicenna's metaphysics in the works of Averroes. He suggests that the first sense of being in Avicenna's exposition corresponds in part to the theory of being-as-truth Fārābī articulates in some sections of *The Book of Particles*, and that both interpretations build on one of the senses of being Aristotle outlines in *Metaphysics* Δ7.¹²⁴ In spite of this connection, Menn warns that the *shaykh al-ra'īs* elaborates on the legacy of his predecessors, and that *wujūd ithbātī* holds a distinct sense in the context of Avicenna's metaphysics. As he puts it,

unlike al-Fārābī, he does not say that *wujūd* in the positing sense is a second intention, something mind-dependent and an object of logic rather than metaphysics. On the contrary, Avicenna thinks that being in this sense is an objective feature of things, and is (alongside unity) one of

lished in reality" or "realized" in existence; cf. Black, *Mental Existence*, 26, who takes *wujūd ithbātī* to mean "mental and concrete existence"; Lizzini, *Wuğūd-Mawğūd*, 118, according to whom *al-muthbat* and *al-muḥaṣṣal* "can be conceived of as belonging to the level of concrete reality (*in re*) as well as to the level of knowledge (*in intellectu*)"; De Haan, *Avicenna's Healing*, 29, who also construes these terms as meaning "realized" or "established," and writes that "(*mawjūd*) directs our attention to the entity as having an established existence or realized subsistence"; and Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 71, 76, 106, 108–111, who takes these roots to mean 'realized' or 'established in existence.'

123 According to this interpretation, God can only very awkwardly be described as *muthbat* (established in reality) and *muḥaṣṣal* (realized in existence), in the same way that God can only very awkwardly be called 'a thing' (*shay'*) or a 'substance' (*jawhar*).

124 See Menn, *al-Fārābī*; idem, *Fārābī*, especially 70 and 82, where the connection between Fārābī and Avicenna is stressed; and Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 149–152. Menn provides a fascinating reconstruction of the critical reception of Avicenna's metaphysics in Averroes, which he explains mostly through the lens of being-as-truth. But his analysis does not dwell much on the second sense of *wujūd* Avicenna outlines in *Metaphysics* I.5 and on his theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), as well as how the latter relates to these senses of *wujūd*. For other studies on being-as-truth in Avicenna approached from a different angle, see Kukkonen, *Dividing Being*, 56–58; De Haan, *Avicenna's Healing*; and Lizzini, *Ontology and Logic*.

the universal attributes of things that are central objects of metaphysics; if X is other than God, the *wujūd* of X is an accident of the quiddity of X.¹²⁵

Menn is probably right to stress a certain connection between *wujūd ithbātī* and being-as-truth. In this perspective, *wujūd ithbātī* would mean something like ‘affirmative existence’ (i.e., affirmed in the mind through reasoning or propositional truth), and the corresponding technical terms Avicenna mentions in this same passage—namely, *al-muthbat* and *al-muḥaṣṣal*—could be glossed respectively as “the affirmed” or “the established” and “the intellectually obtained or ascertained (in the mind),” all of which would ultimately refer to the being-as-truth of propositions in the mind. This approach seems to find some traction in other Arabic works and is also etymologically quite compelling.¹²⁶ If construed as such, these technical terms would bear some relation to the notion of ascertainment or judgment (*taṣḍīq*), which presupposes propositional truth, and they could also be dissociated from the status of quiddities regarded in themselves as the objects of conceptualization (*taṣawwūr*).¹²⁷

Nevertheless, as Menn himself notes, focusing on being-as-truth unduly prioritizes the mental and logical plane over the ontological one and would restrict this sense of being solely to the mind. In effect, it would limit Avicenna’s argumentation to merely one of the four senses of being Aristotle had outlined in *Metaphysics* Δ7, and, moreover, to a sense that Aristotle himself had not deemed central to the metaphysical inquiry. Given the nature of Avicenna’s own metaphysical project and its alignment with Aristotle’s, it would be surprising if he had limited one of the two main senses of *wujūd* he discusses in this key chapter solely to being-as-truth.¹²⁸ One may also have reservations regarding this interpretation on terminological grounds. Neither the Arabic Aristotle—at least in the version by Uṣṭāth handed

¹²⁵ Menn, Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*, 153.

¹²⁶ As Menn shows, both Fārābī and Averroes discuss being-as-truth at some length in their works. There are also some interesting etymological observations regarding the roots *th-b-t* and *ḥ-ṣ-l* and their use in the classical and postclassical texts that would seem to confirm the meaning of being-as-truth. The root *th-b-t* is often employed in the sense of ‘establishing’ or ‘proving’ (a doctrine), such as when it is connected with the proof of the Necessary of Existence in Itself (*ithbāt wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*), and thus with something that is proven or established in the mind. As for the root *ḥ-ṣ-l*, it can suggest something that is ‘acquired by,’ or ‘realized in,’ the mind through reflection, and is also associated with syllogistic reasoning, where it describes a particular type of proposition (see for example Jurjānī’s explanation of *al-muḥaṣṣalah* in *Definitions*, 259). On this reading of the terminology, *muthbat* and *muḥaṣṣal* would point to something established and acquired by the mind, i.e., in the sense of propositional truth and being-as-truth.

¹²⁷ Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 30, relevantly translates *taṣḍīq* as “acknowledging the truth.”

¹²⁸ For Avicenna’s metaphysical project, see Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s Metaphysics*; and Menn, Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*. Granted, Avicenna’s discussion of the senses of being in *Metaphysics* I.5 may not be exhaustive, but I think the point still holds: construing the first sense exclusively as being-as-truth seems too restrictive in the broader frame of Avicenna’s discussion of the subject matter of metaphysics as being *qua* being in Book I.

down to us in Averroes's *Great Commentary on Metaphysics*—nor for that matter Fārābī and Averroes, who tackle its relevant passages, replicate the Avicennian terminology in their works. Rather, they refer to being-as-truth by means of terms derived from the ḥ-q-q root (*ḥaqq*, *ḥaqīqah*) and the ṣ-d-q root ('being' said '*alā l-ṣādiq*'), making them the cornerstone of their argumentation.¹²⁹ In addition, there are numerous instances where Avicenna employs the root ḥ-ṣ-l and its related terms (*ḥuṣūl*, *muḥaṣṣal*) to designate not being-as-truth in the mind, but rather the being of things outside the mind. In these instances, the root expresses the reality, actualization, or realization of existence in a substance or an accident, linking it to the being of the categories. Given that Avicenna tells us that *al-muḥaṣṣal* and *al-muthbat* are synonymous with *al-mawjūd*, it would be odd indeed if he limited these terms merely to propositional being in the mind. As we know, *al-mawjūd* for Avicenna has a broad extensionality and encompasses both mental and concrete entities. Granted, these points are not decisive, especially given Avicenna's tendency to use innovative terms and expand the nomenclature he inherited from his forebears. But they prompt us to reconsider a potential doctrinal link between Fārābī's and Averroes's theories of being-as-truth, on the one hand, and *Metaphysics* I.5, on the other.¹³⁰

These terminological points notwithstanding, limiting Avicenna's notion of *wujūd ithbātī* to being-as-truth alone would be perilous, in view of the slipperiness of the epistemological and ontological planes in his philosophy. We should bear in mind that *muthbat* and *muḥaṣṣal* can have an epistemological emphasis (what comes to be affirmed or established in the mind), or, alternatively, but not antinomically, an ontological one, as pointing to a causal and ontological state, i.e., that which is 'established' in existence (through a cause) and that which 'acquires' existence or is 'realized' in existence (again, through a cause). One caveat to that effect appears in *Metaphysics* I.8, where the master discourses on the various meanings of truth in a manner that suggests that he has being-as-truth as a central concern there. Nevertheless, even in that passage, the epistemological or purely intellectual and logical consideration of being-as-truth is connected with other ontological considerations related to extramental existence, or what one might call objective metaphysical

129 For the evidence from Uṣṭāth's translation of *Metaphysics* and Averroes's commentary, see Averroes, *Great Commentary on Metaphysics*, vol. 2, 555.8–13, and for Averroes's commentary, 559.15 ff.; for Fārābī, see *The Book of Particles*, 213.23 ff.

130 If anything, and on purely terminological grounds, these passages could support the designation of Avicenna's second sense of being, viz., proper being (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), as corresponding to being-as-truth. The term *ḥaqīqah*, for example, appears in Averroes's account of being-as-truth in his *tafsīr*, where it is said that *huwiyyah* (viz., *al-mawjūd*) points to the true nature (*ḥaqīqah*) of the existent, which is *grosso modo* what Avicenna says about the second sense of *wujūd* in *Metaphysics* I.5. In light of this terminological overlap, it is not surprising that other scholars, such as De Haan, Avicenna's *Healing*, especially 29–30, and Lizzini, *Ontology and Logic*, whose studies also focus on being-as-truth, have chosen to associate it primarily with the second sense of being Avicenna provides in *Metaphysics* I.5, and thus also with essence.

existence, with the result that the two planes are interlinked and that being-as-truth emerges ultimately as the mental counterpart of a state of existence in extramental reality.¹³¹ What is more, the various senses of truth Avicenna provides are grounded ultimately in a theological model that presumes God as the absolute truth. On this model, the being-as-truth said of all beings apart from God is relative and corresponds to—and depends directly on—an ontological state of contingency of all beings apart from God as it exists in the real world.¹³²

Given these considerations, it stands to reason to construe Avicenna's first sense of *wujūd* in a more flexible way and as referring broadly to beings that are 'realized' or 'established' in existence *both* in the mind and in external reality, a reading which also coheres well with his terminology. One upshot of this interpretation is that *wujūd ithbātī* and *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* would not be predicated univocally (like being-as-truth), but rather differently and variably depending on the types of beings under investigation. Returning to Menn's qualification, it appears that *wujūd ithbātī* focuses on existence as an external concomitant, attribute, or even accident of essence. This state of externality and accidentality pertains to all the contingent beings of Avicenna's ontology, but it applies to them differently, depending on their categorial status. Here we perceive a connection between *wujūd ithbātī* and *tashkīk al-wujūd*, a hypothesis that seems confirmed by a passage in which Avicenna himself specifies the link between *tashkīk* and *wujūd* taken as a non-constitutive concomitant.¹³³ By the same token, and because *tashkīk al-wujūd* deals primarily with the categories—it establishes, for instance, that existence is prior in substances and posterior in accidents, prior in certain substances over others, etc.—it would seem that *wujūd ithbātī* pertains to the being of the categories or at least invokes a categorial scheme.¹³⁴ But this leads to a certain interpretive tension. For if we hark back to Aristotle's Δ7, the sense of being associated with the categories is described as being *per se*, a sense which seems to fit awkwardly with the perception of existence as an external and accidental attribute of essence. My point is that defining the relationship between *wujūd ithbātī*, *tashkīk al-wujūd*, and Avicenna's theory of ontological externality, accidentality, and contingency represents a real interpretive challenge. In spite of an obvious thematic and methodological debt to Δ7, it is not immediately clear that Avicenna's *wujūd ithbātī* corresponds to any of the senses of being outlined by Aristotle in that text.

131 In fact, in that opening section of I.8, one might even say that being-as-truth in the mind, which is tied with enunciation and belief (*al-qawl wa-l-'aqd*), is subjected to another sense of truth construed as the external reality and existence of things. On this point, see De Haan, Avicenna's *Healing*.

132 For a detailed examination of the interface of the epistemological, theological, and ontological planes of Avicenna's theory of truth, see De Haan, Avicenna's *Healing*.

133 Avicenna, *Discussions*, 218, section 648.

134 This is a difficult point. Menn, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 153, links the sense of *wujūd khāṣṣ* with the being of the categories, and I think there are good reasons to do so, as I explain later.

In spite of these uncertainties, one detects a neat correspondence between *wujūd ithbātī* and *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, on the one hand, and other terms that appear in Avicenna's works that designate realized or established beings, such as *al-wujūdayn* (concrete and mental existence), as well as other terms derived from the root *ḥ-ṣ-l* (such as *ḥuṣūl*, *ḥāṣil*), which he frequently employs to refer to the actual—and so also caused and contingent—existence of substances and accidents in the concrete world. After all, Avicenna stresses the synonymy of *mawjūd*, *muḥaṣṣal*, and *muthbat*, thereby suggesting that these terms refer to a basic sense of being. On this reading, it is important to note that this entire terminological cluster implies the caused, contingent, and dependent state of actual existents. Its sense, therefore, would be primarily metaphysical and causal and mark a state of ontological contingency. It would designate the state of the existent that is 'established' or 'realized' in existence by something else. Understandably, this sense would exclude the First, whom Avicenna to my knowledge never describes as *muthbat* and *muḥaṣṣal*, and very rarely as *mawjūd*.

In light of these considerations, it appears that the two main approaches outlined above (*wujūd ithbātī* as being partly derived from being-as-truth, and as expressing a state of ontological contingency) can be fruitfully reconciled to some extent and in fact presuppose one another. For there is a certain isomorphism between objects in the mind and their existence in the world according to the Arabic philosophers under discussion, a necessary state for being-as-truth to be predicated. This is why Fārābī, for one, glosses being-as-truth as "what is in the mind as it is outside the mind," or "being outside the soul as it is in the soul,"¹³⁵ and why Avicenna, following him, maintains a robust parallelism (encapsulated in *Metaphysics* I.8) between being-as-truth (or truth in the mind) and ontological truth (truth *qua* existence in the real world).¹³⁶ More precisely, in the context of Avicenna's philosophy, one could argue, as De Haan has, that the relative truth of things in the mind mirrors their contingent ontological status in the world. Since truth is relative (in the case of everything that is not the necessary of existence), being-as-truth will correspond per force to being-contingent in the world, since any truthful proposition about something in the mind will be about a being that is in itself contingent and acquires existence, necessity, and truth from an external cause. As a corollary, the only absolute truth is the Necessary of Existence, which happens to be the only non-contingent being of Avicenna's philosophy.¹³⁷ So the truth value derived from *taṣḍīq* will have an extramental correspondence in reality, thereby cementing the link between propositional truth and ontological truth in the world, and, thus, between a kind of epistemological being in the mind and a kind of real being in the world. As De Haan writes,

¹³⁵ Menn, Fārābī, 73; idem, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 152.

¹³⁶ Menn, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 153; De Haan, Avicenna's *Healing*.

¹³⁷ De Haan, Avicenna's *Healing*, especially 28. In *Salvation*, 555.5, Avicenna states that the Necessary of Existence is pure truth (*fa-huwa ḥaqq maḥḍ*), and in *Metaphysics* I.8 that it is "permanently true in itself" (*huwa l-ḥaqq bi-dhātihi dā'iman*).

“in Avicenna’s metaphysics the conditions of truth are inextricably tied up with the conditions of existence, and any being that receives the necessity of its existence from another must also receive its truth from another.”¹³⁸ In sum, one could argue that there is an epistemological-ontological isomorphism between being-as-truth and being-actually-and-contingently that can be extracted from Avicenna’s discussion in *Metaphysics* I.5 and I.8.¹³⁹ The link between these two dimensions of the problem is rooted partly in the notion of *taṣdīq*, which ensures that our mental judgment pertains to something that is actually existing or at least ontologically relevant and possible in the extramental world, and not simply to a fruitless mental operation. It thus ensures a certain commensuration between truth in the mind and truth outside the mind. What is more, the apparent parallelism between ontological truth and propositional truth in Avicenna may have encouraged Averroes to extend the theory of the accidentality of being-as-truth to all of Avicenna’s ontology and thus to both the mental and the concrete spheres.¹⁴⁰

Although pressing for a single and integrated sense of being that would include these two aspects appears difficult,¹⁴¹ it remains valid that there is a constant feature that characterizes these various cases: in the case of being-as-truth as well as in the case of being ascribed to entities that are ‘realized’ or ‘established’ in the world, existence pertains to them from the outside and as a concomitant. In other words, being-as-truth *qua* accidental feature in the mind seems to overlap significantly with a model of ontological contingency that also applies to the concrete world. Hence, whether approached from an epistemological or ontological sense, *wujūd* here is presumed to be an external and even accidental attribute of a quiddity: both being-as-truth in the mind and contingent existence in the real world imply

138 De Haan, *Avicenna’s Healing*, 28, and 29: “for Avicenna, the primary sense of truth is not epistemological, but metaphysical, since the locus of truth is first found in things. It is the truth of things that is the foundation for veridical cognition.”

139 The main difference, though, is that De Haan does not correlate being-as-truth specifically with one sense of *wujūd* in *Metaphysics* I.5, although his discussion emphasizes the second sense and the relation between truth and essence.

140 This goes in the direction of the reconstruction proposed by Menn regarding Averroes’s critical reception of Avicenna.

141 One problem is that, as Menn explains, being-as-truth is predicated univocally of things in the mind. In contrast, for Avicenna the existence of extramental entities (the being of the categories) is predicated not univocally, but according to modulation or *tashkīk*, as should be clear by now. Another problem is that although one may draw a general parallelism between truth in the mind and truth *qua* existence in the extramental world, there is no *strict* parallelism between mental existence and extramental existence in Avicenna, since there are mental objects, such as artificial forms and even perhaps fictional forms, which can be said to exist in the mind, but not in extramental reality. By virtue of existing in the mind and being a quiddity in the mind, some forms must possess some kind of truth, which would nevertheless have no counterpart in the real world, and which would seem different from the being-as-truth predicated of things that have a direct counterpart in the concrete world. This poses a threat to the isomorphism between mental and extramental existence and truth that otherwise seems to apply to Avicenna’s ontology.

the externality and accidentality of being for all things that are not the Necessary of Existence. As an upshot, and regardless how exactly one translates and construes *al-muthbat* and *al-muḥaṣṣal*, the primary sense that emerges here is one of existence as an external and concomitant attribute and as applying to essence from the outside as an added intention or meaning (*ma'nā*) and concomitant (*lāzim*). Whether one extrapolates the accidentality of being-as-truth to the real world (as Averroes perhaps does on behalf of Avicenna) or maintains a quasi-isomorphism between the mental and concrete existents, these options all lead to, or imply, the Avicennian theories of the distinction between essence and existence and of existence perceived as an external concomitant of essence.¹⁴² In this regard, and from an etymological perspective, the terms *al-muthbat* and *al-muḥaṣṣal* underline the contingent and caused nature of the entities to which they apply, which is why, ultimately, the literal rendition of these words as meaning 'what is established' and 'what is realized' in existence remains perhaps preferable. These notions intersect with the cognate notion of *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, 'realized' or 'acquired existence,' which Avicenna uses frequently in his works, and whose purpose is also to stress the extrinsic, concomitant, and caused nature of existence vis-à-vis essence. As a result, and although their relevance for a potential theory of being-as-truth in Avicenna should not be denied, I shall in the remainder of this study interpret these various expressions as encapsulating a doctrine of *realized* or *acquired existence*, in close relation to the Avicennian theories of causality and contingency. These notions extend to all the contingent entities in the concrete world and in the mind, but, significantly, they exclude God from this ontological picture. This sense of being would encompass the categorial beings and the separate intellects, but not God Himself.

To conclude, it appears that Avicenna's *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* and *wujūd ithbātī* bear an ambiguous relation to Aristotle's Δ7 and especially to his notion of being *per se*, which encompasses the various categories, and which, in this regard, is linked to his theory of *pros hen* predication. For Avicenna, this basic sense of being extends to all concrete and mental entities, to all substances and accidents, albeit according to a gradation or modulation of meaning. By virtue of this it is linked to his theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), whose purpose is to explain how existence applies exactly to each instance as an external concomitant of essence. But this also entails something in Avicenna's philosophy that was fully absent from Aristotle's system: that existence, defined as an external concomitant of essence, is 'realized' in each existent by virtue of an exterior cause, thereby making this existent con-

142 In that sense, and as I suggested already in chapter III, Averroes's assessment of Avicenna's ontology according to which being is accidental is not altogether outlandish, if accidentality is construed primarily as meaning 'external to the essence.' So it is important to clarify that this accidentality is not that of a true accident, such as 'musical' in Socrates, but rather due to the external and non-constitutive status of the concomitant (*lāzim, lāḥiq*). Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 153, 159–160, seems to have no qualms with calling existence an accident or accidental in Avicenna's philosophy.

tingent, complex, and dependent on an essentially prior existent. In that respect, Avicenna's *wujūd ithbātī* may reflect a rehandling of various senses of being from $\Delta 7$, including being-as-truth (presupposed in the mental dimension of *wujūd ithbātī*), actual and potential being (subsumed under *tashkīk al-wujūd*, and more precisely under the aspects of possibility and necessity; see section 1.2.2. above), and even Aristotle's notion of being *per accidens*, in the sense that whatever is posited as being 'established' or 'realized' (whether in the mind or *in concreto*) has existence as an external concomitant, even though its relation to its cause is necessary once that thing comes to exist in actuality.¹⁴³ As we saw in chapter III, this externality or extrinsicality of the concomitants vis-à-vis pure quiddity represents one of the senses of accidentality Avicenna recognizes, in accordance with the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model he deploys in his works. This would help to explain Averroes's later qualms with Avicenna's doctrine and his critique—warranted or unwarranted, I leave the question open here—of the accidentality of being in Avicenna.¹⁴⁴ The applicability of Avicenna's theory of *wujūd ithbātī* and *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* to all composite and contingent beings (but not to God or pure quiddity) seems to suggest that it is based on his *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model, which presupposes externality, complexity, causality, and ontological dependence. At any rate, one sense of being that Avicenna does not seem to tackle in earnest here is being *per se* or essential being, which is the focus of the second sense disclosed in *Metaphysics* I.5.

2.2 'Proper existence' (*wujūd khāṣṣ*)

2.2.1 The evidence from *The Cure*

Avicenna's mention of 'special' or 'proper existence' (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) in *Metaphysics* I.5 has received only sporadic attention in the modern scholarship focusing on his Arabic works.¹⁴⁵ This is somewhat surprising, given that it plays an important role in his

143 I am aware that accidental being means something very different for Aristotle, but my aim here is to try to understand how Avicenna interpreted and transformed his doctrine, and how *Metaphysics* I.5 relates to such seminal texts as *Metaphysics* $\Delta 7$. For insight into the issue of the accidentality of being in Avicenna, see III.5.

144 Averroes's interpretation of Avicenna likely rests on a partial understanding of the latter's aims in *Metaphysics* I.5, or even perhaps on his ignoring deliberately the other sense of *wujūd* developed by Avicenna in that passage (viz., *wujūd khāṣṣ*), since he claims that Avicenna recognized only accidental being and its univocal predication. As Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 164, explains, "Averroes thinks that Avicenna has conflated these two senses of being, and that only this conflation leads him to posit a *wujūd* which is an accident, existing outside the mind and really superadded to the quiddity." As Menn notes, this raises the question of the Avicennian texts Averroes consulted, and more specifically here the question of whether he was directly acquainted with this passage of *Metaphysics*. On Averroes's interpretation of Avicenna, see also Cerami, A Map.

145 The comments in the literature are brief and disparate; see Marmura, Avicenna's Chapter "On the Relative," 91–92, 95–96; idem, in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 386–387, 400; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's*

philosophy and that it also directly influenced the Latin scholastic theories of *esse proprium* and *esse essentialiae*.¹⁴⁶ What is more, this notion also impacted many theological systems in postclassical Islam, such as those of Ṭūsī and Ḥillī, who adapt it and deploy it in their accounts of God's existence. The notion of proper being is one of two distinct senses of *wujūd* the master outlines in this famous passage of *Metaphysics* I.5, but, of the two, it is the only one he connects directly with essence or quiddity. As in the case of the first sense, but perhaps even more so, there is no agreement as to what Avicenna intends by this and how exactly the relationship between proper existence and essence should be envisaged.

At first blush, the discussion of the second sense of *wujūd* offered in *Metaphysics* I.5 poses a large interpretive problem that arises out of an apparent paradox of Avicenna's part. On the one hand, Avicenna insists on separating existence and essence, at the very least conceptually, and in stressing their intentional difference and irreducibility. This distinction lies at the core of his method and metaphysical project. On the other hand, in the course of his exposition of *mawjūd* and *wujūd* in this chapter, he ascribes a distinct sense (*ma'nā*) of existence to quiddity, essential reality, and thingness, thereby apparently blurring the distinction between essence and existence that he otherwise strives so earnestly to maintain. Needless to say, this has led to considerable scholarly perplexity and controversy. Why gloss one sense of *wujūd* with the very notions that Avicenna typically contrasts to existence? Upon further reflection, Avicenna's approach is not unprecedented. Aristotle himself had also described essence as *τό τί ἦν εἶναι*, which literally means "the what it is" or "the what it is to be," a formula which includes within it the Greek verb 'to be' (*εἶναι*). In the Arabic translations of Aristotle achieved during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries CE, *τό τί ἦν εἶναι* was rendered by means of a variety of terms and expressions, most of which do not preserve the connection with the verb 'to be' found in the Greek texts.¹⁴⁷ It is this sense of *wujūd*, Avicenna claims, which can be connected

Metaphysics, 187; Black, *Mental Existence*, 25–26; Rashed, *Ibn 'Adī; Lizzini, Wuğūd-Mawğūd*, 118–119; Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 150, 153; idem, *Averroes*, 70–71; and Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz*.'

146 Even though these notions may have been based also on other passages of the Avicennian corpus (especially *Metaphysics* V.1), there is a direct historical connection between the Latin scholastic interpretation of Avicenna's *wujūd khāṣṣ* as defined in *Metaphysics* I.5 and *esse proprium* and *esse essentialiae*. Ultimately, however, the doctrines of essential being articulated in the Latin tradition represent independent elaborations on Avicenna, whose roots in the Avicennian texts are more or less strong or tenuous, depending on scholars' interpretations. For some insight into this topic, see Owens, *Common Nature*; idem, *The Relevance*; Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, 87; de Libera, *La querelle*; idem, *L'art*, 577–580; Porro, *Universaux*; and idem, *Henry*.

147 Among the Arabic expressions used to translate the Aristotelian notion of essence are *mā huwa*, *mā huwa bi-l-anniyah*, *anniyah*, *huwiyyah*, *mā'iyah*, and *māhiyyah*. See Afnan, *Philosophical Terminology*, 12–13, 274–276, and Endress, *Proclus arabus*, 79–109. It is striking that some of these terms (such as *huwiyyah* and *anniyah*) were used to translate both being and essence, depending on the translator.

with quiddity, essential reality, and thingness. Because the connection Avicenna establishes between the various technical terms expressing quiddity (*māhiyyah*, *ḥaqīqah*, *shay'iyah*) and this sense of existence cannot be overlooked or underplayed, the challenge becomes one of elucidating in what sense this connection should be interpreted. What the Arabic etymology and the context imply is that this sense of existence, in contrast to the first, is properly essential and necessary, since it is connected with the consideration ‘what it is essentially to be that kind of thing.’ In that regard, it would also seem to correspond to Aristotle’s notion of being *per se* as discussed in Δ7 and E1–2, which, together with actual and potential being, the Greek philosopher regards as the real and proper subject-matter of the metaphysical inquiry.¹⁴⁸ In light of this, I wish to adduce the tentative hypothesis that the two main senses of being Avicenna discusses in this passage have as a direct model the opening lines of Δ7, where Aristotle asserts that “things are said ‘to be’ in an accidental sense and by their own nature,” but that Avicenna thoroughly reinterpreted these senses in connection with his causal and ontological theories. The suggestion that Avicenna modelled his exposition of the senses of being in *Metaphysics* I.5 on the opening line of Δ7 and on the basic distinction between being *per se* and being *per accidens* could help to explain why he only provides two basic senses of being, when Aristotle’s text mentions four and is also amenable to a multiplication of senses.¹⁴⁹ As we saw above, one can convincingly argue that what is *muthbat* and *muḥaṣṣal* has existence added to it as an external concomitant, so that its being under this angle does not fully identify with its essence. In contrast, proper being—regardless how exactly it is to be construed at this point—seems to apply to and identify with the essence of a thing directly. This second sense, which seems to correspond to a narrow construal of being *per se*, is conveyed in the Arabic text by means of a vocabulary of essence. On a purely terminological level, it should be noted that Avicenna connects special existence with quiddity in itself, which suggests that *wujūd khāṣṣ* is just another way of referring to the special ontological mode of nature and pure quiddity. Here is the key excerpt of *Metaphysics* I.5:

Text 29: To everything there is an essential reality [*ḥaqīqah*] by virtue of which it is what it is. Thus, the triangle has an essential reality in that it is a triangle, and whiteness has an essential reality in that it is whiteness. It is that which we should perhaps call proper existence [*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*], not intending by this the meaning given to affirmative [or established] existence [*al-wujūd al-ithbātī*]. For the expression ‘existence’ is also used to denote many meanings [*yadullu ‘alā ma’ānī kathīrah*], one of which is the essential reality a thing happens to have. Thus, the essential reality a thing happens to have is, as it were, its proper existence. In sum, we say that it is clear that each thing possesses a proper reality [*ḥaqīqah khāṣṣah*], which is its quiddity

148 As mentioned previously, according to Menn it is Avicenna’s *wujūd khāṣṣ* that points to ‘the being of the categories,’ that is, to being as predicated of substance and accident. For this interpretation and its relation to Fārābī’s metaphysics, see Menn, Fārābī, 70; idem, Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*, 150–153.

149 For an example of how these senses can be multiplied and combined, see Menn, Aristotle, 5–6.

[*hiya māhiyyatīhi*]. And it is known that the essential reality proper to each thing is other than the [other sense of] existence that is synonymous with 'what is affirmed' [or 'established'].¹⁵⁰

As we can see, proper existence is glossed by means of the terms *ḥaqīqah* and *māhiyyah*, which are technical Avicennian terms that refer to pure quiddity. 'Proper existence' here is synonymous with 'proper essential reality' and with 'pure quiddity,' and these expressions are supposed to amount to a sense of *wujūd* that is distinct from 'the affirmed,' 'the established,' and 'the realized.' The special existence of a triangle, for example, is responsible for its 'whatness' as triangle and for its 'being a triangle.' This is another way of saying that the special existence of triangle is its pure quiddity 'triangleness,' since it is the latter that makes a triangle a triangle. The notion of special existence would depart markedly from the notion of realized existence conveyed by the term *al-muḥaṣṣal*, since the latter does not apply to pure quiddity as such, but posits existence as an external concomitant of essence. So the two senses of being Avicenna posits in that passage appear to rely on the *māyīyah-lawāzīm* distinction, where proper existence corresponds to the *māhiyyah* and realized existence to the concomitants of essence (or to *māhiyyah* and its concomitants and accidents taken as a whole). In light of the previous analysis articulated in this book, there is little doubt that proper existence pertains directly, in some way or other, to the ontological status of pure quiddity, and that the expression *wujūd khāṣṣ* is employed in deliberate contradistinction to the formulae 'affirmed' or 'established existence' (*wujūd ithbātī*) and 'realized' or 'acquired existence' (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*). If this hypothesis is correct, then this passage would lend further weight to the idea that Avicenna regards the term *wujūd* as a modulated term, for existence would differ (among other ways) when predicated of the various essences, say, of 'blackness' and 'triangleness,' which are the two examples mentioned in I.5, and when predicated of realized concomitants of essence. Accordingly, this passage presupposes the theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) Avicenna articulates in other parts of his work and coheres with the idea that essential being represents one of its main aspects, a hypothesis that was raised already in the earlier section on *tashkīk*. For the distinction between essential being and non-essential or realized being goes hand in hand with the idea that existence has several meanings, or rather sub-meanings, which prevent it from being a perfectly univocal notion.

Now, the ideas that existence has several senses (*ma'ānī*), and that one of its key senses refers to essential being conceived as an ontological mode, had already been put forth by Avicenna's predecessor Yaḥyā b. 'Adī. Yaḥyā, in his treatise entitled *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, distinguishes between "logical," "nat-

¹⁵⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.5, 31.5–10, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 24, slightly revised. It should be noted that this key passage is found in a close form, if not as an exact verbatim quotation, in *Discussions*, sections 802–803, 279–280, as well as in one of Bahman-yār's works entitled *Treatise on the Subject Matter of Metaphysics*, 3–4.

ural,” and “essential” being. He describes the latter sense of *wujūd* alternately as “essential” (*dhātī*), “real” or “true” (*ḥaqīqī*), and “divine” (*ilāhī*).¹⁵¹ In spite of Avicenna’s emphasis on the connection between essence and proper being in that passage of *Metaphysics* I.5 and of a clear precedent in the works of Yaḥyā, there has been a perceptible reluctance in the modern scholarship to construe *wujūd khāṣṣ* as a kind of *esse essentiae* or essential being. In fact, the idea that there could be even a remotely equivalent theory in Avicenna to the one later articulated by the Latin Scholastics has been brushed aside or treated cursorily in the literature, and this, in the absence of a detailed study on the Avicennian notion of proper being.¹⁵² This problem is compounded by the ambiguity of this expression and the variety of cases it can potentially cover. To take the Latin tradition as an example, *esse essentiae* is used with different meanings by different authors and can be applied to different classes of entities.¹⁵³ But the straightforward and a priori conclusion that proper being bears no connection whatsoever with essential being and that Avicenna does not recognize any instances of essential being in his philosophy seems oversimplistic. For there is at least one case, or rather—on the basis of the analysis articulated in this book—two cases where this notion can justifiably and quite pertinently be invoked. The first is the essential being of the First; the second, the essential being of pure quiddity as an intelligible object. I say a few words about these cases before turning to the complicated issue of proper being as it applies to entities *in concreto*.

Avicenna’s theology establishes a virtual identity between God’s existence and His essence. God’s existence is *per se* and essential in an absolute sense. For

151 Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 154.17–20; for an incisive analysis of this text and of the relation between Yaḥyā and Avicenna, see Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī. I discuss Yaḥyā’s and Avicenna’s theories of essential being comparatively in section 2.2.3.

152 See, for example, the various studies by Rahman; Mayer, Faḥr ad-Dīn, 202 and note 17; Black, *Mental Existence* 25–26; Menn, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*; Benevich, *Die ‘göttliche Existenz’*; De Haan, *Avicenna’s Healing*, 29–30; and Özaykal, *Deconstruction*. The reluctance to recognize any notion of proper being and essential being in Avicenna may have arisen in part out of a reaction to the Latin scholastic interpretation of this thinker, a trend spearheaded notably by Rahman. At any rate, and as I have been stressing repeatedly throughout this study, essential being is an ambiguous notion that can apply to a wide diversity of theories, and so one desideratum is to clarify the various ways in which it has been used in the past. In the present discussion, I construe it mostly as referring to an intelligible reality in the mind as well as an irreducible metaphysical principle in concrete beings.

153 It may refer to objects in the human mind, to objects in God’s mind, to the relation between God’s essence and created essences, etc. For a brief summary of some of these views and their connection with Avicenna, see Owens, *The Relevance*. Understandably, one contentious point concerns the meaning and interpretation of *esse essentiae* in Avicenna. If by this is meant, for instance, the fact that quiddity already possesses a special autonomous and transcendent existence in the extramental world on the model of a Platonic form, then this sense would not apply to Avicenna’s philosophy. However, if by proper existence is meant a kind of irreducible and intrinsic intelligible reality or being of quiddity as it presents itself in a pristine state in the mind, then the issue becomes less clear and calls for a detailed investigation.

God's being does not derive from an external source, but from His own essence and so is fully identical with His quiddity. So God's being is by definition essential being. Now, it is significant that God's essential being, according to Avicenna, also amounts to a kind of divine 'proper being,' a mode of existence that is proper to Him and that no other entity shares with Him. At *Metaphysics* IX.7, Avicenna explains that God's essential being and oneness are "proper to Him" or "specify Him" (*yakhuṣṣuhā, takhuṣṣuhā*), a statement that draws directly on the terminology adumbrated in *Metaphysics* I.5. In fact, an understanding of the kind of existence and oneness that are 'proper to' the First's essence is included in the minimum sum of metaphysical knowledge that a human soul ought to know.¹⁵⁴ In this particular case, it is clear that the proper being of God is indeed His essential being. Not incidentally, God's existence is identical with his *māhiyyah* and *ḥaqīqah*, which are the very terms Avicenna uses to gloss *wujūd khāṣṣ* in *Metaphysics* I.5. In light of this, the idea that there is no such thing as essential being in Avicenna is flawed. For there is at least one important occurrence of essential being, namely, God's existence, which is being *per se* in the strictest and most absolute sense. Thus, the question is not whether Avicenna tolerates such a doctrine of essential being in his metaphysics, but rather whether he allows for any other iteration of that doctrine in his philosophical system.¹⁵⁵

The other instance—discussed in detail in previous sections of this book—concerns the status of pure quiddity as an intelligible object in the mind. I argued that pure essence has an irreducible intelligible reality and being that is to be distinguished from the accidental and complex existence of the universal concept. What is of interest here is the connection between this intelligible being and proper being, which Avicenna associates with essence. Given that proper being is identified with true reality and quiddity; and that quiddity is conceivable and intelligible 'in itself'; then it is sensible to conclude that the pure quiddities in the mind have their own proper existence. In fact, Avicenna's use of the example of triangelness to illustrate proper being in I.5—an example that appears in virtually every crucial Avicennian disquisition on quiddity in itself—seems to cement this view: the 'triangle in itself' in the mind has a kind of proper being that is its very intelligible nature. Hence, in the context of Avicenna's noetics, proper being appears to stand as a sufficient requirement or criterion of intellectual existence. Since quiddity is conceivable in a direct, prior, and simple way in the mind, and since pure essence or nature is, fundamentally, proper existence, it seems that Avicenna allows for a distinct kind of intellection that focuses directly on this intelligible object, while at the same time excluding all notions of realized existence, of ontological states (*aḥwāl*) brought about

154 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, IX.7, 429.11–12.

155 There is a further incentive to tie proper being to quiddity in a strict manner. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that the theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) encompasses God's existence, which, for Avicenna is the paradigmatic case of essential being. Fundamentally, this means that *tashkīk* includes God's proper being or *wujūd khāṣṣ*, a view later embraced by Ṭūsī as well.

by concomitants and accidents. This special existence does not cease or vanish when quiddity is combined with other mental concomitants to form the universal. Rather, it persists even when it is further conditioned and specified as a mental or concrete existent. In that case, it continues to intrinsically and permanently characterize quiddity in itself and, mereologically and by extension, the complex being as a whole. But we must recognize that this intelligible being and proper being is pure quiddity, regardless of its relationship with the external concomitants and the composite nature of contingent things.

But here a difficulty arises. Could the notion of proper existence not be construed chiefly as a purely intentional and mental notion referring not to a distinct mode or sense of existence, but rather to the portion of realized existence that is shared by a certain class of existents (*mawjūdāt*) that have a common essence, such as humanness or horseness, and so, by extension, to the sum of individual humans and horses taken as a group? Put differently, is proper existence not merely an extensional specification or constriction of general existence, or of existence taken absolutely, a qualification on its scope, which does not alter its intensional nature and fundamental meaning? This would make proper existence merely a part or segment of general existence, both expressions ultimately pointing to the same sense of established or realized existence. On my view, this position does not withstand scrutiny. Avicenna labels proper existence a distinct sense (*ma'nā*) of existence, and one that he deliberately contrasts to realized or established existence. Even though these two 'senses' of *wujūd* agree in sharing a fundamental or focal meaning, they are nonetheless intensionally distinct, in that one refers to essential being, the other to accidental being and to the realized concomitants of essence. They are also extensionally incommensurate, since proper existence attaches exclusively to the pure quiddities, which can be abstracted from their external concomitants and accidents, and hence from the realm of realized and concrete existents. In contrast, realized existence necessarily implies a complex substantial entity taken as a whole. So that if realized existence applies primarily to the *mawjūdāt* of the concrete, exterior world, special existence is in contrast to be connected chiefly with the conception of pure quiddity in the mind.¹⁵⁶ In this regard, there can be little doubt that the

156 Nevertheless, if quiddity in itself can be said to possess a special kind of *wujūd*, it on the other hand cannot really be regarded as a *mawjūd* on the standard definition of this term. For being a *mawjūd*—on a ground of synonymy with *muthbat* and *muḥaṣṣal*—implies possessing accidents and concomitants and, hence, realized or affirmative existence, which is distinct from the quiddity itself. Hence, 'this mountain' or 'the universal mountain' is a *mawjūd* in that sense, but not 'quiddity in itself mountain,' since the latter cannot be pointed at and is not realized contingently and causally in the way these beings are; in other words, it is neither a 'thing' nor an 'existent' in the straightforward Avicennian sense. Rather, 'mountain in itself' has or is its own *wujūd khāṣṣ*, which amounts to another mode of existence altogether that transcends compositeness and concomitance. This perhaps explains why *al-mawjūd* is fully synonymous with *al-ḥāṣil*, *al-muḥaṣṣal* and *al-muthbat*, and also correlates with *al-shay'*, but cannot, on the other hand, be conflated with pure quiddity, thingness, and special existence.

basic distinction established in *Metaphysics* I.5 announces the ontological disquisitions articulated in V.1 regarding the distinct status of quiddity in the mind, and that both texts should also be connected with the account of pure quiddity as outlined in *Introduction* I.2.¹⁵⁷

If proper existence can be constructively glossed in terms of the transcendental status of pure quiddity in the mind, there remains the arduous issue of how it relates to the existents *in concreto*. Since proper being pertains to essence, and since all concretely existent 'things' have an essence, then it follows that proper being, in some way or other, applies to them as well. So how is proper existence in the sense of essential existence to be interpreted in relation to the concrete world (*fī l-a'yān*)? Does Avicenna, following Fārābī, intend it primarily as the being of the categories of things in the real world, the being of actually existing substances and accidents? And, if so, is this being identical with the essence and the substance as it is realized in actuality, as Fārābī and Averroes seem to think? Or something other than that? This in turn raises the sharp issue of the relationship between quiddity and substance in Avicenna's philosophy.

In a cluster of interrelated studies, Menn has argued for a direct connection between Avicenna's notion of proper being and Fārābī's notion of 'being delineated by a certain quiddity' (*al-munḥāz bi-māhiyyah mā*). According to Menn, the latter is to be construed as the being of the categories of things in the concrete world. On this account, Fārābī contrasts being-as-truth in the mind, whereby existence is accidental and applied univocally to things, to the being of real existents, which is identical with their essence, a distinction that Averroes later picked up and used as a tool to mount his critique of Avicenna's ontology. On Menn's reckoning, Avicenna modeled his notion of proper being on this Fārābīan theory and used it to refer to the being of the categories outside the soul.¹⁵⁸ In particular, Avicenna's theory of proper

157 Oddly, when it comes to essence, the core connections between chapters I.5 and V.1 of *Metaphysics*, as well as the link between these texts and *Introduction* I.2, have almost never been stressed in the scholarship. One exception is Marmura (Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, Marmura edition, 404–405, notes 9 and 10), who connects *wujūd khāṣṣ* with the discussion of the ontology of essence in V.1. Indeed, one may wonder: how can the description of a 'proper existence' associated with essence in I.5 not bear any relation to the explicit references to the existence of quiddity in V.I? And how, in turn, can Avicenna's remarks regarding the possibility of conceiving quiddity 'in itself' in the logical text bear no relationship to these metaphysical chapters, where he makes the same argument and argues for the intelligible existence of essence? It is hard to understand why these various accounts have been treated in a discrete manner in the modern scholarship on Avicenna's metaphysics, all the more so given the intertwinement of logic and ontology in this thinker's method.

158 Menn, Fārābī's *Kitāb*, 78–81, 83; idem, Fārābī, 70; idem, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 152–153. Menn believes that the Fārābīan sense of *wujūd* as 'being delineated by a certain quiddity,' which he identifies also with the being of the categories, refers to entities *outside* the soul, and he contrasts that sense of *wujūd* to being-as-truth, which is intramental and linked to propositions; cf. also Wisnovsky, Notes, 188, who suggests that, for Fārābī, *shay'* is broader than *mawjūd*, because it covers things inside and outside the mind, whereas *mawjūd* only strictly applies to the latter. However, it should be noted that Fārābī in *On the One*, 51.5–7 (see also Janos, Al-Fārābī's *On the One*, 116–117), explicitly

existence may have been informed partly by two important and understudied works by Fārābī, *On the One and Oneness* and *The Book of Particles*, which showcase in some passages this thinker's understanding of how essence relates to existence.¹⁵⁹ According to Fārābī, one sense of existence is synonymous with the idea of “being delineated,” “set apart,” or “distinguished by one's essence” (*al-munḥāz bi-māhiyyah*).¹⁶⁰ Although it is not entirely clear what this means, since Fārābī does not elaborate much on this notion, and although the extensionality of this sense of being remains uncertain, its primary function appears to be to designate the ontological state of certain classes of concrete entities whose existence is determined by their quiddity.¹⁶¹ Following Fārābī, Avicenna appears to connect special existence specifically with the quiddity of a thing, to what makes a thing what it is. In Avicennian parlance, ‘proper existence’ is distinguished from ‘established’ or ‘realized existence’ and assumes the meaning of ‘being a certain thing’ or ‘existing as a certain thing,’ or even ‘existing in a way that its quiddity allows it to exist.’ Thus, for Fārābī as well as for Avicenna, being ‘distinguished by one's essence’ and ‘special existence’ respectively qualify all things, whether a human being, a tree, or a stone. What is more, they also encompass the separate intellects and even God and thus assume a transcendental scope, since they pertain to all beings (material or immaterial) that have a quiddity and an essence.¹⁶² These expressions refer to what these things are in their essence and, by extension, to the way *in which* these things

applies the formula ‘being delineated by a certain quiddity’ *qua mawjūd* to entities in the mind and outside the mind (*kānat mutaṣawwarah aw kānat khārij al-nafs*). So I am not sure that the distinction is as clear-cut as Menn and Wisnovsky present it. Nevertheless, it is true that Fārābī, unlike Avicenna, prioritizes concrete existence over mental existence in his philosophy, so that whenever he discusses the status of ‘existents,’ these should be understood first and foremost as extramental beings. In a similar manner, Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 153, seems to connect the meaning of proper being in Avicenna chiefly to things outside the soul, although I would argue that it also applies to pure quiddities in the mind. Considering that Avicenna ascribes a full-blown ontological status to mental objects, and that he also allows for a concept of quiddity taken in itself, it is sensible to presume that proper existence extends to it as well in the mind and, more generally, to intelligible beings—and this, in a manner that seems to be underdeveloped or even neglected in Fārābī's treatment of the issue. I would agree, though, that proper existence, like Fārābī's ‘being delineated by a certain quiddity,’ is being *per se*, which should be contrasted to Fārābī's being-as-truth and Avicenna's ‘realized existence.’ There is another—equally important—issue I discuss below, which has to do with how these thinkers conceive of substance and its relation to essence.

159 On this point and on *wujūd khāṣṣ* in the works of these two thinkers, see Menn, Fārābī, especially 70; idem, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*; Bertolacci, *The Distinction*, 267; Rashed, *Ibn 'Adi*, 111, 146; and Janos, *Al-Fārābī's On the One*.

160 Fārābī, *On the One*, 51.5–12; idem, *The Book of Particles*, 116.7; see Menn, *Fārābī's Kitāb*, 78; and Janos, *Al-Fārābī's On the One*, 116–118.

161 As I mention above, this sense of being appears to apply both to mental and concrete entities, although the latter takes precedence in Fārābī's analysis.

162 Fārābī explicitly ascribes the expression ‘being delineated by one's essence’ (*al-munḥāz bi-māhiyyatīhi*), to God; see Janos, *Al-Fārābī's On the One*, 118–121. Avicenna's position on this issue was discussed previously; see notably sections IV.1 and IV.2.4.

exist. Hence, any existent will possess its own special or proper existence that allows it to exist in the way in which it exists, and this state is due to its quiddity.

Although this account is plausible, and although Avicenna is undeniably engaging with the theories of his predecessor in elaborating his ontology, it still says little about how these thinkers conceive of proper being, and even about whether a real textual connection exists between Fārābī's *al-munḥāz bi-māhiyyah mā* and Avicenna's *wujūd khāṣṣ*. Menn highlights a certain symmetry between these views, but I think their differences are equally important.¹⁶³ More specifically, there are three crucial points that suggest a discrepancy between these two theories. First, Fārābī, in contrast to Avicenna, does not develop a theory of pure quiddity. If, in the context of Avicenna's philosophy, proper being appears to be identifiable with quiddity 'in itself' as an intelligible object, this is not the case in Fārābī's philosophy, which displays little interest for the issue of mental existence beyond the sense of being-as-truth. Second, and as a corollary, whereas Fārābī's theory of 'being delineated by one's essence' seems to pertain primarily—if not exclusively—to extramental concrete beings, there is no reason to assume that Avicenna's notion of proper being does not extend to mental essences as well, which the master places on a par with their concrete instantiations. Finally, as recent studies have shown, Fārābī and Avicenna differ considerably in their assessment of the place of Aristotle's *Categories* in the philosophical curriculum and, more precisely, of the nature and scope of the category of substance. Fārābī, following closely the late-antique commentatorial tradition on this treatise, identifies the categories squarely with the concrete and material individuals of the world. Avicenna, in contrast, regards the contents of this work as ontological in nature and thus as falling within the bounds of the metaphysical inquiry. He also extends the notion of substance to encompass the immaterial beings, above and beyond the composite beings of the sublunary world. Finally, as I will explain later on, he correlates or even conflates substance and quiddity in a manner Fārābī does not.¹⁶⁴ This, in turn, directly impacts the way these thinkers conceive of how existence applies to the categories. In light of this, even if one concedes a formal resemblance between Fārābī's and Avicenna's theories, inasmuch as they put forth a sense of being *per se* or being associated with the categories, they seem to diverge importantly with regard to their ontological implications. So there are

163 Emphasizing the overlap between Fārābī's and Avicenna's treatments of these senses of being would make Avicenna's position quasi-identical with that of Fārābī and later with that of Averroes, who also talks about the being of the categories and regards the existence of a thing as identical with its essence (although this is *not* how Averroes himself interpreted Avicenna's metaphysics). But differences between these thinkers' understanding of this sense of being need to be carefully fleshed out, especially with regard to Avicenna's theory of quiddity in itself, as well as his groundbreaking rethinking of the status of the categories and the ontological scope of *tashkīk al-wujūd*. Needless to say, it is this sense of proper being that could have protected Avicenna against the scathing critique elaborated by Averroes. The latter seems to have been limited to an incomplete picture of the Avicennian position.

164 See notably Kukkonen, *Dividing Being*; and Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, especially 26, and 225–227.

good reasons to stress the differences between Fārābī's and Avicenna's views in addition to their similarities.¹⁶⁵

At this stage the problem bifurcates in two distinct directions. First, there is the issue of how proper being applies to the pure quiddities in the mind (a topic that finds a negligible precedent in Fārābī, and which was briefly addressed above), and how it applies to the essence of concrete existents (with the potential Fārābīan precedent highlighted by Menn). Second, and with regard to the latter, there is the issue of how Avicenna conceives of substance and being *per se* in contradistinction to the Fārābīan position. In brief, the main question at this juncture is how proper being applies to the concrete substances and, more specifically in the context of Avicenna's thought, to the notion of substance or substance taken 'in itself.' What does it mean, for Avicenna, to say that the existence of this concrete horse is just its essence? And how could his approach potentially differ from that of Fārābī and later Averroes?

Given that pure quiddity somehow exists in concrete beings, as we saw in chapter III, one implication of Avicenna's ascription of a special sense of existence (viz., proper being) to pure quiddity is that this sense of being would extend to all the realized substances of the world. This idea would remain relatively uncontroversial, if proper being were construed as the essence of actual or existing substances, that is, if we hypothesize that Avicenna is referring here to the proper existence, reality, or quiddity of a realized individual substance or *sunolon*. Accordingly, the proper being, say, of 'this triangle' or of 'that horse' would be its essence, what makes it exist *qua* triangle or *qua* horse, and what makes it this particular substance. In this picture, proper being can be conceived of as co-extensional with the essence of the primary substance and as an alternative way of regarding the existence of that substance. That is to say, 'this triangle' or 'that horse' exists actually (affirmative or realized existence), and it exists *qua* triangle or *qua* horse (proper existence). Ultimately, however, we would be talking about the same entity and the same existence considered from two different angles. This is how thinkers such as Fārābī and Averroes seem to envisage the relationship between essence and existence in concrete beings. Despite being two distinct notions in the mind, essence and existence refer to a

165 In his analysis, Menn, Fārābī's *Kitāb*, 83, himself raises the question of whether, for Fārābī, being in the sense of 'being delineated by one's quiddity' should really be connected with the being of the categories. This tension is reflected in the Fārābīan works themselves: Fārābī usually regards the categories as comprising only the concrete individual beings (see Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 225–227; in *On the One*, 51.5–12, Fārābī distinguishes the things 'in the categories' and those 'outside the categories,' obviously with the First in mind), and he ties 'being delineated by a certain quiddity' with the being of the categories. Yet, in *On the One*, he extends the sense of 'being delineated by a certain quiddity' to include the First, Who in principle lies outside the categories. But if this sense of being applies strictly to the categories, then it should not include God on Fārābī's model. This problem does not apply to Avicenna, since he includes the immaterial beings (the separate intellects, if not the First) within the category of substance and extends *tashkik al-wujūd* to the transcendental beings.

single thing and reality in the concrete world and do not imply a composition of metaphysical principles. What is more, this position would intersect somewhat with the Ash'arite view that essence and existence are identical in realized beings.

Now, as we saw in the previous analysis, Avicenna's essentialist framework definitely allows for such an interpretation. Accordingly, proper existence would correspond to quiddity or nature as it exists in the realized individual substances together with their attributes or concomitants, and so, by extension, to the realized substance taken as a whole. On this approach, proper being would refer to the realized essence of an existent in the concrete world or in the mind. In Avicennian parlance, this would also correspond to 'conditioned quiddity' or quiddity taken 'with other things.' Accordingly, and if this interpretation is retained, then most interpreters would agree to construe this sense of *wujūd* as a kind of essential or *per se* being related to the category of substance, but only in reference to the complete, actual, and realized substance and *sunolon* (σύνολον). Proper existence for Avicenna, like 'being delineated by one's quiddity' for Fārābī, would refer to the essence of an existing entity, to what it is to be that thing (a horse, a triangle, something black), and thus, by extension, to the being of the categories (substances and accidents).

On this account, then, proper existence is primarily being as divided into the categories, where the existence of a thing is identical with the essence of a thing. But even though Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes might all concur generally on this point, they might disagree as to what the statement "the *wujūd* of X will be just the essence of X"¹⁶⁶ means exactly in the context of their ontology, and this, because they conceive of quiddity, existence, and substance in significantly different ways. I will postpone the crucial analysis of substance—and more precisely of the relationship between substance and quiddity—to a later section and limit myself here to a few remarks. As we saw in chapter III and elsewhere, Avicenna is keen to maintain a sharp distinction between quiddity in itself and its external concomitants and accidents *within the realized composite substance*. So, on his mereological model, it remains conceptually possible to differentiate between the existence of the *sunolon* and the irreducible existence of pure quiddity within that complex entity, in a manner that is not methodologically and conceptually viable in Fārābī's and Averroes's ontology. Thus, when Avicenna contends that substance is quiddity or essence, I take him to mean not that essence is the realized composite substance or *sunolon*, but rather that substance is pure quiddity, regardless of whether it is found in the mind or in the concrete world as inhering in individual beings (see section 4 below). So by implication, and strictly speaking, proper existence is the being of this very quiddity-substance and not of the *sunolon* taken with its external attributes and accidents, which imply realized existence instead. What is more, for Avicenna,

¹⁶⁶ Menn, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 152. It should be noted that Menn himself says little about the second sense of being that Avicenna outlines in *Metaphysics* I.5, viz., proper being, and focuses almost entirely on the first sense in his various articles on Fārābī's and Avicenna's ontology.

substance, and especially substance *qua* essence, includes not just the material entities, but also the immaterial beings. In that sense, it encompasses the beings that Fārābī regards as lying beyond or outside the categories (*khārij ‘an al-maqūlāt*), as he puts it in *On the One*.¹⁶⁷ This is important, because it means that proper being, in these cases, is to be identified with the immaterial principle and intellectual form. In brief, if proper being is the being of the categories, and if the category of substance includes the principle of intellect, then proper being will also include the special existence of the separate intellects and the First Itself.¹⁶⁸

Because proper existence can be taken as tantamount to thingness or quiddity, it can, like the latter, be characterized in terms of autonomy and irreducibility and, hence, also as lacking a relation (*idāfah*) to other things that are not identical to its very being. Conceiving something in its proper existence means to consider it ‘in itself,’ or ‘with regard to what is proper, peculiar, or unique to it.’¹⁶⁹ In that

167 Fārābī, *On the One*, 51.5–12. To my knowledge, no comparable assertion can be found in Avicenna’s works.

168 This hypothesis is, of course, congruent with the various results reached in the other sections of this book, and especially the idea that *tashkik al-wujūd* extends to the immaterial intellects and to God as well (for a detailed discussion of essence and existence in the First, see section 2.4 below). Yet, reaching the same conclusion from this route poses a serious problem, for it was said before that *tashkik al-wujūd* is a kind of *transcendental* modulation (following Treiger’s terminology) precisely because it transcends the categories and can be applied to God. The way out of this problem lies in resolving the ambiguity surrounding Avicenna’s notion of substance. It is true that the master defines one sense of substance as intellect and often seems to include the immaterial beings in that definition. But he is also quite keen to stress that God is not a substance. In *Notes*, section 981, 560, and sections 989 and 990, 563–564, for example, Avicenna argues that God is not a substance on the traditional definition of ‘being not in a subject,’ although the proposition ‘being not in a subject’ does apply to Him in another sense, which has to do with “His being Himself” (*‘alā annahu huwa*). So it would seem, on Avicenna’s mind, either that God is a special and unique substance or that He possesses the properties of substance (being an intellect, being not in a subject), while not strictly being a substance in the standard sense. Either way, we can infer from this that the Avicennian notion of substance and its criteria are somewhat ambiguous or modulated. These remarks notwithstanding, a key point remains unchanged: *tashkik al-wujūd* extends to God and to His proper being, regardless of whether He is regarded as a special substance or a quasi-substance or a non-substance, and regardless of whether *tashkik al-wujūd* is best translated as ‘transcendental modulation’ (which would include God *qua* non-substance) or merely as ‘ontological modulation’ (which would include God *qua* special substance). Recent studies have qualified Avicenna’s rehandling of the *Categories* and his reinterpretation of their scope as a momentous break with the earlier tradition and an influential achievement for the later development of ontology in Islam; but its impact on the later theological tradition and especially on the theological systems of commentators such as Rāzī, Ṭūsī, and Ḥilli deserves to be investigated as well.

169 This explains why Avicenna in his logical works at times emphasizes the ‘unconnectedness’ of proper existence and the fact that it need not be conceived of in relation to other things; see in particular Avicenna, *Categories*, 224.17–18. At *Metaphysics* IV.2, 182.12–13 (cf., idem, *Discussions*, section 813, p. 285) Avicenna tells us that “everything that does not subsist in a subject [viz., a substance] has proper existence [*fa-lahu wujūd khāṣṣ*], through which it need not be connected with other things.” Pure quiddity, *qua* substance, or rather, substance, *qua* pure quiddity, is that which is not related

sense, special existence can be compared to other aspects of quiddity Avicenna discusses in his works, or other ways of describing quiddity, which stress its autonomy and irreducibility. Apart from the rich essentialist vocabulary that is implemented to that effect to describe the self-identity of pure quiddity (see Appendix I), and which is expressed to some degree in this very passage of *Metaphysics* 1.5, one may mention here the unconditioned quiddity or quiddity ‘not with the condition of something else’ (*lā bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*) and especially quiddity ‘with the condition of no other thing’ (*bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar*). If the latter is considered, then conceiving of the pure quiddity horseness in the intellect would be tantamount to considering its special existence only and with no relation to other things whatsoever. It would exist in the intellect as such, *qua* the proper existence of horseness, with no considerations of realized existence or other external concomitants being attached to it. This in part explains why Avicenna establishes a narrow link between mental existence and proper existence.¹⁷⁰ For my immediate purposes, this linkage reinforces the contention that the intelligible existence of pure quiddity in the intellect amounts to no more than its own ‘proper’ or ‘special being’ and that this mode of being should be demarcated from the one that qualifies complex mental and concrete entities.

Like its quiddity, the proper existence of a concrete being, by its very nature, can also be considered in connection ‘with other things,’ not least with the external attributes of essence, such as oneness or realized existence, an approach which intersects and overlaps with the essence/existence discourse in Avicenna’s philosophy as it is traditionally framed by scholars. In this regard, proper existence bears a direct link to the existent taken as a complex whole or cluster, meaning that the latter has a quiddity that determines or specifies its existence and gives it the proper existence associated with its species. Approached from this angle, special existence is linked to the cluster of accidents and concomitants that together characterize the actual ex-

to another thing. So that the ontological autonomy of substance seems to bear a direct link to the fact that quiddity can be envisaged *in itself*, and with no relation to what is outside of it. More specifically, this statement is to be construed in connection with Avicenna’s belief in the irreducible existence of quiddity. Even when it is regarded as a part of the composite existent, special existence and pure quiddity (e.g., humanness) is just itself and nothing else and need not (although it can) be related to other things; cf. *Salvation*, 535.18–20; *Dialectic of The Cure*, 264.12–14.

170 The tone is set already in *Metaphysics* 1.5, where Avicenna is investigating the primary notions and foundational cognitive concepts in the mind, one of which is quiddity or the related concept ‘the thing,’ and where Avicenna then identifies quiddity and proper existence. But this link reappears saliently in other contexts wherein Avicenna discusses mental existence: in his logical discussions on relation or, rather, ‘relationness,’ which contrast its concrete and intellectual modes of existence (see *Categories* 159.9–10; *Metaphysics*, 157.12–15; Marmura, Avicenna’s Chapter “On the Relative,” 91–92, 95–96); and of present vs. future contingents, the latter having their quiddity existing only conceptually (see *Metaphysics*, 159.15–17; cf. Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 400.18). The link between proper existence and mental existence in Avicenna’s philosophy seems important but requires further examination.

istence of things.¹⁷¹ Hence, inasmuch as proper existence refers to the existence of quiddity in an actual or realized being, a composite or *sunolon*, it does introduce a relation to something else, and it also refers to the way *in which* this actual being exists. Since existence is just existence for Avicenna, or rather, since realized existence is just realized existence, special existence is what specifies the kind of existence that a being possesses. This explains why existing *qua* a horse or a tree or a spring differs from existing *qua* a human being. Avicenna's ontology, and more specifically, his theories of realized existence and existential modulation (*tashkik al-wujūd*), require such a theory of proper existence, since it is the latter that makes something exist the way it exists and therefore qualifies or determines existence from an essentialist standpoint. As Avicenna explains in a passage of *Discussions*:

because existence is predicated of what is below it by modulation [*bi-l-tashkik*], it follows necessarily that every existent must be differentiated from another existent by its essence [*bi-dhātihī*], as blackness is [differentiated] from extension. For these two [things] do not share a constitutive common notion [*‘āmm muqawwim*], although they may share a non-constitutive concomitant [*lāzim ghayr muqawwim*].¹⁷²

In other words, it is the proper existence of blackness that differentiates it from extension, or human from horse and triangle, not *wujūd qua wujūd* or *wujūd* taken merely as an external attribute of the thing. So, for instance, the modalities of 'the possible' and 'the necessary' (one key aspect of *tashkik*) are limited in their explanatory value, since they cannot differentiate between the various composite and contingent existents—given that *each one of these beings* is 'possible in itself' and 'necessary through its cause.' Nor by extension can realized existence, regarded here as an external concomitant (*lāzim*) of essence—which, as another passage of *Notes* seems to suggest, is modulated precisely because it is a concomitant of proper being or quiddity—suffice to set apart different classes of things in their existence.¹⁷³

171 This perhaps is why Avicenna explains in *Categories* that the state of thingness (*shay'iyah*) and its special existence are never dissociated from the category of relation (*al-muḍāf*). Avicenna, *Categories*, IV.5, 159–160; cf. idem, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, 242. In addition, it should be noted that Avicenna sometimes seems to use the expression *wujūd khāṣṣ* with another intent in mind, to express the specific or conditioned existence of an entity or essence in the concrete world; this seems to be the case in his discussion of matter in *Metaphysics*, II.3, 74–75, at least according to Marmura (in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 390). But is this really the case? Since quiddity can be said to exist in the concrete beings under one aspect, it would make sense that specific existence could also be said of quiddity in concrete beings. In that case, it would also be related, or conceptually relatable, to other things. At any rate, Avicenna's use of *wujūd khāṣṣ* in the logical works is complex and requires additional reflection.

172 Avicenna, *Discussions*, 218, section 648; translated by Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*, 362, slightly revised.

173 Avicenna, *Notes*, 163, section 238: "Oneness, like existence, are counted among the modulated terms [*al-asmā' al-mushakkikah*], and they are among the concomitants [*min al-lawāzim*]." I think that *wa* here can almost be translated as "because," as it stands as an explanation of why existence and oneness are modulated and not predicated in a perfectly univocal way.

Rather, Avicenna is alluding here to the proper, irreducible, and idiosyncratic existence each being has by virtue of its very quiddity. Thus, every existent (*mawjūd*) can be said to exist by virtue of its realized existence and by virtue of its proper existence. The former refers to the substantial being taken as a whole in its state of actual existence, the latter solely to the quiddity as an ontic principle within that existent, which in turn qualifies realized existence inasmuch as it determines the kind of existence this being will 'acquire' from the outside. In sum, Avicenna's theory of the modulation of being (*tashkīk*) is deeply interconnected with his theory of pure quiddity *qua* proper existence. The doctrine of proper being—taken as an account of the special ontological status of pure quiddity as well as an account of how it determines and specifies the realized existence of the *sunolon*—is so intricately woven into the fabric of Avicenna's ontology that the latter becomes unintelligible without it.

Hence, there is a sense in which proper existence 'specifies' or 'qualifies' realized existence. This specifying function of special existence is encapsulated in the Arabic root *kh-ṣ-ṣ*, which means 'to distinguish,' 'to set apart,' or 'to be specific or peculiar to,' with the implication that *wujūd khāṣṣ* means for a thing to have an existence that is peculiar or exclusive to it. Accordingly to exist 'as a horse' or 'as fire' is proper and exclusive to all the actual existents whose realized existence is qualified by the special existence of 'horseness' or 'fireness.' This implies a relationship or interface between what is commonly framed (by Avicenna and especially by modern scholars) as a distinction between *māhiyyah* and *wujūd*, but which can be recast in terms of a relationship between proper or essential being and realized, external, and concomitant existence. This difference in phrasing, however, is not doctrinally insignificant. For it drives home the point that the relation between quiddity and realized existence can also be conceptualized, as Avicenna himself suggests, as one between *two different modes or senses of existence*. This Avicennian doctrine seems to anticipate the distinction between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae* that one finds in some medieval Latin sources.

In its equal capacity to be considered in a state of connectedness or unconnectedness, 'in itself' or 'with other things,' *wujūd khāṣṣ* shares some core features with other aspects of Avicenna's discussion of quiddity. It brings to mind notably the different considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity in *Introduction* I.2, which can focus on quiddity inasmuch as it is quiddity, or on quiddity as it exists in realized concrete and mental existents. It also brings to mind Avicenna's distinctions between unconditioned quiddity (*lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) and conditioned quiddity (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*), where the term *shay'* here can be construed as referring to realized existence taken as a concomitant (*lāzim*) of quiddity, or, put differently, to the cluster of accidents and concomitants that inevitably accompany the realized existence of quiddity. However, and unless further conditions or considerations are added to it, special existence describes quiddity in itself, even in the case of the essence of the concrete or realized *sunolon*, and it remains intentionally and extensionally distinct from *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* or *wujūd ithbātī*. Now, since pure quiddity has otherwise been shown in the present book to possess a distinct kind of simple, prior, unconditioned, absolute, and

divine existence—and this, quite apart from what Avicenna has to say about proper existence in *Metaphysics* I.5—there are solid grounds to argue that the proper existence of quiddity corresponds expressly to this essential ontological mode. In other words, Avicenna’s claim that *wujūd khāṣṣ* represents a distinct sense of being strengthens the hypothesis that quiddity in itself does possess its own mereological existence in concrete beings, and that this special ontological status is not identical with realized existence, but amounts instead to another mode (*naḥw*, *ḥukm*) and sense (*ma’nā*) of existence (*wujūd*). These various distinctions form the core of Avicenna’s groundbreaking theory of ontological modulation.

2.2.2 The evidence from *Philosophical Compendium for ‘Alā’ al-Dawlah*

Additional evidence concerning the distinction between realized and proper existence, or between accidental and essential existence, can be gleaned from another work of Avicenna’s middle period entitled *Dānīsh-Nāma-i ‘Alā’ī* or *Philosophical Compendium for ‘Alā’ al-Dawlah* (henceforth abbreviated to *Philosophical Compendium*). This treatise was redacted in Persian for a wealthy patron with philosophical aspirations. It has been classed by Gutas as belonging to the middle period of Avicenna’s philosophical output, with a composition date shortly following that of *The Cure* and *Salvation*. For our purposes, this work is particularly valuable for two main reasons: first, due to its chronological proximity to, and textual connection with, *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*, and, second, due to the fact that it was written in Persian and, hence, can shed alternative light on Avicenna’s discussion of existence through its divergent ontological terminology.

The ontology of quiddity Avicenna articulates in *The Cure* not only informs his treatment of the same topic in *Philosophical Compendium*; it also represents a cornerstone of his discussion of the notion of existence in that work. In this regard, it is important to point out that the Persian terminology of existence deployed in the latter work is richer and more diversified than the one he relies on in his Arabic works.¹⁷⁴ As Parviz Morewedge has shown, Avicenna in this work relies on an array of Persian and Arabic terms to articulate his ontological doctrine, *ḥastī* and *wujūd* being the two key terms that appear most frequently throughout the text.¹⁷⁵ What is significant, over and above these purely linguistic or terminological variations, is the argumentative and doctrinal differentiation Avicenna establishes between realized existence, on the one hand, and essential being, on the other. Although—in spite of Morewedge’s claim—there does not seem to be a strict correlation between the Persian and Arabic terminology Avicenna deploys and the different aspects and senses of being he discusses, his argumentation nevertheless

¹⁷⁴ The reasons for this are well known and have been stressed on numerous occasions in the scholarship; they have to do chiefly with the linguistic difference between Persian and Arabic and the absence of the use of a copula in the latter.

¹⁷⁵ See Morewedge’s commentary in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*.

teases out the basic ontological distinction between realized existence and essential being that was emphasized in the previous analysis of *Metaphysics of The Cure*.¹⁷⁶

The intimation of a special mode of being of essence is first alluded to at the beginning of the work when Avicenna discourses on the conditions necessary for a body to exist and on the principles of corporeality. He explains that prime matter in itself is not sufficient to account for the existence of a body, or even of corporeality, since these require the corporeal form (*ṣūrat-i jismī*), which provides inchoate matter with the essence of bodyness and corporeality, as well as of three-dimensionality. In this connection, Avicenna explains that this corporeal form always subsists in matter, that it is a condition for our knowledge of what a body is, and even that it is an ontological condition for a body to exist once it has acquired the individual accidents of width, length, and depth. Avicenna goes on to describe this corporeal form as the substance and essence of a body, and he also equates it with 'being a body,' since "being a body is due to a form."¹⁷⁷ This form, this essence of corporeality, always subsists, even when the various accidents of three-dimensionality, i.e., of width and length and depth, change.¹⁷⁸ It would seem, then, that this form provides inchoate prime matter with thingness, i.e., corporeality in itself, with its first essential definiteness. So 'being a body,' or the essence of corporeality depends, at the very least potentially and conceptually, on the corporeal form combining with prime matter, not on a body actually existing in the concrete world. Although this is true primarily with regard to our thinking about matter and body, Avicenna's comments in this passage would seem to apply to the concrete world as well, although this point is not made explicit in our passage.¹⁷⁹

176 Morewedge argues that Avicenna refers to realized existence by using the term *wujūd* and to essential being by using the term *ḥastī*. This terminological distinction represents the main thrust of Morewedge's analysis of the notion of existence in his book. This argument, however, does not seem to be borne out by a close inspection of the textual evidence. But this fact should not detract from the more important point that Avicenna does seem to distinguish two senses or aspects of existence, which coincide with the ones discussed earlier.

177 Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 27.2–3; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, 25. For the corporeal form in Avicenna and its relation to matter, see Lammer, *The Elements*, 120 ff.

178 Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 13–14; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, 17.

179 Moreover, there is an ambiguity in Avicenna's argumentation as to whether 'being a body' should apply to the essence or form of corporeality alone or to the composite substance of prime matter and corporeal form. In fact, absolute body, like all the other pure quiddities, does not exist as such and separately in the concrete world, but exists intelligibly in the mind. Nevertheless, there is also a sense in which it can be said to exist immanently in all concrete bodies, inasmuch as the corporeal form is implied by or subsumed under each substantial species-form, as was shown in chapter III, and as Lammer, *The Elements*, 165–179, explains in detail. Interestingly, Avicenna applies the same essentialist terminology to describe the relation between the essence of body and its determinate extensions as he does to describe the relation between pure quiddity and its non-constitutive concomitants: the determinate extensions are *lawāḥiq* relative to the *māhiyyah* of body; see Lammer, *The Elements*, 131–132.

Avicenna's analysis in the following sections of the work delineates with more precision the notion of a being of quiddity in and of itself. He returns to this point in passing when he asserts that 'being a man' and 'being water' is one thing, but their numerical unity is something else. As he puts it, "[numerical] oneness is external to the realities and essences" of these things, a statement which introduces the distinction between quiddity in itself, or being a certain thing in itself, and its various concomitants, in this case numerical oneness.¹⁸⁰ But the master tackles this issue in earnest in the eleventh chapter of this work, which focuses on the relation of being (*ḥastī*) to the categories (*maqūlāt*). There Avicenna devotes his attention to the question of whether being is a univocal or equivocal notion and how it can be predicated of different things.¹⁸¹ The argument in this chapter of *Philosophical Compendium* has a clear structure and can be divided into three main sections: (a) first, Avicenna reports the view of those who regard existence as a purely equivocal notion (36.14–37.37.1); (b) he then retorts by arguing that it is a kind of modulated univocal notion, because it has a single overarching meaning (37.1–38.1); and (c) he goes on to elaborate on (b) by mentioning a set of differences and distinctions in the way in which being can be predicated of things (38.1–39.7). Avicenna's main intention in this section is therefore to show that being (*ḥastī*) is neither a pure equivocal nor a pure univocal notion, but rather a 'modulated' (*mushakkik*) notion. In section (b), he argues that existence has an overarching and unified or focal meaning, which is nevertheless subject to qualifications. There he mentions "absolute existence" (*ḥastī-i muṭlaq*) and "general existence" (*ḥastī-i 'āmm*). These expressions convey a single, fundamental meaning of existence, which applies to all the categories, and which means for something 'to exist' or 'to be' (*ḥastī*) and is the contrary of nonexistence or 'not to be' (*nīstī*). Existence or being has, accordingly, a single unifying meaning (*yak ma'nā*). What Avicenna states here accords squarely with what he explains in his other works concerning ontological modulation (*tashkik*) and the relative univocity of *wujūd*.

Nevertheless, in section (c), he explicates that the notion of being is not by any means a rigid univocal, since various distinctions and qualifications can be introduced to modulate this notion and to clarify the various cases to which it applies. What is of particular relevance for my purposes is the set of distinctions Avicenna introduces in the remainder of the passage in order to justify his differentiating between various aspects or even sub-senses of being. It is these distinctions that can account for the difference (*ikhtilāf*) in the way existence is predicated of things. The first distinction is that between priority and posteriority: existence applies primarily to substance and secondarily to accident. What is more, it applies primarily to some substances and secondarily to others, and primarily to some accidents

¹⁸⁰ Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 33.8–10.

¹⁸¹ Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, chapter 11, 36–39. This passage has been commented upon by Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, 156–206; and a large segment of it has been analyzed by Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*.

and secondarily to others.¹⁸² A second aspect of modulation mentioned in chapter 11 is based on degrees of intensity, or degrees of strength and weakness, which can be applied to some accidents, such as blackness or whiteness. The rationale underlying this claim seems to be that although quiddity in itself, e. g., whiteness, is applied in a purely univocal way to different things—such as snow and ivory, for the whiteness of snow is not in itself whiter than the whiteness of ivory—it is degrees of strength and weakness in existence, of being white in actuality, which differentiate them.¹⁸³ These two aspects or modes of *tashkik*, especially priority and posteriority, have already been discussed in a previous section. Finally, Avicenna introduces a third distinction between general existence (*ḥastī-i ‘āmm*) and existence conceived of in a more proper or specific (*khāṣṣ*) way, the latter referring to the existence of individual things, or rather ‘thingness-es,’ and not to being ‘in general.’ Avicenna contends in this connection that “if you make existence proper [*chōn ḥastī-rā khāṣṣ konī*], then the existence of each thing [*chīz*] becomes distinct, so that the proper substance of each thing is distinct.”¹⁸⁴ So, there is a principle of differentiation and determinedness that sets a thing apart from all the other things, where ‘thing’ in this context is meant to refer to quiddity. Furthermore, the reference to proper existence, or “making existence proper,” obviously corresponds to the Arabic expression *wujūd khāṣṣ* that

182 See Treiger, *Avicenna's Notion*, 355–359. This distinction intersects directly with the broader distinction between proper and general existence: the proper existence of a thing is what, at a fundamental level, differentiates the existence of substance from its accidents, or of one accident from another, or of one substance from another, such as the being of blackness from the being of whiteness, of humanness from horseness. Regardless of whether it is a substance or an accident, it is the essence and proper existence of that thing that will set it apart from other things. It is intriguing in this connection that Avicenna attributes pure quiddities to all things, whether substances or accidents, and that he furthermore correlates quiddity with substance in a forceful manner. The implication would seem to be that one sense of substance is reducible to quiddity taken in itself. This perspective will be explored in more detail below.

183 This argument is problematic, because it does not square with what Avicenna says on this topic in some of his other works, where he seems to reject the idea of an intensity of being; cf., for example, the discussion of modulated terms and existence in *Categories*, I.2, 10.17–18. In the latter work, the reverse of what appears in *Philosophical Compendium* is stated: whiteness is said not to be predicated univocally and not to be the subject of greater or lesser intensity. The crux of Avicenna's arguments seems to rely on a basic distinction between a quiddity taken in itself and a quiddity taken as something realized in a concrete being. While the former is constant and irreducible and thus also unchanging in the way it is predicated of things, the latter is variable and can be predicated differently of things as they come to exist in actuality. A passage in *Notes*, 99–100, section 121, explains this point in detail: “If one says: ‘This [thing] is blacker than that other [thing],’ one is not referring here to absolute blackness [*al-sawād al-muṭlaq*]. For they are one in their definition of blackness, and the latter is predicated of them equally. Rather, the intention is that this [thing] in its specific blackness [*sawādihi l-mukhaṣṣa*] is blacker than that thing in its specific blackness. And this only occurs through a relation [*iḍāfah*] to whiteness, in that this [thing] is closer to whiteness than that [thing].” It is, therefore, not pure quiddity which is liable to degrees of intensity, but rather the accident as it comes to be realized or exist in a concrete subject.

184 Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 37.11.

appears in *Metaphysics* I.5. This is confirmed by the remainder of the passage, which associates proper existence with ‘the being’ of individual essences, such as blackness, a point to which I return below. In brief, the reference to proper or specific existence in *Philosophical Compendium* seems to stem from the same concern regarding the special being of quiddity that appears in *Metaphysics* I.5 and later in V.1. As we saw in the section on *tashkik*, it is on these grounds that existence can be modulated and said differently of things.

At this juncture, let us turn to the last paragraph of chapter 11 of *Philosophical Compendium*. There Avicenna develops an argument that seems at first glance awkwardly related to the discussion that precedes it, since it concerns the relation between essence and existence, as well as between ‘the essential’ (*dhātī*) and ‘the accidental’ (*‘araḍī*). On a first evaluation, these last points do not seem to directly inform the analysis of the various senses or modes of existence.¹⁸⁵ Upon careful examination, however, a crucial link emerges between its contents and the theme of the chapter. For Avicenna’s point seems to be that existence is said differently of essence and of the concrete, realized entity taken with its accidents and concomitants. The aim of this last paragraph would therefore be to further elucidate how a special sense of being can be attributed to quiddity or thingness, as opposed to the accidental and composite whole. I quote the relevant passage below:

Text 30: This meaning of [realized] existence is not essential [or intrinsic, *dhātī*] to the ten categories, nor is it to be regarded as their quiddity [*māhiyyah*]. We have stated this argument previously. It follows from this reasoning that one cannot say that something has made humanness into an actual substance and blackness into a color. However, one can say that it has made [each of] them into a [realized] existent [*mawjūd*]. Accordingly, each of the ten categories has a quiddity [*māhiyyah*] that does not proceed from a [realized] entity. For instance, four is four [*chahār chahār*] or it is a number with the attribute of [realized] existence [*ṣifat-keh hast*], and this existence is described as realized existence [*amniyyah*]. Quiddity and realized existence are different [*digar*], and the realized existence of [these things] is distinct [*jodā*] from quiddity on the grounds that the former [i.e., realized existence] is not an essential meaning [*ma’nā dhātī*], but an accidental meaning [*ma’nā ‘araḍī*]. The accidental condition [or state, *hāl*] pertaining to these nine [categories] is in such a manner that each one of them has its quiddity by itself [or for each one of them the quiddity is by virtue of itself] [*har yaki-rā māhiyyat-i bekhūdish ast*], whereas what is accidental [i.e., realized existence] is so [only] in relation to the thing in it.¹⁸⁶

In this last paragraph of chapter 11, Avicenna introduces his seminal distinction between essence and existence. At first sight, this seems to have little to do with the

¹⁸⁵ This, perhaps, explains why Treiger in his article does not quote and analyze this last paragraph of chapter 11. But I think he overlooked its essential connection to what precedes and the fact that it is meant to illustrate yet another aspect of the modulation of existence and of the ontological difference (*ikhtilāf*) that can be predicated of things.

¹⁸⁶ Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 38.10–39.4; transl. Morewedge, *The Metaphysics*, 30–31, slightly revised.

main theme of chapter 11, which is whether existence is a univocal or equivocal notion, and how it can be said to apply to the ten Aristotelian categories. But scrutiny of the passage reveals that it is in fact perfectly pertinent to the discussion at hand and adds to its main argument. For the crucial distinction Avicenna makes here is between realized existence or *anniyyah*, which he describes as an accidental meaning (*ma'nā 'araḍī*) and an attribute or characteristic (*ṣifah*), and the being of quiddity, which is essential or intrinsic (*dhātī*) to essence. Whereas the former is something extrinsic that conditions essence from the outside and endows it with a state or condition (*ḥāl*) of realization and concretization—this should be connected with the conditioned state of quiddity (*bi-sharḥ shay' ākhar*) that Avicenna discusses in *The Cure*—the being of quiddity is in contrast essential and inherent to it and indistinguishable from it. It is, for example, what makes founness founness, humanness humanness, and blackness blackness, and what provides each category with its being itself-*qua*-itself, and this in complete abstraction from the realization and concretization of these essences. The fundamental difference teased out by this text, then, is one between essential being, on the one hand, and accidental being or the realization or concretization of existence, on the other. This distinction is highly relevant to the overarching aim of the passage and represents one of the many differences (*ikh-tilāfāt*) in terms of which being is predicated and said of things. In bolstering this point, the passage harks back to an earlier statement that appears in chapter 3 of the same work, where Avicenna describes substance (*jawhar*) as that whose being is not in a subject and is a reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and quiddity (*māhiyyah*) whose being (*hastī*) is not receptive of another thing.¹⁸⁷ By implicitly distinguishing between two ontological modes or states—i.e., an essential one belonging to thingness or quiddity, and an accidental one belonging to the realized whole—this passage appears to elaborate on the notion of proper existence discussed more explicitly in Avicenna's other works. In the final analysis, this last paragraph would add a crucial and distinct point to the overall discussion of chapter 11, and its contents would overlap significantly with some of the other texts discussed previously. In line

187 Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 9.13–15. In this regard, it is quite remarkable, as Morewedge notes, that this theoretical distinction is to some extent borne out by Avicenna's Persian terminology: the terms *wujūd/mawjūd* and *anniyyah* seem to refer chiefly in this work to realized or concretized existence and to be connected with the notion of accidentality he mentions in this passage, whereas Avicenna employs terms from the root *hastī* and *ast* to describe the being or reality of quiddity. Morewedge contends that *wujūd* signifies "concretion" and "actuality" and differs from the meaning of essence (*dhāt*, *māhiyyah*) and being (*hastī*). The term *wujūd* should be associated especially "with the accidents of an individual substance which has been realized, such as the color white in Socrates' skin" (325). But Morewedge's claim may go too far, and I see no strict correlation between content and terminology in this work; rather, the crucial point in this passage focuses on the distinction between the essential reality or being of quiddity (*dhātī*) and the accidental status of realized or acquired existence (*'araḍī*).

with chapters I.5 and V.1 of *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*, it implicitly identifies one sense of existence with the proper existence or reality of quiddity or thingness.¹⁸⁸

The main thrust of Avicenna's argumentation in these texts is that differences in the way existence is predicated of things are based on various aspects of *tashkik*, as well as—I would contend—on the distinction between the essential being of quiddity and the realized, accidental existence of its concomitants. In fact, and all things considered, it is the notion of essential being that most directly accounts for the difference (*ikhtilāf*) between one thing's existence and another thing's existence. This is because it, more than the others, is indistinguishable from the core and essence of a thing and points to its irreducible difference in thingness, such as the difference between the being of humanness and the being of horseness, or between the being of blackness and the being of whiteness. It is this very sense of existence that Avicenna elucidates and attributes to quiddity in *Metaphysics* I.5, a hypothesis that is further borne out by the fact that he even provides similar examples there, such as whiteness. Hence, even though differences in the way being is predicated arise from a set of aspects or modes (priority and posteriority, the modalities, etc.), one could argue that they stem primarily and especially from the irreducible ontological distinctness or difference embedded in each quiddity. This may be called a kind of 'quidditative modulation of being.'

One element of Avicenna's discussion that is more implicit in *Philosophical Compendium* than in *The Cure* is the fundamentally *mental* or *intellectual context* of the being of quiddity. Avicenna's comments in the former work are quite succinct and abstract. Although he contrasts sharply realized or concretized existence and essential being—the former corresponding extensionally to the concrete beings of the exterior world, as well as possibly to the 'realized' existents in the mind, i.e., complex universal mental concepts—the extensionality of essential being is not clarified in that passage. However, on the basis of the previous analysis, it is apparent that it is primarily to the status of pure quiddities *in the mind* that Avicenna is alluding and, thus, to a kind of intelligible being. That is to say, this passage would be differentiating between the realized, accidental existence of concrete entities and the essential, intelligible existence of the pure quiddities in the intellect. So there are reasons to think that the essential being of quiddity Avicenna alludes to in *Philosophical Compendium* is to be connected directly with the doctrines of the primary notions and the intelligible existence of quiddity as it is expounded in *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1.¹⁸⁹

188 The question of why Avicenna inserts this paragraph in his analysis of the modulation of being has to be addressed and cannot be simply ignored, as Treiger does in his article. The most convincing explanation in my eyes is that its contents represent yet another mode or aspect of *tashkik*.

189 Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, 162, reaches the same conclusion, but I think he goes too far in his construal of essential being, especially with regard to what it encompasses. He makes impossibles, such as "round square" and "2+2=5," examples of intelligible being. He also claims that "an impossible being is a concept" (316). But I think that this, strictly speaking, cannot be correct, because

There is a final, intriguing feature about Avicenna's discussion in *Philosophical Compendium*: the distinction between the accidental nature (*'araḍī*) of realized existence and the essential nature (*dhātī*) of the being of essence seems to imply that realized or concretized existence is merely possible (because it is accidental and extrinsic), whereas essential being is necessary (because it is essential and intrinsic). Although Avicenna does not introduce the modalities in his discussion of the various aspects or modes of existence in *Philosophical Compendium*, the correlation between accidentality and possibility, on the one hand, and essentiality and necessity, on the other, coheres with other Avicennian doctrines. This point needs to be developed further and will be addressed in a forthcoming section.

2.2.3 Yaḥyā b. 'Adī and Avicenna on essential being

As we saw already in chapters II and III, the Christian philosopher Yaḥyā b. 'Adī exerted a profound influence on Avicenna's conception of essence. His works foreshadow many of the distinctions that later play a key role in the master's approach to this topic and that are often attributed to Avicenna himself. One issue that needs to be explored in more detail at this juncture concerns the place of essential being in their ontology. In a groundbreaking study devoted to the metaphysics of Yaḥyā and Avicenna published in 2004, Marwan Rashed concluded that the Avicennian theory of proper being (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) was directly indebted to Yaḥyā's works and, more specifically, to his theory of essential being.¹⁹⁰ To my knowledge, Rashed is the only scholar working with the Arabic sources to have seriously entertained the possibility that Avicenna articulated a theory of essential being and that this theory had a direct precedent in the early Islamic context. Although his general hypothesis of the influence that Yaḥyā had on the *shaykh al-ra'īs* has been validated by subsequent studies, his argument regarding essential being has not been retained in specialized studies on Avicenna. In what follows, I delve into the line of inquiry opened by Rashed and try to generate additional insight into how these thinkers perceive the relationship between essence and existence.

for Avicenna impossible things that cannot exist at all cannot be conceived of and are not real concepts. Only concepts of possible and necessary things can exist. What does perhaps exist in the mind is the *concept* of the impossible (*mumtani'*) in itself as a logical notion, not *impossible beings*, as Morawadji would have it, since these do not have a quiddity or essence. But even then, I think one should distinguish between two senses of impossible, as was proposed already in chapter II: absolute impossibles, like 'square circle' or 'existent nonexistent,' which cannot ever exist in the mind even as concepts; and things that are impossible in the sense that their existence is negated in the present moment, but are theoretically possible, such as a future contingent. There is a sense in which the latter can exist in the mind, but not the former. For instance, it is impossible for a childless woman to have a son in the present moment; but it is not impossible for this to happen at a future time, and so the mental consideration of this state is also possible, not impossible.

190 Rashed, Ibn 'Adī. Comments on Yaḥyā's theory of essential or divine being can also be found in Ehrig-Eggert, Yaḥyā, 59–60; and Endress, Yaḥyā, 459–460.

As I showed earlier, there are strong reasons to construe the second sense of *wujūd* outlined by Avicenna in *Metaphysics* I.5 as referring to a kind of essential being associated with nature and quiddity. According to the master, this sense of essential being is distinguished from realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*), which pertains to the realized substance or *sunolon* taken as a whole, that is, together with the external attributes and accidents of essence. Now, the two ideas that *wujūd* possesses several senses, and that one of its senses refers to essential being, had already been articulated by Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī. In his treatise entitled *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, Yaḥyā makes the following statement, which is relevant for the issue at hand:

Text 31: Likewise, existence is an equivocal term that points to various senses [*al-wujūd ism mushtarak yadullu ‘alā ma‘ānī mukhtalifah*].¹⁹¹ The first is ‘natural existence’ [*al-wujūd al-ṭabī‘ī*], and this is the existence of the notions [or forms or essences, *al-ma‘ānī*] in matter and together with accidents. The second is ‘logical existence’ [*al-wujūd al-manṭiqī*], which is the existence of the notions *qua* forms [*ṣuwar*] in the soul. The third is ‘the essential [existence]’ [*al-dhātī*], which is also called ‘the divine [existence]’ [*al-ilāhī*], and this is the existence of the notions on account of what [or of the thing to which] their definitions point to [in itself] [*wa-huwa wujūd al-ma‘ānī ‘alā mā tadullu ‘alayhā ḥudūduhā*].¹⁹²

To be sure, there are significant differences—to which I shall return later on—in the way Ibn ‘Adī and Avicenna conceive of the relationship between essence and existence. With regard to this passage, one obvious difference is that Yaḥyā outlines three senses of *wujūd*, as opposed to Avicenna’s two senses in *Metaphysics* I.5. Another key difference is that being, for Yaḥyā, is an equivocal term (*ism mushtarak*), whereas for Avicenna it is more appropriately described as a modulated term (*ism mushakkik*).¹⁹³ But I wish to begin the analysis by stressing the similarities between their views. Yaḥyā, like Avicenna later on, distinguishes various senses (*ma‘ānī*) of *wujūd*, and his statement to that effect (*wa-ayḍan fa-inna l-wujūd ism mushtarak yadullu ‘alā ma‘ānī mukhtalifah*), is very close to the one that appears in *Metaphysics* I.5 (*lafẓ al-wujūd yadullu bi-hi ayḍan ‘alā ma‘ānī kathīrah*). What is more, Yaḥyā and Avicenna connect one of these senses directly with quiddity, essence, or nature taken in itself: for Ibn ‘Adī, this is “essential existence” and “divine existence,” which is also called “true existence” (*wujūd ḥaqīqī*) in another treatise,¹⁹⁴ while for Avicenna it is “proper existence” (*wujūd khāṣṣ*). However, it is worth recalling that Avicenna at *Met-*

191 Naturally, *mushtarak* can also be translated as “equivocal,” but I think that Ibn ‘Adī, like most Aristotelian philosophers, would recognize that being possesses a core or focal meaning; so ‘ambiguous’ seems a more appropriate translation.

192 Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 154.17–20.

193 Yaḥyā also puts forth the view that existence is equivocal in some comments he made regarding *Categories*; see Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *Philosophical Treatises*, 182.15–183.5. I have not found any references to the idea of modulation (*tashkīk*) in his writings.

194 Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 66b15.

aphysics V.1 draws a distinction between the concrete composite existent, which he calls “the natural thing” (*al-shay’ al-ṭabī’ī*) and which has “natural existence” (*al-wujūd al-ṭabī’ī*), and the nature or essence “taken in itself” (*al-ma’khūd bi-dhātihī*), which has “divine existence” (*al-wujūd al-ilāhī*).¹⁹⁵ Hence, for the master, divine existence pertains to the essence taken in itself. In addition, Avicenna frequently refers to “intellectual existence” (*wujūd ‘aqlī*) in his works, which amounts unequivocally to what Yaḥyā for his part describes as “logical existence” (*wujūd mantiqī*). Both expressions pertain to the existence of universal notions in the mind or, as Yaḥyā puts it, of notions “conceived of or in the soul” (*mutaṣawwar aw fī l-nafs*).¹⁹⁶ In brief, both Yaḥyā and Avicenna recognize two broad modes of conditioned existence—‘natural/concrete’ and ‘intellectual/logical’—and they in addition posit a third mode that is closely connected with the essence taken in itself: ‘essential/divine/real existence’ for the former, and ‘proper/divine’ existence for the latter.

Now, it is important to stress that Yaḥyā’s threefold ontological distinction corresponds directly, as in Avicenna, to three different ways of considering the same essences. In other words, Yaḥyā is not distinguishing between different kinds or sets of essences (such as the essence of concrete horse vs. the essence of God), but rather between the three ontological contexts and states that characterize the same essence, such as humanness. This is crucial, because it suggests that the same essence is characterized by different ontological modes or states depending on where it is located and on whether it exists combined with external concomitants and accidents or solely in itself. One key passage from Yaḥyā’s works that illustrates this appears at the very end of his treatise *On the Four Scientific Questions*:

Text 32: I mean only that simple forms, in their essences—which correspond [exactly] to what their definitions signify—are utterly unclothed in matter and do not need it; they need it only for their sensible existence. As for their intellectual existence, they do not need matter for it, although they do need the intellect. Now for their divine existence [*wujūdihā al-ilāhī*], which is their real existence [*wujūduhā al-ḥaqīqī*] (I mean [their existing] in their [essential] realities), and in which they are not clothed with anything else, they need nothing at all apart from themselves—even though they do not exist at any given moment in one of the three kinds of existence without [also existing in] the other two [kinds of existence]. Rather, all of these three existences must always attach to it, as long as their Creator and Existentiator—hallowed be His names—wishes it. This is [what we have to say] about proving the existence of divine forms. As for their general quiddity, it is “forms”; their specific quiddity is “forms stripped of matter and of all concomitants and free of all things other than themselves.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.16–205.2.

¹⁹⁶ Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 151.22–23.

¹⁹⁷ Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 66b15–20, and 96 for the English translation.

Hence, in Yaḥyā, as in Avicenna, the different ways of conceiving of essence (as a universal in the mind, as a concrete particular, and in itself) correspond to different ontological modes, one of which is divine and essential.

On the basis of these passages and doctrinal parallels, it would appear that the *shaykh al-raʿīs* is relying directly on Yaḥyā's treatises in elaborating his terminology and his distinction between natural, intellectual/logical, and divine existence, as well as in connecting the last aspect with pure essence specifically. In light of this, and in spite of the fact that Avicenna does not make this connection himself explicitly, there can be little doubt that the reference to the "divine existence" of essence in *Metaphysics* V.1 is an elaboration on the sense of "proper existence" disclosed in *Metaphysics* I.5.¹⁹⁸ One hint that supports this hypothesis comes from the very phrasing of the key statement in section V.1, where pure quiddity is said to have "an existence that is *specified* [*yakhuṣṣu wujūduhu*] as divine existence"—in other words, whose "proper existence" (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) is "divine."¹⁹⁹ What is more, if we appeal to section 11 of *Philosophical Compendium* and to the distinction Avicenna makes therein between what is 'accidental' (*ʿaraḍī*) and what is 'essential' (*dhātī*), and if we accept the hypothesis that this distinction may in this passage refer to different aspects or senses of being, then the overlap with Yaḥyā's works becomes even more implicative terminologically: for the proper being and divine being of quiddity as Avicenna conceives it would also, it appears, be "essential" (*dhātī*). In that state, it would have to be distinguished from the accidental ontological state of the external attributes.

Although these points are arresting, I would argue that the commonalities between these two thinkers run even deeper. One key feature of Ibn 'Adī's argumentation revolves around the distinction between essence 'taken in itself' and essence 'taken with other things.' It is this distinction that grounds his postulation of the three modes or kinds (*aṣnāf*) of existence of essence. Essence in concrete beings and essence in the mind is accompanied by certain conditions, attributes, or concomitants that preclude considering it simply in itself. In these cases, it is considered as a part of the composite existent. Accordingly, Yaḥyā describes essence in concrete beings as "in that it is with matter and with specifying accidents" (*bi-annahu fī hayūlā wa-maʿa aʿrāḍ khāṣṣah*), and essence in the mind as "in that it is conceived or in the soul" (*bi-annahu mutaṣawwar aw fī l-naḥs*). In those statements the Arabic expression *bi-annahu* expresses a condition. In contrast, essence taken in itself is "devoid of its concomitants" (*al-ʿariyyah min al-lawāḥiq*) and "without anything else being connected to it" (*min ḡhayr an yuḍāfa ilayhi shayʿ ākhar*).²⁰⁰ On Yaḥyā's

¹⁹⁸ This was also Marmura's opinion (Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 404, note 9).

¹⁹⁹ Note also the similarity in phrasing between Yaḥyā (*wa-huwa l-wujūd al-musammā wujūd ilāhī*) and Avicenna (*wa-huwa alladhī yakhuṣṣu wujūduhu bi-annahu l-wujūd al-ilāhī*). Exactly in what sense it can be called 'divine' is an issue addressed later on.

²⁰⁰ Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 66b9–10; Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 153.2.

mind, it is this latter aspect of essence that is said to have divine and essential being. What this means is that the other two aspects imply a mereological and immanent state of the essence within the concrete or mental existent, which is why Yaḥyā describes it in this context as a “part” (*juzʿ*) of a composite. What is more, essence in itself as well as its divine and essential being are said to be prior and absolute when compared to the other two states. Yaḥyā explains that “this notion [of the pure essence] is prior by nature [or by essence]” (*hādihā l-maʿnā aqdam bi-l-ṭabʿ*). In other words, it is essentially prior to the concrete and mental instantiations of essence.²⁰¹ Remarkably, this would seem to be the case even when essence is taken as a part embedded in concrete particulars. The essence humanness of, say, Zayd, is prior to Zayd taken as a composite and contingent substance, which is why this essence *qua* common nature in Zayd can be said to have essential existence.²⁰²

As the analysis of Avicenna's doctrines carried out in earlier sections has shown, all of these ‘Adian features find a direct counterpart in the master's system. The master uses conditions (*shurūṭ*) to distinguish between a state of essence in itself and a state of essence with other things, the latter being associated with composite mental and concrete existence. Avicenna furthermore regards quiddity in itself as being “prior” to the realized concrete being and as possessing a divine existence on that account. It is also a “part” of the *sunolon* according to a mereological interpretation, while at the same time preceding it in the way that the simple precedes the complex and the part precedes the whole. Even the title of *Metaphysics* V.1 where Avicenna expounds these various points, “On General Things and the Manner [or Mode] of their Existence” (*Fī l-umūr al-‘āmmah wa-kayfiyyat wujūdiḥā*) directly echoes the title of Yaḥyā's treatise (*Fī tabyīn wujūd al-umūr al-‘āmmiyyah*). The various terminological and doctrinal parallels between Yaḥyā and Avicenna are summed up in the comparative table below (Tab. 1).²⁰³

These striking parallels notwithstanding, there are three points that remain to be clarified. First, the fact remains that Avicenna in chapter I.5 refers to two, not three, senses of existence, a deviation which seems to undermine any strong parallelism between his views and those of Yaḥyā. Second, Yaḥyā neatly correlates the three senses (*maʿānī*) of existence he lays out with “three kinds of existence” (*aṣnāf al-wujūd al-thalāthah*), a symmetric account and conflation that seems absent in Avicenna's system. Finally, even if one grants a direct connection between these texts, it remains unclear that Yaḥyā and Avicenna intend “divine existence” in exactly the same way. In fact, it is not entirely obvious how Yaḥyā himself understood this notion. So apart from a formal similarity between their views one should not hasten

201 Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 153.7–12; 157.3–4, 158.3–7.

202 Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī, *Treatise on Unity*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 401.1–3.

203 I have tried as much as possible to include the textual references to the examples given: (C) refers to Yaḥyā's treatise *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, (F) to his treatise *On the Four Scientific Questions*. All the Avicennian references are to *Metaphysics* V.1 of *The Cure*.

Table 1 Comparison of Yaḥyā's and Avicenna's views on pure essence

Notions and doctrines	Yaḥyā b. 'Adī	Avicenna
Designation of pure essence	<i>al-dhawāt al-maḥdah</i> (F65b5) <i>al-ḥayawān al-muṭlaq</i> (C157.3–4, 158.3–7) <i>ma'nā</i> (F, C)	<i>al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya</i> <i>al-ḥayawān al-muṭlaq</i> <i>ma'nā</i>
Conditions linked with the three states of essence: <i>in concreto</i>	<i>bi-annahu fī hayūlā wa-ma'a a'rāḍ khāṣṣah</i> (C151.22–23, 152.17)	<i>bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar</i> (<i>shay' ākhar</i> =concrete concomitants) <i>kawnuhu ma'a māddah wa-'awāriḍ fī l-a'yān</i>
in the mind	<i>bi-annahu mutaṣawwar aw fī l-nafs</i> (C151.22–23, 152.17)	<i>bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar</i> (<i>shay' ākhar</i> =mental concomitants) <i>fī l-'aql, fī l-nafs, fī l-dhihn</i>
in itself	<i>min ghayr an yuḍāfa ilayhi shay' ākhar</i> (C153.2) <i>al-'ariyyah min al-lawāḥiq</i> (F66b9–10)	<i>lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar</i> and <i>bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar</i> <i>khāl 'an al-sharā'it al-lāḥiqah</i>
Mereological state of essence in composite beings	<i>ajzā' al-murakkab</i> (C152.1–3)	<i>al-juz' minhā</i> <i>juz' min ḥayawān mā taqaddum al-juz' 'alā l-kull</i>
Corresponding ontological modes	<i>wujūd ṭabī'ī</i> <i>wujūd manṭiqī</i> <i>wujūd dhātī/wujūd ilāhī/wujūd ḥaqīqī</i> (C and F)	<i>wujūd ṭabī'ī</i> <i>wujūd 'aqlī</i> <i>wujūd ilāhī</i> <i>wujūd khāṣṣ/ḥaqīqah</i>
Qualities of the divine existence of essence	<i>aqdam bi-l-ṭab' min al-mawjūdāt al-ṭabī'iyyah</i> (F66b12)	<i>aqdam min al-wujūd al-ṭabī'ī</i>

to the conclusion that Avicenna modelled this feature of his ontology entirely on the 'Adīan texts.

The first point amounts to an illusory difference but calls for interesting remarks. It is true that *Metaphysics* I.5 mentions only two senses of *wujūd*, but on the reconstruction of these two senses provided here, the first sense of *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* is in fact a contraction of the two sub-senses of existence that presuppose the external attributes and accidents of quiddity. Accordingly, it would include *wujūd fī l-a'yān* and *wujūd fī l-'aql*, *wujūd ṭabī'ī* and *wujūd 'aqlī*, as well as the formula *al-wujūdayn*, when these are taken to refer to the existence of composite or complex contingent beings. Realized or established existence combines and collapses these various denominators, because it puts the emphasis on existence as an external concomitant

of essence as well as on the various external attributes that are realized in the composite substance, whether in the concrete *sunolon* or the complex universal concept. These various expressions designate a single ontological mode or state, albeit in two different contexts (mental and concrete). This explains Avicenna's tendency—a real source of confusion for his readers—to alternate between descriptions of concrete and mental existence as two separate phenomena—which they truly are in a certain regard—but which are liable to being classified under a single notion in view of their identical extraneous and accidental relation to pure quiddity and of their implying a state of ontological compositeness or complexity. Once this point has been elucidated, then one of the seeming differences between Yaḥyā's and Avicenna's classifications dissipates. What remains fundamental is not so much the distinction between intellectual/logical and concrete/natural existence—which these thinkers both uphold and which, granted, also plays an important role in their system—but rather the distinction between the essential being of essence, on the one hand, and existence construed as a concomitant and external attribute, on the other. Put differently, the main cleavage in their metaphysics would be between the existence of essence taken 'in itself' and the existence of essence taken 'with something else.' The upshot is that both Yaḥyā and Avicenna appear to have articulated their ontology on the basis of a fundamental *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* distinction. This fundamental doctrinal commonality prevails, in spite of a divergent distribution of the various senses of *wujūd* in their systems.

The second point is more problematic. To my knowledge, the expression "kinds of existence" (*aṣnāf al-wujūd*) does not appear in the Avicennian texts. Here it is possible to surmise that Yaḥyā opted for this relatively committal and implicative phrasing because he views existence as an equivocal term (*ism mushtarak*), which would justify the claim that there are indeed different "kinds" of existence, which are fundamentally unrelated to one another.²⁰⁴ Avicenna for his part speaks of modes or aspects (*anḥā'*, *aḥkām*) of existence, which seems more in line with his position that *wujūd* is not a purely equivocal notion, but rather a modulated notion whose modes or aspects can be deployed around a focal or central meaning. Accordingly, these various ontological modes are what express modulation without ever resulting in the crystallization of different 'kinds' of existence. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Yaḥyā equates the senses of *wujūd* with its kinds or modes (*ma'anī=aṣnāf*), whereas in Avicenna's ontology the relation between the senses of being and the ontological aspects or modes remains much more elusive and, it would appear, also distinctive (partly because it invokes the complicated theory of *tashkīk al-wujūd*). Accordingly, for Avicenna, concrete and mental existence are not presented as two distinct senses of existence, as they are by Yaḥyā, but rather as two contexts or modes that fall under the single sense of realized or established existence and that are modulated by *tashkīk*, as explained above.

204 Yaḥyā insists on using this term also in his other treatise, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 148.6.

This is why Avicenna at times distinguishes them, and at other times speaks of them in a unified and generic way (*al-wujūdayn*, *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, *wujūd ithbātī*, etc.). This point is also reflected in the fact that in Avicenna's philosophy, the simple term *mawjūd* or 'existent' can refer either to a concrete or a mental being. Even then, and bearing this point in mind, it appears that for both Yaḥyā and Avicenna, the senses of existence correspond quite clearly to modes of existence. More precisely, there are two fundamental senses of existence recognized by these thinkers that also amount to two distinct modes of existence: (a) essential being, and (b) the existence of the attributes and concomitants of essence, or of essence taken with its attributes. In brief, then, even if Avicenna shuns the notion of 'kinds' (*aṣnāf*) of existence, he still correlates the two senses of *wujūd* of *Metaphysics* I.5 with modes of existence very much along the lines of Ibn 'Adī's position.

The third issue raised above is by far the most intricate. There can be little doubt at this stage that Yaḥyā's treatises were a direct source for Avicenna's doctrine of the ontology of quiddity. But in what way, if any, did Avicenna depart from his predecessor regarding the notion of essential and divine existence? And did the two thinkers understand it in exactly the same way? The fact that neither of them elaborates much on this notion only compounds this problem. In order to address this point, we first need to get a better grasp of how Yaḥyā conceives of the divine existence of essence. There is little evidence contained in Yaḥyā's philosophical treatises that can be used to illuminate this issue. From a purely terminological angle, attributing a 'divine existence' to the essences or forms would suggest that these exist in God's mind, as opposed to existing separately on the model of the Platonic forms, a theory which Yaḥyā rejects.²⁰⁵ And indeed, we know from other treatises penned by Ibn 'Adī that he attributed knowledge of all things, and, more specifically, knowledge of all the forms (*ṣuwar*) to God.²⁰⁶ Moreover, because Yaḥyā's noetics posits a perfect unity or unification (*ittiḥād*) between knower and object of knowledge, the implication is that these forms are identical with the divine essence, which in turn helps to explain how they can be described as 'divine.'²⁰⁷ Beyond these two key points, however, it is arduous to determine how this divine mode of existence of form relates to the other two modes Yaḥyā posits. This question is raised quite starkly in *Treatise on Unity* when the Christian thinker attributes 'essential existence' to the forms or universals that are *in* the concrete beings.

205 Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 74, raises this issue but does not address it in detail. For an interpretation that places these essences in God's mind, see Rashed, Ibn 'Adī, 119–122, 142.

206 Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *On the Existence of the Incarnation*, 83.1–4 (in Périer, *Petits traités*).

207 Avicenna agrees with Yaḥyā that intellect and object of intellection are one and identical in God, but the difference is that Yaḥyā extends this principle to human intellection as well—he regards intellect and its object as forming a cognitive unity or unification (*ittiḥād*) and a single thing (*shay' wāḥid*)—whereas Avicenna posits an irreducible distinction between the two in the case of human thought. For Yaḥyā's position on this issue, see Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *On the Existence of the Incarnation*, 74–75, 83 (in Périer, *Petits traités*); and Périer, *Un philosophe*, 142.

In spite of this ambiguity, it seems possible to proffer the following tentative account of Yaḥyā's position. The divine mode of existence of essence or form can be predicated of any essence or form taken in itself, even when it is otherwise associated with, or mereologically constitutes, a composite and contingent substance (as in the case of a concrete particular thing or a universal notion in the mind). This is because this divine, essential, and true mode of being pertains to the essence or form taken in itself as well as to the definition and self-identity of a thing, all of which can be predicated of particulars in addition to universals according to Ibn 'Adī. Not only do the universals, the essences or forms, exist immanently in the particulars (see section III.4.2). On Yaḥyā's account of divine knowledge, God knows particular things by knowing the universal things that constitute them.²⁰⁸ And inasmuch as the pure essences underlie both the logical universals in the mind and the individual concrete beings, they are ontologically and cognitively distinct from them taken as composite entities. As such, they hark back to God's essence, whence they originate. Hence, essence or form would be 'divine' not only on account of the metaphysical localization of the pure essences in the divine *nous*, but also because in that state its existence essentially precedes that of the composite beings. It is, as Yaḥyā asserts, "prior by essence" (*hādihā l-ma'nā aqdam bi-l-ṭab*).²⁰⁹ In existing in that prior and fully abstract state in God's mind, the essences or forms can be said to cause those in the concrete world. As Yaḥyā puts it: "It has been made clear that this meaning [*ma'nā*, i.e., of the pure essence] is more deserving of existence than the other two on account of the fact that it is a cause [*sabab*] of their existence."²¹⁰ Overall, Yaḥyā's account of the 'divine' or 'essential existence' of the pure form or essence seems premised on his mereology, which posits that essence exists combined with either mental or concrete concomitants.²¹¹

With hindsight, it is hard to deny that Avicenna borrowed much from his predecessor's conception of pure essence and its special ontological mode, as well as his mereology and distinction between essence and its external concomitants. In fact, there are strong reasons to believe that Avicenna's *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* distinction owes a major debt to Ibn 'Adī's treatises. In spite of this, the two thinkers appear to have articulated these views with quite different intentions in mind. Yaḥyā's approach is profoundly theological, and his theory of essence seems chiefly designed to establish core theological doctrines, such as God's creation of both particular and universal things, as well as the possibility for human beings to know God's essence

208 Périer, *Un philosophe*, 140–142, who used unedited manuscripts containing works by Yaḥyā.

209 Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 153.7.

210 Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 153.4–5.

211 This helps to explain Yaḥyā's keen interest in mereology, a topic he discusses in many of his treatises, such as *Treatise on Unity; On the Whole and Parts* (*Philosophical Treatises*, 212–219); *On the Distinction between Genus and Matter* (*Philosophical Treatises*, 280–298), as well as in the two philosophical treatises that lie at the heart of this analysis.

as it is in itself. What is more, Yaḥyā's move to locate the forms in God reflects his intention to articulate a theory of plurality-in-oneness, which also characterizes his theology, and which should be compared especially to his Trinitarian doctrine. Avicenna's concern, in contrast, appears to be primarily ontological and epistemological. One of its main effects is to render the pure quiddities valid objects of human cognition and to place them at the center of the scientific and logical inquiry. In this connection, it is possible to highlight a key difference between these two thinkers, which has to do with pure essence as an object in the mind. Even though Yaḥyā in one of his treatises hints at the fact that the pure essence can be envisaged as a distinct and abstract mental object, he nowhere intimates that this object could be said to possess its own intelligible being.²¹² For Yaḥyā, purely abstract essence or essence "without anything else being connected with it" does not appear to exist as such in the human mind. If it does, Yaḥyā says virtually nothing about it. Rather, pure essence on his view is divine on the grounds that it can exist in a kind of objective definitional plane of its own and in a mode that is autonomous from human thought, or because it is thought by God. In line with Yaḥyā's predominantly theological approach to philosophy, this special status of essence is therefore to be connected chiefly with God's thought and God's creation of the forms and essences.²¹³ In Avicenna's treatment of essence, in contrast, pure quiddity not only amounts to a distinct epistemological object and consideration in the human mind, it also exists as such in a manner distinct from the existence of the complex universal concept. Thus, negatively-conditioned quiddity, which is distinct from the universal, has "existence only in the mind" (*wujūduhu fī l-dhihn faqat*).²¹⁴ This is in line with Avicenna's own theory of proper being, which, contrary to Yaḥyā's theory of divine being, can be extended to—or even primarily applies to—objects in the intellect, inasmuch as proper being is the being of quiddity and nature, and quiddity and nature are, according to the master, eminently conceivable and cognizable, distinctly and 'in themselves.' By seizing Yaḥyā's concept of divine and essential existence and modifying it to fit his ontology, Avicenna endowed the objects existing in human thought with a hitherto unprecedented importance and status in the Arabic philosophical tradition. For it is this common intelligibility of the pure quiddities that brings the human intellects one step closer to their divine counterparts. In this regard, Avicenna appears to have significantly elaborated on Yaḥyā's doctrines and shifted the emphasis onto the human mind. While the focus is theological in Yaḥyā, in Avicenna it shifts decidedly toward epistemology and intellection, where the intelligibility of essence is construed chiefly in connection with human thought. As intimated previously, this shift

212 Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, *On Clarifying the Existence of the Common Things*, in *Philosophical Treatises*, 164–165, makes a strong case for the epistemological or logical differentiation between essence 'in itself' and essence taken 'with other things,' but he does not tease out the ontological implications of this distinction when it comes to the being of essence 'in itself' in the human mind.

213 Menn and Wisnovsky, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī *On the Four Scientific Questions*, 65b40, 66b15–20.

214 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.6–10.

of perspective can be hypothetically attributed to the Bahshamite influence on Avicenna, especially the debates regarding the nature of mental existents and the ontological status of 'the thing,' as well as (following Roshdi Rashed) to the progress in abstract mathematical thinking that had occurred during that period. More generally, it is attributable to Avicenna's unprecedented interest in the notion of mental existence.

2.3 Essence and existence revisited

The previous sections have tackled the relationship of essence and existence in Avicenna's metaphysics. The crucial inference that can be introduced in the discussion at this stage is that, whenever Avicenna mentions 'existence' in contradistinction to quiddity or essence, he generally intends *one mode or sense of existence*, namely, 'realized' or 'established existence' (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal* or *al-wujūd al-ḥāṣil*). This is the mode of existence he contrasts to, and separates from, essence, and which he regards as an external, non-constitutive, and even—in a qualified sense—accidental state. But as we saw, realized existence is not exhaustive of *all* the ontological modes and senses that are deployed in Avicenna's metaphysics, for, as he reminds us, *wujūd* possesses "many meanings" (*ma'ānī kathīrah*) as well as many "aspects" or "modes" (*anḥā', aḥkām*). Another crucial meaning I emphasized earlier is *wujūd khāṣṣ*, which represents another ontological mode and sense, and one distinct from *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*. Furthermore, there is the notable exception of God, whose existence should also be regarded as amounting to a distinct and self-contained ontological mode, not comparable to any other mode. Because 'realized' or 'acquired' existence in Avicenna's works typically encompasses the caused, contingent, composite or complex, and conditioned beings, it cannot include God, at least not in any straightforward way. Hence, realized or acquired existence, for Avicenna, expresses a certain lack or deficiency. It is necessarily derivative and even defective, since it presupposes an external agent and therefore involves posteriority, possibility, and multiplicity. These shortcomings do not apply to the divine being, nor do they apply to pure quiddity. Hence, whenever Avicenna distinguishes intensionally between essence and existence, between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, he has in mind realized existence specifically, not existence *simpliciter*. In this regard, it is quite correct to claim, as has been done repeatedly in the scholarship, that realized or actual existence and quiddity are co-extensional, since realized or actual existents will always have a quiddity, and, conversely, quiddities are parts of the caused and contingent beings that possess realized existence. For instance, the quiddity in itself 'horseness' will exist *in* the universal concept 'horse' and *in* the concrete entity 'this horse,' and in that respect it can be regarded as in some sense co-extensive with the realized existence of this universal and particular horse. In short, there is a sense in which not only *mawjūd* and *shay'*, but also *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, are indeed co-extensional and co-implicative. This is an important point Avicenna strives to establish in *Metaphysics* I.5.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that this standard thesis of co-extensionality, premised as it is on the definition of *wujūd* as *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, cohabits in the master's philosophy with the equally important thesis of the ontological distinctness and indifference of quiddity in itself. This means that pure quiddity preserves its irreducible and special mode of existence *even when* it is a part of a complex or composite being. Moreover, there is at least one exception that threatens to break the symmetry between realized existence and essence: the simple, abstract, and negatively-conditioned conception of pure quiddity.²¹⁵ In this case, quiddity and *wujūd khāṣṣ* are fully dissociated from realized existence, since pure quiddity cannot be said to exist intellectually with adjoining accidents and concomitants, nor can it be regarded as existing *in* a composite or complex entity, or as part of it. I argued in chapter II that Avicenna allows for this kind of simple and unmediated apprehension of pure quiddity, and I also argued throughout this study that this concept or object possesses its own, special mode of intelligible existence in the mind. In this manner, the concept of pure quiddity appears as a kind of transcendental notion in the intellect, and one that is distinct and free from the mental accidents and concomitants that typically accompany human reflection. In this particular case, it would seem that the mind focuses exclusively on the proper existence of 'the thing,' or rather of 'thingness,' and that thingness, inasmuch as it is contemplated as such, exists with this proper existence alone and bears no relation to realized or acquired existence. Now, what is true of human intellection is, *a fortiori*, true of divine intellection. This leads me to posit two different modes of intellectual existence: a complex, posterior, and positively-conditioned one that characterizes the universal concept, or quiddity taken with its mental accidents; and a prior, simple, distinct, and negatively-conditioned one that corresponds to the proper existence of quiddity in itself.²¹⁶ The latter connects with Avicenna's views on the apprehension of thingness or quiddity *qua* final cause in the intellect, which he describes as being prior to, and as unfolding in abstraction from, efficient causality. This transcendent intelligible mode of being, which belongs to pure quiddity, has nothing to do with realized existence in the way this notion is described in *Metaphysics* I.5. When reading Avicenna's philosophical works, then, one must determine whether he intends in each case realized existence or proper existence. In what follows, I would like to illustrate this hypothesis by means of passages drawn from Avicenna's works.

The differentiation between these two modes of existence is hinted at in the following passage of *Introduction* I.6:

215 The other exception, of course, is God's existence, as mentioned above. Both on my interpretation are cases of essential being.

216 Pure quiddity preserves this special mode of existence even when it is a part of the universal, although obviously in this case it is no longer negatively-conditioned in the sense of 'without other things.'

Text 33: It was previously shown to you that things have quiddities, and that these quiddities may exist in the concrete world [*fī l-a'yān*] and may exist in the mind [*fī l-awhām*], but that it is not necessary that quiddity [i.e., quiddity in itself] become actualized according to one of these two [modes of] existence [*lā yūjabu la-hā taḥṣīl aḥad al-wujūdayn*]. [Furthermore, it was shown to you] that each one of these [two modes] of existence becomes established [*kull wāḥid min al-wujūdayn yathbutu*] only after the establishment of this quiddity [*ba'd thubūt tilka l-māhiyyah*], and that each one of these [two modes] of existence derives from the quiddity properties and accidents that are on account of quiddity [*yalḥaḡu bi-l-māhiyyah khawāṣṣ wa-'awāriḍ takūn li-l-māhiyyah*].²¹⁷

We can observe that, in this passage, “realized existence” is for all intents and purposes interchangeable with what Avicenna generically calls “the two modes of existence” (*al-wujūdayn*), i.e., realized concrete existence and realized intellectual existence. Furthermore, notice that realized existence is said to follow, or be subsequent to, quiddity. It is also complex and necessarily accompanied and characterized by the appearance of accidents and concomitants that attach to it. If quiddity is realized together with its concomitants in *al-wujūdayn*, then this composite can be described as possessing realized or established existence, either in the mind or in the concrete. Clearly, it is this kind or mode of existence that Avicenna in his various works defines as a ‘concomitant’ (*lāzim*), as being ‘external to’ (*khārij*), as a meaning ‘added to’ (*zā'id 'alā*), and even sometimes as being ‘accidental to’ (*'araḍa*, *'āriḍ*) quiddity.²¹⁸ It is also the realization of these concomitants and accidents that generates the ontological states (*aḥwāl*) studied by the science of metaphysics.²¹⁹ The upshot is that this mode of realized existence has nothing to do with quiddity taken *in itself*. What is more, this text also intimates the ontological precedence and irreducibility of quiddity vis-à-vis established or actual existence. True, Avicenna does not explicitly refer there to the prior *existence* of pure quiddity, but he does state that “it is not necessary that quiddity [i.e., quiddity in itself] become actualized according to one of these two [modes of] existence [*lā yūjabu la-hā taḥṣīl aḥad al-wujūdayn*].” A weak interpretation of this assertion would be that Avicenna is merely alluding to the ‘possibility

²¹⁷ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.6, 34.5–10. It is also possible to read the last segment with the verb *yuḥiḡu bi*, with the meaning: “join [or connect] with the quiddity properties and accidents that are on account of it.” Either way, the point is that the mental and concrete concomitants are external to quiddity, even though they follow from it once quiddity is realized in existence.

²¹⁸ This is why *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* can also be cogently translated as ‘acquired existence.’ The emphasis here is on the fact that existence is acquired or obtained through an external cause. This connects with the well-known Avicennian doctrine that in all caused and composite beings there is a distinction between quiddity and existence as well as between possibility and necessity. The only qualification that needs to be added in support of this doctrine is that it rests on the notion of realized existence, namely, *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*.

²¹⁹ For the term *aḥwāl* in Avicenna's metaphysics, see Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 615, who notes the connection between the states and the accidents. On my construal, these states are linked to the realization in existence of the external elements of quiddity, and they at any rate never refer to quiddity in itself in Avicenna's writings.

of realized existence' of pure quiddity when it does not actually exist. But this interpretation seems unlikely, and this for two reasons. First, because one would expect quiddity to exist, at the very least in the mind. So it would have intellectual existence, according to a weak principle of plenitude. Thus, the pure quiddities of fictional and artificial forms can be said to exist in the mind, if not *in concreto*. Second, as I will show below, possibility is itself a concomitant of quiddity and something added to it, and, moreover, it is only meaningful when connected with realized existence. So this interpretation is not entirely convincing if one intends to elucidate the status of quiddity *in itself*. Another, and I think more convincing and comprehensive, interpretation is that quiddity need not always possess realized existence (i. e., contingent, conditioned, and composite existence), but rather can exist with its own mode of existence in the human and divine intellects. If this interpretation is correct, then Avicenna would be implicitly referring not only to the priority of quiddity over realized existence in human thought (and, hence, to an essential and logical kind of priority in human knowledge), but also to the prior existence of the quiddities in the divine intellects. In brief, Avicenna would be arguing that the quiddities can be conceived of in a divine context as being prior to the realized existence associated with multiplicity and matter and, hence, in abstraction from *al-wujūdāyn*.

The interpretation advocated here eases the problem that had preoccupied Marmura in the various studies he devoted to Avicenna's doctrine of quiddity. Marmura wondered why Avicenna claims at times that quiddity in itself exists *neither* in the mind *nor* in the concrete world, and states on other occasions that it possesses mental existence, that in itself it exists in the mind in a mode distinct from the universal (see chapters I and II). I presume that Marmura regarded this discrepancy as a real paradox, because he placed these statements on the same conceptual and argumentative plane and assumed that they all referred to a single mode of existence.²²⁰ But adhering to the interpretation expounded above helps us to alleviate this conundrum. In those passages where Avicenna apparently denies any existence to pure quiddity, he really intends by *wujūd* 'realized' or 'acquired existence,' or the two sub-modes of caused, conditioned, contingent, and composite existence that characterize universals and concrete entities (i. e., what is usually referred to in the modern scholarship as mental and concrete existence). Understandably, Avicenna refrains from ascribing this contingent mode of existence to quiddity in itself, as the passage of *Introduction* above shows. In this regard, it is important to highlight that in two other instances where Avicenna broaches this point, he adjoins the requisite qualification to the effect that pure quiddity cannot exist in a state of intrinsic complexity:

Introduction I.2: the consideration of quiddity inasmuch as it is that very quiddity **unconnected to either mode [or aspect] of existence and to what follows from it [quiddity] insofar as it**

220 Marmura, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals, 38–39.

is like that [i.e., in one of these two modes of existence] [*al-wujūdāyn wa-mā yalḥaqquhā min ḥaythu hiya ka-dhālika*].²²¹

Metaphysics V.1: existing neither in the concrete world nor in the soul nor in a thing from among these in potentiality or in actuality— **in a way that [the concomitants] would become internal to horseness.**²²²

Conversely, Avicenna insists that complex and contingent things exist only through realized existence:

Pointers: Know that each thing [*kull shay'*] that has a quiddity [*lahu māhiyyah*] becomes realized as an existent in concrete reality [*yataḥaqqaqu mawjūd fī l-a'yān*] or as a concept in the mind **only inasmuch as its parts [*ajzā'uḥu*] are present together with it.**²²³

Notes: The single quidditative meaning—for example humanness—if it becomes multiple, **becomes multiple only as a result of concomitant causes** [*bi-asbāb lāḥiqah*]. So in this case this quidditative meaning is necessarily caused [i.e., in realized existence].²²⁴

Not only are the accidents and concomitants what make the *sunolon* composite and a kind of ontological bundle. They also enable a multiplicity of individuals possessing the same essence to exist, which is another point underlined here. In contrast, in those passages where he describes the existence of quiddity in itself in a positive manner, Avicenna omits the notions of multiplicity, complexity, and realization associated with the concomitants, and mentions instead the simple, unconditioned, and irreducible mode of existence proper to it. This mode of essential being excludes the concomitants and accidents that necessarily accompany realized existence, and which imply compositeness, causedness, and contingency.

It is noteworthy that Avicenna deploys the distinction between essential existence and realized, external, and accidental existence in a theological context as well. Here it is worth quoting at length from an important passage of *Discussions* to which I alluded swiftly in other sections of this book:

Text 34: Someone asked: It is said that existence is an accident [*al-wujūd 'araḍ*]. Now, since it is clear that the Necessary of Existence is neither an accident nor a substance, what is the difference between these two [modes of] existence? [Avicenna's reply]: Existence is an accident [only] in things that have quiddities from which existence follows [*fī l-ashyā' allatī lahā māhiyyāt ya-*

²²¹ Avicenna, *Introduction* I.2, 15.2–3.

²²² Avicenna, *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*, V.1, 196.10–13.

²²³ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol.1, 202.4–5. It should be noted that the “parts” mentioned here refer back to the subject “thing,” and so the term designates the various principles or elements that make up the composite substance, including its external concomitants.

²²⁴ Avicenna, *Notes*, 386, section 684. Notice that Avicenna's mention of concomitant causes, i.e., things outside pure quiddity, could apply just as well to the causedness of the universal in the mind as to that of the concrete particular, both of which are endowed with multiplicity, albeit in different ways. The main point here is that multiplicity and the state of causedness are attached to quiddity only inasmuch as it is combined with external conditions and elements.

lḥaquhā l-wujūd]. As for that which exists by virtue of its essence [*al-mawjūd bi-dhātihī*—and not from an existence that follows its essence in the way of an external thing [*amr gharīb*] not comprised in the definition—it does not have an existence by which it exists—to say nothing of that existence being accidental to it [*faḍlan ‘an an yakūna ‘arīḍan lahu*]—but rather it exists by virtue of its essence and is so by necessity.²²⁵

This passage starkly contrasts existing “from one’s essence” (*bi-dhātihī*) with existence taken as an external concomitant (*amr gharīb*) and even an accident (*‘araḍ*) of essence. While the first ontological mode is essential, simple, and irreducible, the latter entails externality, causality, and complexity. Likewise, when Avicenna states at *Metaphysics* VIII.7 that “the Lordly Knower [God] encompasses [in His knowledge] realized and possible existence [*al-wujūd al-ḥāṣil wa-l-mumkin*],” and that “His essence has a relation to [these things] inasmuch as they are intelligible [*ma‘qūlah*] not inasmuch as they have existence in concrete reality,” it is clear that he does not include God and His intelligibles either in the category of ‘realized existence’ (*al-wujūd al-ḥāṣil*) or in that of ‘possible existence’ (*al-mumkin*), but only those things that are external to His essence and come to exist in concrete reality as a result of the divine causation.²²⁶ Hence, neither God’s quiddity nor any of the pure quiddities fall in the category of realized, caused, and accidental existence. The pure quiddities, like God, can have nothing that is ‘realized’ or added to them, since they are in themselves simple and irreducible and devoid of a cause.

The evidence adduced above and in other parts of this book suggests that Avicenna’s philosophy posits two fundamentally different modes of existence, one of which pertains to pure quiddity alone, the other of which characterizes the complex entity that is quiddity and its accidents and concomitants. This would explain why Avicenna in his works alternates between positive and negative descriptions of the ontological status of pure quiddity. The differences would depend on whether he includes or excludes the external concomitants, as well as whether he intends essential existence or accidental and realized existence. The *via negativa* applies to the contingent and conditioned status of composite beings that cannot be extended to pure essence, and the *via positiva* to the simple, irreducible, and essential existence that quiddity assumes in itself. Avicenna’s seemingly conflicting views concerning the existence and nonexistence of quiddity in itself, as well as the conundrum first raised by Marmura, have to be construed in light of these various aspects or modes of existence, as well as of the relationship of quiddity to its external concomitants and accidents.²²⁷

²²⁵ Avicenna, *Discussions*, 272, section 789. This passage has already been translated and discussed by Belo, *Essence*, 413–414.

²²⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure* VIII.7, 364.13–15.

²²⁷ In reaching the above conclusion, I am aware that I am to some extent elaborating on a view that was once popular in medieval Latin philosophical circles. The scholastic intuition that an additional mode of (essential) existence was required to make sense of Avicenna’s ontology and metaphysics was, I believe, justified. In effect, the distinction between realized and essential existence in Avi-

2.4 Possibility/contingency (*imkān*) and the ontological status of pure essence

There is a final feature pertaining to the ontological status of pure essence that needs to be addressed, namely, its relation to possibility or contingency (*imkān*). Although I will explore this topic in more detail in a section of chapter V devoted to divine knowledge and the issue of God's intellection of 'possibles' (*mumkināt*), some general comments are in order here in order to disambiguate this important point. There is a general tendency in the modern scholarship on Avicenna to describe quiddity as being intrinsically or essentially possible or contingent (*mumkin*), to such an extent that the two notions of *māhiyyah* and *mumkin* are sometimes used interchangeably. According to this interpretation, possibility/contingency (*imkān*) is internal to and constitutive of essence and always characterizes the essence taken in itself (regardless of whether or not it actually exists), while necessity is external to essence and linked to the agent and efficient cause that is responsible for its existence. One of the implications of this view seems to be that it is impossible to conceive of quiddity without at the same time conceiving of it as something possible or contingent.²²⁸

In spite of the fact that some of Avicenna's statements may be used to buttress such a position, I regard this interpretation as being inconsistent with his doctrine of essence as well as with some crucial evidence that can be drawn from his corpus. There are indeed strong reasons to reject such as close identification of essence and possibility/contingency. The first point to note is that Avicenna states explicitly that possibility is an external concomitant (*lāzim*) of quiddity, not one of its constitutive elements or essential features. He in fact compares it to a triangle having its three angles equal two right angles, which is a non-constitutive and external concomitant of the pure quiddity 'triangleness.'²²⁹ Moreover, in *Metaphysics* V.1, Avicenna explains on various occasions that pure quiddity excludes both actuality and potentiality, or the consideration of what is actual (*bi-l-fi'l*) and what is potential (*bi-l-quwwah*) (see Text 8 and Text 16).²³⁰ Now, we know from *Metaphysics* IV.2 that the master conceives of potentiality and possibility very closely and even construes possibility as a kind of potentiality. In that section, he states: "We call the possibility of existence the potentiality of existence" (*wa-naḥnu nusammā imkān al-wujūd quwwat*

cenna corresponds in some ways to the distinction made by some Latin philosophers, such as Henry of Ghent, between *esse essentiae* and *esse actualis existentiae*. Avicenna may not have articulated this doctrine as clearly as some of his Latin peers, but the seeds of this distinction are on my view undeniably present in his works.

228 For a recent example of this trend, see Allebban, *Conservation*, 53, 146, and 188–189. Allebban writes (146): "necessity and impossibility apply *externally* to an essence while contingency is *internal* to it." Contingency is further defined as "the constitutive property of a thing with respect to itself" (189). I assume this is why Allebban refers to "contingent essences" throughout her dissertation.

229 Avicenna, *Discussions*, 309–310, sections 867–868. See also section V.3.3 of this book for more references and especially the analysis of Text 50.

230 The relevant references are Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 196.10–12 and 201.4–11.

al-wujūd).²³¹ In another paragraph, he defines possibility/contingency of existence (*imkān al-wujūd*) as “an attribute in a subject and something that occurs to a subject” (*ma‘nā fī mawḏū‘ wa-‘arīḏ li-mawḏū‘*), thereby stressing its externality vis-à-vis essence.²³² Hence, when Avicenna says that pure essence, or quiddity taken strictly ‘in itself,’ excludes actuality and potentiality, he means by this that it also excludes considerations linked to necessity and possibility/contingency. As an upshot, it becomes quite clear that possibility/contingency cannot legitimately be regarded as ‘internal to’ and ‘constitutive of’ quiddity. Like the other modalities, it is, strictly speaking, external and concomitant to essence taken ‘in itself,’ because pure essence excludes the modalities. Admittedly, however, possibility bears a closer relation to essence than necessity, given that the latter presupposes an external efficient cause. In spite of this, both possibility and necessity remain considerations or concomitants added to pure quiddity from the outside.

That Avicenna in fact regards possibility/contingency as something external to pure quiddity goes hand in hand with his claim that we can conceive of pure quiddity in complete abstraction from existence and, more specifically, from the modalities that accompany the notion of realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*). When one intellects ‘triangleness’ or ‘horseness,’ one is embracing in a single cognitive act the constitutive elements of these quiddities, of which possibility/contingency is not a part. Possibility, like necessity, only makes sense when it is related conceptually to realized existence, since we are dealing with a possibility *of or for realized existence* (*mumkin al-wujūd*). In other words, one cannot introduce the notion of possibility/contingency (*imkān*) without at the same time introducing the notion of realized and caused existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*). Accordingly, in *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna explains that possibility/contingency is one of the first things to characterize the state of the created or caused thing (*al-mubda‘*).²³³ His choice of the term *mubda‘*—‘caused being,’ ‘creature’—stresses the gap between regarding possibility as the constituent of a pure essence vs. the external attribute of a created entity that is inserted within a causal or cosmological account. Finally, it should be noted that the dissociation of essence and possibility/contingency, and the association of existence and possibility/contingency, I am advocating here seems to accord with the results advanced earlier regarding Avicenna’s theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). As we saw, the modalities of necessity and possibility are described as two of the aspects and features (*aḥkām, anḥā‘*) of *tashkīk*. In other words, they participate in modulating the notion of existence when they are applied to things or predicated of things. As such, they are part and parcel of the structure and functionality of *tashkīk al-wujūd*. This suggests that these notions are

231 Avicenna, *Metaphysics* IV.2 of *The Cure*, 182.

232 Avicenna, *Metaphysics* IV.2 of *The Cure*, 182.

233 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 60.18–61.7.

implementable and meaningful only in light of a theory of realized existence conceived of as an external attribute of essence.

Given the foregoing remarks, we should be weary to identify or connect possibility/contingency and essence in a forceful way or provide a simplistic account of how these notions interconnect in Avicenna's philosophy. If it is undeniable that possibility/contingency bears a 'closer' relation to essence than either necessity or impossibility, given that the last two directly posit the presence or absence of an external cause, both possibility and necessity ultimately remain two modalities (*jihātān*) and concomitants (*lāzimān*) external to quiddity considered strictly 'in itself.'

2.5 Quiddity and existence in God

The foregoing considerations open a new interpretive perspective regarding the relationship of quiddity and existence in God. More specifically, defining the ontology of pure quiddity through the notions of essential being and essential entailment enables us to tackle the difficulty of how God can be said to have existence and a quiddity, without this amounting to a duality. Moreover, it throws some light on God's special mode of existence, and how this existence compares to that of other beings. Modern scholars have spilled much ink trying to adjudicate whether Avicenna ascribes a quiddity to God and, if so, how it relates to existence.²³⁴ The two most common interpretive strategies in this regard have been to argue either that God does not have a quiddity or that God's quiddity is identical with His existence. Stated as such and without further qualifications, however, neither argument is particularly convincing. The former is undermined by the numerous (and almost routine) references in Avicenna's works to God's quiddity and essence (*māhiyyah* or *dhāt*). Moreover, depriving God of a quiddity is odd on conceptual grounds, since everything that exists, according to Avicenna, has a quiddity, and quiddity is precisely what makes something exist in a distinct way. Accordingly, to be God is surely to exist *qua* something or in a certain and special way or in a way proper to Him to the exclusion of all other things. So that depriving God of a quiddity and ascribing merely general existence to Him would deny Him precisely that which sets Him apart from the other existents. Thus, the need would remain to have to explain exactly what mode of existence belongs to God uniquely and in contradistinction to the other beings. But the alternative interpretation according to which God's essence is existence suffers from a shortcoming comparable to the last point raised above: if one argues that God has a quiddity, and that this quiddity is identical with God's actual existence, then one still needs to qualify or define what mode of existence could be said to belong to God that would not entail any distinction or duality in Him. Avicenna is adamant

²³⁴ See, among many other studies, Macierowski, Does God Have a Quiddity; Lizzini, Ibn Sinā's Metaphysics; Adamson, From the Necessary; and Özaykal, Deconstruction.

that God is the only being that is perfectly simple, one, and unitary, and in whom there is no distinction or separation between essence and existence, even at the purely conceptual level. In all other beings, there is a duality of quiddity and realized existence. These two principles remain distinct, at the very least conceptually, and perhaps also in external reality. But why, if realized or established existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, *wujūd ithbātī*) is ascribed to God, and if realized existence is by definition distinct from quiddity and an external concomitant, should this not be the case as well with regard to Him? In sum, regardless of whether one refrains from ascribing a quiddity to God or identifies God's quiddity with His actual or realized existence, one still needs to explain the special mode of existence that would belong to Him to the exclusion of all other things and that would account for the complete absence of a metaphysical duality in Him.

It stands to reason to surmise that when Avicenna says that God is pure existence, or that God's quiddity is identical with His existence, or that quiddity and existence are one in God, he cannot be intending the same mode of 'acquired' or 'realized' existence that characterizes the other beings of his ontology. This is because, as we saw, realized or acquired existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) is obtained from an external cause, from 'another' (*ghayr*), and therefore indicates that the thing which acquires it is a deficient and complex substance. This kind of existence is by definition acquired from the outside, external to the essence, and realized by virtue of an independent cause that essentially precedes its effect. In Avicennian parlance, the state of deficiency of the effect is indicated through the expression *mumkin al-wujūd*: what is merely possible of existence cannot exist on its own, but depends on an exterior agent for its actual existence, regardless of its status in the ontological hierarchy. But God's existence, by contrast, lacks a cause. It is not caused by or dependent on another being. Rather, God's existence is from Himself and is pure necessity, making God the Necessary of Existence in Itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātīhi*). In his *Commentary on 'The Chapter of Pure Faith'*, relying on some of the same notions that appear in his core philosophical works, the master says about God that "He is He by His own essence" (*huwa huwa li-dhātīhi*).²³⁵ And in the passage of *Discussions* quoted above (Text 34), Avicenna contrasts God's essential and necessary existence (*bi-dhātīhi*) to the kind of accidental and external existence (*'araḍ*, *'arīḍ*, *amr gharīb*) proper to contingent beings. God's existence, then, unlike that of all other things, is quite literally from *His self* or from *His essence*, and it is in fact identical with His essence. This would seem to make it a primordial case of both essential existence (*wujūd dhātī*) and proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) in the sense delineated in *Metaphysics* I.5. It constitutes a case of irreducible and self-identical existence that annuls any relation to what is other than It or outside of It, very much along the lines of Avicenna's description of pure quiddity as a perfectly distinct and irreducible object. In this connection

235 Avicenna, *Commentary on 'The Chapter of Pure Faith'*, 107. See also De Smet and Sebti, Avicenna's Philosophical Approach.

it is noteworthy that some of the expressions Avicenna uses to describe God's essence, such as *huwa huwa li-dhātihī*, are close to those that express the self-identity of pure quiddity, notably *al-insān bi-mā huwa insān*, *bi-mā huwa huwa*, *ḥaqīqah huwa bi-hā mā huwa*, and *min ḥaythu hiya hiya* (see Appendix 1), some of which, it would seem, can be applied to the divine quiddity Itself. In this fashion, God exists through or by the special existence of His quiddity, which happens in this case to be pure actuality and pure necessity.

Recall in this connection that special existence is the existence that is proper to one's quiddity and not acquired from an external cause. So, in that sense, God's existing through His quiddity would not entail any duality of principles. As Avicenna puts it, "the One [*al-wāḥid*], inasmuch as It is the Necessary of Existence, is what It is in terms of Itself, which is Its essence [*yakūn mā huwa bi-hi huwa wa-huwa dhātu-hu*]." ²³⁶ For God to be truly the Necessary of Existence, Avicenna adds, Its reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) must belong to it alone. So that if they were realized by an external cause, then "Its proper existence would be acquired from another [*fa-yakūn wujūduhu l-khāṣṣ mustafād min ḡhayrihi*] and this [existent] would not be the Necessary of Existence." ²³⁷ Thus, the existence that is proper to the divine essence is proper to It alone to the exclusion of all other things. ²³⁸ Moreover, this quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) of God, which, Avicenna argues, is also God's true reality (*ḥaqīqatuhu*) and belongs to His essence in itself (*al-ma'nā alladhī li-dhātihī bi-l-dhāt*), is clearly not synonymous with general or absolute existence, or else this divine *ma'nā* would not be any different from the existence that can be predicated of any other being. Rather, this divine *ma'nā* refers to what is essentially different and unique in God and therefore also to His special existence. It coincides with His being necessary in Himself. ²³⁹ Accordingly, in addition to the terms *ma'nā* and *ḥaqīqah*, Avicenna has no qualms describing God as a *māhiyyah* in key theological sections of his works. For example, in *Salvation*, he states that God is an "abstract quiddity" (*māhiyyah mujarradah*), which, incidentally, is also the very formula that the master

²³⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.5, 349.11–12.

²³⁷ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.5, 350.1–2.

²³⁸ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, IX.7, 429.11–12, explains that knowing which existence is proper to the divine essence (*ayy wujūd yakhuṣṣuhā*) is among the things that the human soul ought to know in order to reach happiness (*sa'ādah*). Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 580.1, describes the true reality of the First as an "existential specificity" (*khuṣūsiyyah wujūdiyyah*), which is another way of talking about its proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*).

²³⁹ If God is said not to possess a quiddity or essence in any way, then one would have to reckon with the idea that the terms *ma'nā*, *dhāt*, *māhiyyah*, and *ḥaqīqah*, which Avicenna employs systematically to refer to God, would lose their technical meaning and be merely synonymous with realized existence. Not only is this highly unlikely; it also does not cohere with Avicenna's overarching theory of quiddity and essential entailment, which he applies to the divine case in addition to beings in general.

uses to describe quiddity in itself.²⁴⁰ Hence, not only does God possess a quiddity according to Avicenna; God's existence is the special or proper existence of His quiddity, which It alone has to the exclusion of all other beings. The fact that Avicenna explicitly alludes to God's proper being (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) in this context is unsurprising, since we saw that proper being is the being of pure quiddity or essential being. This special existence has nothing to do with the realized (*muḥaṣṣal*) or acquired (*mustafād*) existence of complex and caused entities. Alternatively, another way to put it would be to say that, uniquely in God, proper existence coincides perfectly with, and is identical to, actual existence. But even then, the emphasis would remain on the fact that the mode of existence that God possesses to the exclusion of all other things is essential and by virtue of His very quiddity. What is fundamentally at stake here, therefore, is essential existence or essential being, existence coming from one's essence or self, as opposed to existence being acquired from an external source or an external agent. As a result, God's existence is essential (*dhātī*) and proper (*khāṣṣ*) to Him, and it is not an external and accidental meaning or concomitant (*lāzim*) of His essence that can be conceptually added to it, as in the case of all other existents.²⁴¹ Fundamentally, then, it is not the case that God *has* a quiddity. Rather,

240 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 587.11–12, 16; and especially 588.2. In fact, it is striking that Avicenna applies to God terms that are otherwise used to designate quiddity in itself; this is the case notably of *ma'nā*, *ḥaqīqah*, and *māhiyyah mujarradah*; see chapter II for an analysis of this last term in connection with pure quiddity.

241 Avicenna emphasizes the distinction between existence 'from the essence' or 'self' and 'from another' in many passages of his corpus; but he intends to establish different points in those passages. There are, first of all, the standard distinctions one finds in numerous passages between existence that is not in a subject and existence that is in a subject, or between autonomous and dependent existence, which aim to differentiate between the existence of substance and accident. But Avicenna also seeks to distinguish between entities by separating those that are caused in their existence by another and those that are uncaused or that derive their existence from their very self; and he also seeks to distinguish between the existence of quiddity inasmuch as it is quiddity and the existence of the essential accidents and concomitants. These various aspects are often intertwined, which makes Avicenna's analysis sometimes difficult to unpack. On these various distinctions, God possesses existence from Itself, in Itself, and through Itself, it is an uncaused cause, and it also exists not in a subject, although Avicenna is reluctant to describe God as a substance. Moreover, God has existence from His very essence or quiddity, as opposed to existence coming from an exterior cause, an idea that also squares with the Arabic expressions *min dhātihi* and *bi-dhātihi*. This last feature is teased out in *Metaphysics*, I.7, 43.15ff., which discusses the distinction between the existence of quiddity and its external concomitants in a theological context, and whose aim is to show that there can be only one *ma'nā* that is necessary of existence and that is God. There Avicenna distinguishes between the existence of the quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) and the existence of its accidents and non-essential concomitants (*al-a'rād wa-l-lawāḥiq al-ghayr al-dhātiyyah*), thereby implying that God's existence is from this *ma'nā* alone and that all other existents are, in contrast, distinguished by their accidents and concomitants. Here again, the notion of a quidditative meaning or entity (*ma'nā*) forms the crux of Avicenna's argumentation.

God is His own quiddity and nothing else, making Him the only pure quiddity that exists separately in the exterior world in Avicenna's ontological system.²⁴²

This idea of an essential existence that would belong uniquely to God is to be connected with the technical Arabic term *anniyyah*, which appears in many of Avicenna's works. The word *anniyyah* refers to existence, even to concrete existence, but with direct reference to quiddity or essence and, hence, ultimately, to the special, unique, individual existence that each thing has as it becomes realized in concrete reality as a result of having a specific quiddity. Like special existence, the notion of *anniyyah* is therefore related to quiddity, but with regard to its outward manifestation in the real or concrete world and as a result also of its existential individualization. In this connection, it is quite significant that the term *anniyyah* reflects the interface between essence and existence and was sometimes used to mean 'essence' on a par with *māhiyyah* in the Arabic philosophical tradition.²⁴³ In the case of God, quiddity, special existence, and *anniyyah* are absolutely one and identical. God's *anniyyah* is the known manifestation of his *māhiyyah*, which remains, in contrast, forever elusive. As Avicenna states in *Metaphysics of The Cure* VIII.4, "the Necessary of Existence has no quiddity except His being Necessary of Existence, and this is *al-anniyyah*."²⁴⁴ In contrast, in all other beings, there is an ontological discrepancy between special existence or quiddity and realized existence or *anniyyah*. In the latter case, *anniyyah* is a concept that designates the realization of quiddity and its concomitants in real and concrete existence. Accordingly, it becomes intimately tied with realized existence and even, in the case of contingent beings, with the complexity and causality of realized existence. As such, the term *anniyyah* is sometimes contrasted to quiddity and used interchangeably with *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* or realized existence.

242 The First is the only *māhiyyah*, *ma'nā*, and *ḥaqīqah* that is self-realized and exists in itself in the exterior world (cf. *Notes*, 153, sections 217 and 218). This makes it, so to speak, the only separately existing Platonic idea or form in Avicenna's metaphysics. Intriguingly in this connection, God is the only extramental being that is negatively-conditioned (*bi-sharṭ lā shay'*), an expression which Avicenna otherwise reserves for the pure quiddities as intelligibles in the mind. Now, since Avicenna refuses to apply this negative condition to the pure quiddities in the concrete world in the context of his refutation of the Platonic forms, and yet applies it uniquely to God, it is not farfetched to conclude that, on his view, God is the only quiddity that exists purely in itself and separately in the concrete world.

243 For insight into the term *anniyyah*, see Goichon, *Lexique*, vol. 1, 9–12 (but the Arabic meaning of this term is somewhat obscured in Goichon's discussion as a result of the attention she devotes to the problem of its Latin translation and reception); Frank, *The Origin*; Endress, *Proclus arabus*, 79–109; Marmura, in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 383, note 1; Gutas and Endress, *A Greek Arabic Lexicon*, 428–436; Lizzini, *Wuḡūd-Mawḡūd*, 112, note 5; and Mayer, *Anniyya*. In Uṣṭāth's early translation of Book Zeta of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which has been preserved in the lemmata of Averroes's great commentary, and which circulated before and during Avicenna's time, the term *anniyyah* is used systematically to express quiddity in place of *māhiyyah*. Averroes himself in his commentary alternates between these two terms, but favors *māhiyyah*; see Averroes, *Great Commentary*, vol. 2, 767 ff. If anything, this shows the close connection between these terms and the shifting meaning of *anniyyah*.

244 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure* VIII.4, 346.11–12.

tence in order to describe contingent beings. Uniquely in the case of God, however, *māhiyyah* and *anniyyah* are fully co-intensional and co-extensional and designate the absolutely necessary essential being of God.²⁴⁵

God's existing through or by virtue of His quiddity and special existence explains why it is the only being that exists necessarily "in itself" or "in virtue of Its essence" (*bi-dhātihi*) and why it is absolutely self-existing or self-subsistent (*al-qayyūm*).²⁴⁶ God would be counted as "one of the things" (*ba'd al-ashyā'*) mentioned in *Categories* that have "existence from their self or essence" (*al-wujūd min dhātihi*), even though Avicenna is reluctant to call God a substance (*jawhar*) and a thing (*shay'*). In any case, it is precisely because God's existence is *from* His essence and *in virtue of* His essence or self that it is also necessary. For what is essential in that sense is also, according to Avicenna, necessary. So what makes God's existence necessary (*wājib*) is the fact that it is essential (*dhāti*) and from or by His essence (*min dhātihi, bi-dhātihi*) or, better still, because it is identical with His essence: God's quiddity is necessary existence.²⁴⁷ In view of this, it is not surprising that in *Notes* and *Discussions* Avicenna adopts an alternative phrasing and states that God's quiddity or true reality (*ḥaqīqah*) is pure necessity (*al-wājibiyyah 'alā l-ītlāq*).²⁴⁸ Absolute or pure necessity is God's quiddity, because existence is essentially necessary in God. The First is the only being in Avicenna's ontology whose essence or self is necessary of existence by virtue of itself.

Defining God's existence primarily in terms of essential being and necessity explains why there is no multiplicity emerging from the statement that God has a quiddity *and* existence. God's existence, however construed, is the essential being of His

245 Cf. Avicenna, *Notes*, 183.1, section 269, where it is said that "the Necessary of Existence does not have a quiddity other than *al-anniyyah*"; and *Philosophical Compendium*, 75–77, where God's *anniyyah* is said either to come from His *māhiyyah* or to be identical to His *māhiyyah*. There is one particularly interesting feature in this section that deserves to be stressed: God is or has a quiddity, but it is not a universal (*kullī*) quiddity, because universal ideas are complex effects and therefore have a cause. This passage therefore implicitly distinguishes between the intelligible simplicity of pure quiddity and the intelligible complexity of universal concepts.

246 For this Qur'anic term and its relation to quiddity, see Adamson, *From the Necessary*, 175.

247 Attributing a quiddity to God enables a compelling interpretation of how what is created or caused by God, namely, the First Effect, can be described as a *lāzim* of the divine essence. In fact, Avicenna frequently refers to the objects of God's knowledge and to all the things caused to exist by God as *lawāzim* deriving from His essence (see *Notes*, 5.9, section 1; 11.4–5, section 3; 49.4–6, section 30; 51.1–6, section 32). This term should be taken literally as meaning 'something entailed essentially by the divine being.' Everything that exists is, in a real sense, a quidditative or essential concomitant of the divine essence. Even Avicenna's theology seems modelled on the logical relationship between essence and its non-constitutive concomitants.

248 Avicenna, *Notes*, 77.11, section 73; cf. 121.9, section 161, where God is described as "pure necessity itself" (*nafs al-wājibiyyah*); 180, section 265, where it is said again that God's essence "is pure necessity or actual existence, not existence taken in an absolute [or general] sense"; and *Discussions*, section 476, 168.11. In those passages, one gets the impression that God's necessity takes precedence over His existence, although the two notions are obviously inseparable.

essence. It also explains how God can be described as the originative source of all the quiddities, which at this level are identical with His essential being. All of the pure quiddities would ultimately have their originative source in God himself, which means that their foundational truth finds its point of origin in God *qua* absolute Truth or *al-ḥaqq*, and their own essential necessity also finds its source in the necessary quiddity of God. In other words, the special mode of existence that is proper to all quiddities is, in this primal stage, identical with the special mode of existence that is proper to God. This explains why the pure quiddities, when they are in this state of ontological identity with God, are not affected by multiplicity and possibility. These notions emerge as metaphysical concomitants and logical considerations only as a result of their causation from God's essence.²⁴⁹

At this juncture, a tension in some of Avicenna's writings needs to be addressed. Remarkably, the master sometimes appears to dissociate God's pure quiddity from the notions of existence, oneness, and necessity, which are regarded instead as concomitants (*lawāzim*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*) of the essence, with the possible implication that they would not be fully identical or collapsible with It. These passages are somewhat problematic, because they go against the grain of the well-established Avicennian thesis that, in God, essence and existence are one and identical. As Treiger noted, Avicenna seems to put forth such a view in section 479 of *Discussions*, where he rather surprisingly describes existence as entailed by (*yalzamu*) the necessity of the First (*wājibiyat al-awwal*).²⁵⁰ As De Smet and Sebti showed, Avicenna adopts a similar strategy in his commentary on 'The Chapter of Pure Faith,' *sūrah* 112 of the Qur'an, also known as 'The Chapter of Divine Oneness' (*sūrat al-tawḥīd*). There he argues that things like oneness, necessity, and even the name 'Allāh' are really to be regarded as concomitants (*lawāzim*) and to be distinguished from the divine essence (*māhiyyah*, *ḥaqīqah*, *dhāt*, *huwiyyah*) Itself. Accordingly, these divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) are described as concomitants (*lawāzim*) distinct from the divine essence, and yet they are not readily identifiable with the contingent effects caused to exist by God, which can also be defined as *lawāzim*.²⁵¹ This leads De Smet and Sebti to distinguish between two senses of *lawāzim*: *qua* divine attributes and *qua* contingent effects caused to exist by the First. As they remark, this view is also ech-

²⁴⁹ The passages discussed here echo an earlier account in *Metaphysics* I.6, 38.17 ff. wherein Avicenna describes quiddities as being *in themselves* either possible or necessary (*wājib al-māhiyyah li-dhātihi*). Since the master in this passage is focusing on things that come to exist after not existing, he rejects the view that there can be things that are necessary by their very quiddity. Yet, the expression *wājib al-māhiyyah li-dhātihi* could be (uniquely) applied to the First, and in this regard the equivalence of the expressions *wājib al-wujūd* and *wājib al-māhiyyah* is revealing of how Avicenna conceives of the relationship between essence and existence in God. In fact, the latter is simply a shortcut for *wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi* or *min dhātihi*, where *dhāt* is taken to refer to God's essence.

²⁵⁰ Avicenna, *Discussions*, section 479, 169.5–8; Treiger, Avicenna's Notion, 362 and note 106.

²⁵¹ De Smet and Sebti, Avicenna's Philosophical Approach. The authors rightly regard this evidence as problematic, since it seems to clash with other claims by Avicenna regarding the identity of essence, existence, necessity, and oneness in God.

oed in a passage of *Notes*, which seems to define necessary existence and oneness as concomitants proceeding from the divine essence.²⁵²

It should be acknowledged that this view is not limited to the passages pinpointed by Treiger, De Smet, and Sebti. It appears recurrently in *Notes* and *Discussions*, as well as in the commentary on ‘The Chapter of Pure Faith.’ This poses a series of problems. Although it is understandable that the master would not want to describe *wujūd* as a constituent (*muḡawwim*) of the divine essence, since God has no parts and constitutive principles, it is on the other hand harder to explain why it should be regarded as one of Its concomitants. Moreover, the term *lawāzīm* appears to assume a variety of meanings in this theological context, and so it is not entirely clear to what these *lawāzīm* correspond. Now, since this theological position is not articulated in the core works of the master, but rather in writings whose authorship is controversial and may be ultimately the product of his circle, it is possible that some of these views should be ascribed to the intervention of later scholars, possibly some of Avicenna’s close students. In fact, the idea that essence and existence are to be distinguished even in the case of God becomes a hallmark of later Islamic theological systems, especially that of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who vigorously combatted Avicenna on this specific issue. So it would be somewhat surprising to witness Avicenna defend such a view, given his insistence in his main works that essence and existence are identical in God. Furthermore, the view that the divine attributes (*ṣifāt*), *qua lawāzīm*, are really to be distinguished from the divine essence smacks of certain *kalām* positions. For these reasons, one may be reluctant to construe these statements literally or question whether Avicenna is really their author. At any rate, and on the assumption of their authenticity, these passages have in common the fact that they are all ambiguous and difficult to interpret, so it would be wise not to place too much weight on this evidence. Even then, it should be asked whether—if these texts are correctly interpreted—their intent is really at odds with an Avicennian position. For instance, it is far from obvious to me that in the passage of *Discussions* referred to by Treiger, Avicenna is talking about God’s own existence as a *lāzīm* proceeding from His essence, as opposed to the existence of the effects that are caused from His self-intellection. Likewise, De Smet and Sebti in their article insist on distinguishing between the *lawāzīm qua* God’s effects and *qua* the divine attributes, arguing that “all the [divine] attributes are concomitants, but not all the concomitants are attributes.”²⁵³ This would seem to imply that some attributes are somehow distinct from God’s essence, but not identical with the caused entities emanated by God. Yet, some of the texts they discuss do not on my view justify such a distinction. In sum, while it is undeniable that Avicenna in these texts argues that there are *lawāzīm* proceeding from God that are not identical with the divine essence

²⁵² De Smet and Sebti, *Avicenna’s Philosophical Approach*, 140–141; the passage of *Notes* they refer to corresponds to section 982 in the Mousavian edition.

²⁵³ De Smet and Sebti, *Avicenna’s Philosophical Approach*, 142.

Itself, the question of exactly what these *lawāzim* correspond to in the context of the master's theology and cosmology remains open.

In this regard, it is my impression that Avicenna is consistent in ascribing one sense of existence, necessity, and oneness to the divine essence alone and in regarding God's quiddity as identical with a kind of essential being. He never appears to dissociate sharply God's essence from His existence, but rather maintains the doctrine of essential being consistently in these various texts. Even in the *tafsīr*, which is the main focus of De Smet and Sebti, the master reiterates on various occasions—in complete agreement with his other works—that the quiddity of the Necessary Existent is identical with His existence (*wujūduhu 'ayn māhiyyatihi*).²⁵⁴ Likewise, with regard to oneness, he contends that a certain sense of oneness belongs exclusively and essentially to God, which is why it is predicated of God and all other things “by means of modulation,” the divine sense differing from all the other senses.²⁵⁵ As for the epithet ‘Allāh’ described as a *lāzim*, it expresses only a relationship between God and the world, a relational attribute (*ṣifah idāfiyyah*) which can be easily construed through the standard Avicennian notions of causation and emanation. As such, the epithet ‘Allāh’ and the relational attribute do not pertain to, or add anything to, the divine essence, but merely express the conceptual link between God and the world through creation. That the *lawāzim* Avicenna mentions in those passages have nothing to do with the divine essence, existence, and oneness *per se* is confirmed by a close reading of *Notes*. One key idea that emerges from this work is that the *lawāzim* are associated with the beginning of multiplicity (*kathrah*) in the intelligible world. In fact, the concomitants are what ‘individualize,’ or in this case, ‘specify’ beings and distinguish them one from the other.²⁵⁶ Thus, for example, the threefold intellection that characterizes the First Effect, which is responsible for causing a certain multiplicity to exist in it, is described in terms of *lawāzim*. Now, on account of this connection between the *lawāzim* and *kathrah*, it is quite clear that these cannot be associated in any way with God's essence. Accordingly, Avicenna explains in several passages that the *lawāzim* proceed from God as effects, that they are caused to exist by the divine essence, and, hence, that they do not affect It in any way. He states that “the concomitants of the First proceed from It, but do not exist in It; for this reason, It does not become multiple on account of them” (*lawāzim al-awwal takūn ṣādirah 'anhu lā ḥāṣilah fihi fa-li-dhālika lā yatakaththaru bi-hā*).²⁵⁷

The upshot is that whenever Avicenna describes existence, oneness, and necessity as *lawāzim* in a theological context, he presumably is not referring to God's essential existence, oneness, and necessity, but rather to these notions in connection with the divine causation of the other beings, which can be regarded as concomitants

254 Avicenna, *Commentary on 'The Chapter of Pure Faith,'* 106.9, 112.3.

255 Avicenna, *Commentary on 'The Chapter of Pure Faith,'* 109.13 ff.

256 Avicenna, *Notes*, 276, section 469; 280, section 477; 282, section 481; 490, section 899; and 491, section 901.

257 Avicenna, *Notes*, 543, section 957.

of His essence. Put differently, the *lawāzim* designate not God's own oneness and existence regarded as attributes that would be somehow derived from the divine essence and distinct from It, but rather the effects which proceed from Him, starting with the First Effect.²⁵⁸ This First Effect, *qua* caused *lāzim*, does indeed acquire the necessary existence and oneness that flow from the First, and which can themselves, by extension, be described as *lawāzim*. But these *lawāzim* should by no means be construed as the very existence, oneness, and necessity of God Himself, even though they come from Him. Rather, they mark the causal relationship that exists between God and the First Effect and, by extension, between God and the world. Although this causal relation and these *lawāzim* can be framed in terms of attributes (*ṣifāt*), notably the 'relational attributes' (*ṣifāt idāfiyyah*), they do not pertain to, or add anything to, the divine essence Itself. This explains why, according to Avicenna, God has no essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātiyyah*).²⁵⁹ For like pure quiddity, the divine essence can be considered in Itself or in relation to other things; but even when approached from the latter angle, It still remains only Itself. This interpretation seems corroborated by Avicenna's claims that the *ṣifāt* are concomitants that proceed from God's essence, and that there is no proliferation of attributes (*ṣifāt mukhtalifah*) in, or pertaining to, God's essence.²⁶⁰ But if this is the case, then these relational attributes should be identified with the *lawāzim* that proceed from God *qua* effects. Thus, in spite of his talk of divine 'attributes' and 'concomitants' in these texts, the master appears to consistently maintain the doctrine that God's quiddity is perfectly identical with a special sense of *wujūd* and a special sense of *waḥdah*, that is, with essential being and essential oneness. These points are confirmed in *Notes* when Avicenna, in order to dissipate the kinds of misunderstandings that could arise from his use of the term *lawāzim*, states that "the Necessary Existent is He whose existence is internal to His true essence, for this [existence] is the necessity of existence, not a concomitant of His true essence (*wājib al-wujūd yakūn al-wujūd bi-l-fi'l dākhl fi haqīqatihi idh huwa wujūb al-wujūd lā lāzim li-haqīqatihi*)."²⁶¹ On this interpretation, then, the *lawāzim* would overlap neatly with the attributes De Smet and Sebtī talk about, as well as with the notion of causality and the state of being caused (*ma'lūl*). These *lawāzim* and *ṣifāt* would not amount to entities distinct *both* from God's essence *and* from the world, as the *ṣifāt* somehow do in Ash'arite *kalām*, for instance. Rather, they would be co-extensional with the caused beings and with the principles that

258 For a description of the First Effect as *lāzim*, see Avicenna, *Notes*, 131–132, section 172; 544, section 958; and 545, section 960. Even in those passages that present necessity of existence (*wujūb al-wujūd*) as a *lāzim* (e.g., *Notes*, 69–70, section 60), I think that the *lāzim* is the necessary existence that proceeds from God and, hence, the necessary relation between the First Cause and the First Effect, and not God's own necessity of existence.

259 Avicenna, *Notes*, 568.1, section 994.

260 Avicenna, *Notes*, 543–544, section 957; 545.10, section 961. The terms *ṣifāt* and *lawāzim* are used interchangeably in these and other passages.

261 Avicenna, *Notes*, 181.8–9, section 268.

underlie them. In brief, I would contend that there is no significant difference between the *lawāzim* regarded as divine attributes/concomitants and as caused entities, since the former imply a relationship between God and the world that entails necessary causation and implies the sense of *lawāzim qua ma'lūlāt*. This interpretation is not only in line with Avicenna's *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model and theory of necessary causality. It also preserves the theory of the divine essence as a kind of essential existence. Finally, it has the advantage also of homogenizing Avicenna's uses of the term *lawāzim*, which on my reading must in all cases refer to something caused, external to the divine quiddity, and, ultimately, to a contingent effect.

This intricate issue and problematic evidence notwithstanding, it becomes readily apparent that the master articulates his theological position on the basis of the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model, which we already encountered in many different contexts. God is a pure quiddity possessing its own intrinsic and essential being and unity, and everything else stands in relation to it *qua a lāzim* or *lāhiq*, as something external (*khārij*), caused (*ma'lūl*), and non-constitutive (*ghayr muqawwim*). The only difference in this case relative to other implementations of the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* paradigm is that God's *māhiyyah*, unlike all the other *māhiyyāt*, is not constituted by a plurality of *muqawwimāt* and *ma'ānī*, but is a single, perfectly unitary, and inscrutable *ma'nā*. Nevertheless, Avicenna proceeds to apply these logical-metaphysical notions to his discussion of God. In his *Treatise on the Afterlife*, he explains that God has a unitary essence (*dhāt wāḥidah*) that is not made up of "existential quantitative or conceptual parts" (sing, *juz' wujūdī kammī aw ma'nawī*),²⁶² so His essential being stands in contradistinction to the mereological ontology of the caused existents (see chapter III). God is a pure *māhiyyah* that causes all the concomitants (*lawāzim*) to proceed from It. The overlap in Avicenna's logical, ontological, and theological argumentation and the centrality of the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model within it is a remarkable feature of his thought. As I discuss in chapter V, it has important implications as well for our understanding of the issue of God's knowledge.

Now, there is one conceptual advantage to approaching Avicenna's theology from the side of quiddity and special existence, rather than from the side of realized existence. Recall that quiddity and special existence for Avicenna can be considered either in themselves or in relation to other things. In other words, they can be conceptually subjected to considerations (*i'tibārāt*) that either include or exclude a relation (*nisbah, iḍāfah*) to something else. Realized existence, on the other hand, when construed in the standard Avicennian way, necessarily implies a link or relation to something else, since it is a condition (*sharṭ*) and a concomitant (*lāzim*) brought about by an external cause. Even in the case of God, then, where no 'other' (*ghayr*) is posited, a negative condition must apply, whereby God is 'necessarily' or 'on the condition of' no other thing (*bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*), a negative condition that Avicenna usually ascribes to the pure quiddities, but which seems here appro-

262 Avicenna, *Epistle on the Afterlife*, 45.

propriately applied to God's special quiddity. Furthermore, God's quiddity can be conceived of either in itself or in relation to other things (i. e., the caused and contingent beings), which, again, is reminiscent of how Avicenna frames his analysis of pure quiddity, which can be envisaged in abstraction from other things or with other things. Thus, Avicenna has a tendency to discuss God either strictly in terms of His essence (in itself) or in relation to His causation of the world and the chain of caused existents, that is, through His relational attributes and concomitants. In brief, the 'in itself'/'with another' distinction applies equally to the pure quiddities and to God's special quiddity.²⁶³

Finally, Avicenna's doctrine that God exists through or by virtue of His quiddity and so has a special existence that is entirely His own should be connected with his theory of final causality and of God as ultimate and universal final cause. As was shown previously, Avicenna, building on some Neoplatonic precedents, connects quiddity with final causality and regards the final cause as that which completes or perfects the potential existence of an essence. In that sense, essence is closely tied to the Neoplatonic notion of reversion in his works. God's status as a final cause for all the caused beings can also be construed in light of His quiddity and essential being, which, as the quiddity of all quiddities, so to speak, contains within itself all the pure essences of existent things. God's status as a final cause therefore implies a moment of reversion (*epistrophe*) of each quiddity towards its originative source, of the special existence of each quiddity participating in the ultimate special existence that is God's. More specifically, this theory is to be connected with Avicenna's views regarding the intrinsic perfectibility and immortality of the human soul. *Qua* final cause of a human being, the rational soul leads one to one's utmost degree of perfection and completion by partaking in the 'divine' act of intellection and in the contemplation of the pure quiddities. Thus, when it comes to final causality and Avicenna's discussion of this notion in relation to God, it seems more fruitful to approach the master's theology from the perspective of God having a special quiddity, rather than God not having any quiddity at all—and this, given the narrow connection in his philosophy between final causality and essence. In brief, essence or quiddity appears to be the cement that ties all of the key notions of Avicenna's theology together.

263 For a cogent discussion of these two aspects, see Adamson, *From the Necessary*. Adamson focuses especially on the notions of negation and relation in Avicenna's theology. As Adamson, 173, explains, "there are three kinds of things we can say about the necessary existent. First, that there is indeed a necessary existent; second, that this existence *lacks* certain features; third, that this existence enters into certain relations with its effects." These points can each be related to different aspects of quiddity: the first, to the fact that quiddity possesses its own special existence, which in the case of God is necessary existence; the second, to the notion of quiddity taken 'in itself,' negatively conditioned, and in abstraction from concomitants and accidents; and the third, to the relation between quiddity and its external concomitants, effects, accidents, etc. Hence, the various aspects and conditions of quiddity represent an interesting conceptual tool to interpret Avicenna's theology.

2.6 The problematic case of prime matter

Avicenna's doctrine of prime matter offers a particularly interesting case study when it comes to the notion of essential being. The reasons for this are multiple, but they pertain chiefly to the ambiguous ontological status that matter occupies in Avicenna's metaphysics. For if Avicenna's theory of matter is discussed chiefly within an Aristotelian hylomorphic framework, it is also subjected to a drastic metaphysical re-handling and is connected (in a very un-Aristotelian way) with superlunary causality and the cosmological theory of emanation (*fayḍ*). The query I attempt to address here is how the quiddity of prime matter can be said to exist at all and how it relates to essential and intelligible existence.²⁶⁴

Avicenna is adamant that matter cannot exist actually without form. This point is reiterated on numerous occasions throughout his corpus and is premised on the two ideas that matter is dependent on form for its determinate existence and that form precedes matter in actuality. If form precedes matter in actuality, and if matter requires form to exist in a determinate way, then matter in itself will not exist in any true sense in actuality without form. It will not actually exist before it acquires substantial forms from an exterior cause.²⁶⁵ In this context, the first form to inhere in matter is the corporeal form, which provides prime matter with three-dimensional extension. All existent bodies consist of prime matter combined with the corporeal form and other substantial and accidental forms that endow matter with determined measurements and a specific nature. As a corollary, prime matter in itself does not exist separately and as an independent entity in the concrete world. Its actual existence is reducible to the existence of the various entities or quantities of informed matter that constitute the various physical beings and that together make up the realm of nature. In spite of this, Avicenna does not follow the view of some Neoplatonists according to which matter is simply nonexistence or lacks positive being. To begin with, he ascribes one of the senses of substance (*jawhar*) to prime matter, a sense which he contrasts to those of substance *qua* form and of substance *qua* the combination of form and matter.²⁶⁶ Thus, in *Definitions*, for example, matter is de-

264 Avicenna's doctrine of prime matter and its relation to the corporeal form has attracted considerable scholarly attention; see in particular, Buschmann, *Untersuchungen*; Stone, Simplicius and Avicenna; Shihadeh, *Avicenna's Corporeal Form*; and Lammer, *The Elements*.

265 See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.4. Avicenna's general aim in this chapter is to discuss the essence (*dhāt*) of matter and form and their relationship, as well as to establish the priority of form over matter in actuality. Form renders matter existent *in actuality*. Prime matter needs the corporeal form (*al-ṣūrah al-jismiyyah*) and specific dimensions, as well as generic and specific forms, to exist in actuality.

266 See Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.2, 67.16 ff. for the substantiality of *hayūlā*; and Lammer, *The Elements*, 118–120. Lammer rejects the interpretation of prime matter as merely a negative substance or as quasi-substance. Indeed, Avicenna does not routinely associate matter and nonexistence; rather, the latter notion is connected chiefly with the logical modality of the impossible (*mumtani*) and the absence of a cause.

scribed as a substance that acquires actual existence in or through itself (*li-dhātihā*). As befits the definition of substance as that which does not exist in a subject, matter exists for itself and has its own existence, which is why it can also be regarded as its own substance. Hence, if its existence in actuality is dependent on the forms, it nevertheless is not the same as, nor is it reducible to, the existence of these very forms. Furthermore, prime matter also possesses its own quiddity (*māhiyyah*), which implies that it is a thing that is readily and distinctly intelligible in the mind and whose definition does not rely on the actual existence of hylomorphic form. Unlike the quiddity and definition of, say, a horse, which implies form and matter and points to a compound of these two principles in the realized substance, the definition of matter as pure receptivity and potentiality does not include actual form at all and suggests that matter ‘in itself’ is a substance and quiddity. The fact that it is not rendered multiple or composite in reality by its definition explains why Avicenna counts prime matter as one of the simple entities (*al-basā’iṭ*) alongside oneness (*al-waḥdah*) and ‘the Necessary of Existence.’²⁶⁷

For these reasons, if Avicenna insists that matter itself cannot exist actually (*bi-l-fi’l*) without form, he also sometimes allows for the possibility that matter possesses potential existence, that is, a purely receptive and passive existence that would belong distinctly to it. Matter can be said to exist potentially or in a state of potentiality, and in that state it may even be said to precede form. Somewhat intriguingly, Avicenna refers to this state as “the state [*ḥāl*] between matter and form inasmuch as the latter exists [*min ḥaythu hiya mawjūdah*].”²⁶⁸ This state is the pure disposition (*isti’dād*) and pure receptivity (*qubūl*) of matter as a substrate (*maḥall*) for forms. It is these notions that define the thingness of matter: matter is matter because it has the potentiality of reception and disposition (*al-māddah innamā hiya māddah li-anna lahā quwwat al-qubūl wa-l-isti’dād*).²⁶⁹ And it is this thingness of matter that may be said to exist according to one qualified sense or aspect. The nuance Avicenna seeks to tease out, then, is not that matter cannot exist in any way, aspect, or sense without form, but that its existence *in actuality* necessarily depends on form. As Avicenna concludes, “there is a difference between these two claims” (*bayna l-amrayn farq*).²⁷⁰ These remarks seem to characterize the very essence (*dhāt*) of matter, which is what Avicenna intends to focus on in this metaphysical inquiry.²⁷¹ In another pas-

267 Avicenna, *Notes*, 135–136, section 181. Aristotle stresses the connection between matter and substance and is Avicenna’s direct source on this issue. Nevertheless, this point is much more ambiguous in the works of the Greek philosopher, for he also suggests that matter is substance only in a derivative or secondary sense; for the Aristotelian background on this topic, see Stone, Simplicius and Avicenna.

268 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.4, 80.14.

269 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.4, 83.5–6.

270 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.4, 83.15–84.2.

271 At *Metaphysics of The Cure* II.4, 80.11–13, Avicenna explains that he intends to study the essences (*dhātihimā*) of matter and form in abstraction from the relation (*iḍāfah*) that obtains between them. In *Notes*, 84.10, section 81, Avicenna describes prime matter as “a meaning [or entity] that

sage, Avicenna further teases out the distinction between these two states of existence: matter exists potentially in itself and actually through form. As Avicenna explains, “as for the nature of that which is potential, its receptacle is matter. Thus, it is matter that is properly said to exist in itself in potentiality [*inna-hā fī nafsihā bi-l-quwwah takūn mawjūdah*] and in actuality through form.”²⁷² Again, Avicenna's contention is not that matter has two simultaneous modes of existence *in actuality*. Rather, matter may be said to exist potentially and actually according to two different ontological aspects or modes, precisely because these two modes or aspects of existence differ: matter exists according to one sense when taken strictly *in itself*; and according to another when taken in relation to form and the composite substance.²⁷³ In other words, whereas the potential existence of matter is ‘in itself’ and, so to speak, essential, its actual existence is ‘realized’ and ‘acquired,’ and, thus, accidental. Consequently, Avicenna asserts that “taken in itself and from the consideration of the existence of its essence, it [prime matter] is in potentiality” (*fī nafsihā wa-i'tibār wujūd dhātihā bi-l-quwwah*).²⁷⁴ This corresponds to the special kind of substantiality (*jawhariyyah*) that matter has, a substantiality that is separated from actuality and belongs exclusively to it.²⁷⁵

These remarks suggest that matter, when taken in itself, is not ‘nothing,’ but ‘something’: prime matter is a ‘thing’ (*amr*) that is pure receptivity and, *qua* substance, subsists not in a subject. More strikingly, Avicenna in *Definitions* adds on one occasion that prime matter itself has the ‘form’ (*ṣūrah*) and differentia (*faṣl*) of receptivity and preparedness.²⁷⁶ Two points should be stressed in this connection in order to shed light on this unusual statement. First, it was probably motivated

is in itself subsistent” (*ma'nā qā'im bi-nafsihi*), which befits its definition as substance, but ambiguously locates it midway between an intelligible notion and an entity, on account of the very ambiguity of the term *ma'nā*.

272 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.4, 88.15–16.

273 This, of course, implies taking the quiddity of matter either inasmuch as it is itself (*min haythu hiya hiya*) or in relation to others. It would seem that the various aspects of quiddity lie behind Avicenna's conceptualization of prime matter.

274 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.2, 68.7–8. Under a certain condition (*shart*), the potentiality of matter can be said to precede the act in particular things; see *Metaphysics*, IV.2, 183.12ff. It should be noted that the same ambiguity that surrounds Avicenna's theory of prime matter also applies to the corporeal form: is it purely potential or does it already imply a certain degree of actuality? In some instances, Avicenna seems to regard corporeality as a “realized nature,” but the problem is that it, like prime matter, cannot exist on its own and needs other substantial forms in order to exist actually. Corporeal matter remains, at any rate, something very abstract that is the object of intellectual consideration, if not of concrete, actual existence; see *Metaphysics*, II.2, 70.1ff.

275 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, II.2, 67.17: “the substantiality that belongs to matter does not make it something in actuality.” Yet, this substantiality, Avicenna believes, is something in itself.

276 Avicenna, *Definitions*, 17; cf. *Metaphysics*, II.2, 68.4–5: “its [viz., matter's] differentia is that it is prepared for all things, and its form [*ṣūrah*], which is thought to belong to it [in itself], is that it is prepared and receptive.” However, how exactly Avicenna intends this statement is problematic, since he rejects a strict identification of prime matter as a kind of essential form in other instances.

by the desire to shun a potentially problematic conclusion, namely, that if matter is a substance and a quiddity, and if quiddity and substance are primarily definable in terms of form, as Avicenna tends to believe, then matter itself would be an oddity inasmuch as it would amount to a formless quiddity and a formless substance. Indeed, how could matter have quiddity and substance but no form whatsoever? By ascribing an essential form to prime matter, one which it would possess irreducibly and ‘in itself,’ matter would by the same token lend itself to the identification between quiddity and form that Avicenna regards as normative.²⁷⁷ The second consideration is linked to Avicenna’s doctrine of cosmological emanation, according to which the substantial forms of natural things (at the very least their species-forms) are emanated by the Agent Intellect onto the world of nature. Quite remarkably, and in a marked departure from the Aristotelian tradition, Avicenna believes that prime matter is one of the things that proceeds from this superlunary intellect and, hence, that matter as such is eternally emanated as a result of the intellection of this immaterial being. In *Physics*, one reads that “prime matter results from atemporal creation [*ibdāʿ*],” and in *Notes* that “prime matter is absolutely created” (*al-hayūlā l-ūlā mubdaʿah*).²⁷⁸ Elsewhere in the latter work it is stated that “the being of absolute prime matter is connected with absolute creation” (*al-māddah al-ūlā l-muṭlaqah yataʿallaqu kawnuhā bi-l-ibdāʿ*), with the same intent.²⁷⁹ The choice of the terms *ibdāʿ* and *mubdaʿah* in those passages suggests that matter can be made to exist only by an immaterial cause. These statements describe prime matter as a metaphysical entity that possesses its own distinct identity and being even before it acquires the actual forms. Because it is emanated as an entity or form from the Agent Intellect, matter is ‘something’ that exists distinctly from the other substantial forms (be it only intelligibly). It possesses its own quiddity and reality, as well as a kind of essential being, and it is not reducible merely to an idea in the human mind. Thus, the causality tying prime matter to the Agent Intellect, the Giver of Forms, lends weight to the hypothesis that it possesses its own essential form.²⁸⁰

To recap, matter cannot exist actually (*bi-l-fiʿl*) without form and, hence, cannot exist in itself as a realized existent in the concrete world. There is no Platonic form of prime matter, so to speak. Yet, it can be said to have a special, potential, and purely

277 In theory this essential form is not identical with the form of corporeality, which, Avicenna tells us, is the first substantial form to inhere in matter (on the latter, see Stone, Simplicius and Avicenna; Lammer, *The Elements*, 120 ff.). For the corporeal form inheres in matter from the outside and is thus not essential to prime matter as such. But Avicenna’s interpreters took issue with this doctrine, perhaps partly in an effort to avoid the metaphysical consequences that arose from postulating a distinct notion of prime matter; see Shihadeh, Avicenna’s Corporeal Form.

278 Avicenna, *Physics*, I.3, 30.2–3, translation McGinnis; *idem*, *Notes*, 171.7, section 251.

279 Avicenna, *Notes*, 342.2, section 611.

280 On the emanation of prime matter from the Agent Intellect, see Davidson, *Alfarabi*, 76; and especially Lammer, *The Elements*, 193–196. This feature of Avicenna’s cosmology should, of course, be connected with Neoplatonic doctrines about the emanation or causation of nature and matter from the Soul-Principle.

intelligible existence and to possess a unique kind of essential being that endows its thingness with a degree of ontological positivity. This would apply, at the very least, to the pure quiddity of prime matter in the human intellects that contemplate it as well as in the Agent Intellect that emanates it as a result of its intellection. Consequently, the quiddity of prime matter, when taken 'in itself,' could be said to correspond to an ontological mode that can only be described as a kind of essential being. Avicenna's tendency to tie prime matter to the emanation and causation of the Agent Intellect seems to validate this interpretation. In the final analysis, however, whether one decides to interpret the evidence regarding prime matter in Avicenna's philosophy as indicating a kind of essential being or no being at all really boils down to a question of outlook regarding the notions of existence and potentiality.

3 Essential 'realization' and 'subsistence' and Avicenna's theory of causality

Avicenna's distinction between the inner constituents (*muqawwimāt*) of quiddity, on the one hand, and its external, non-constitutive, and accidental concomitants (*lawāzim ghayr muqawwimah*), on the other, stems initially from a logical outlook. This distinction is clearly put forth, for example, in the logical section of *Pointers*, where the triangle is taken as an example. In that work, Avicenna differentiates between (a) the essential constituents that are inseparable from quiddity (e.g., shape-ness for triangle); (b) the concomitants that necessarily follow quiddity (e.g., the triangle has angles that equal two right angles), but are external, non-constitutive, and posterior; and (c) the accidental concomitants that are accidents (*a'rād*) proper, in the sense that they are fully separable from quiddity (e.g., blackness in the concrete triangle). Although (b) and (c) are both 'accidental' (*'araḍī*) in the sense that they are external to quiddity and not constitutive of it, only the elements in (c) amount to real accidents that may or may not exist in a subject.²⁸¹

These logical distinctions in turn provide the backbone of Avicenna's ontological interpretation of quiddity and its concomitants. For just as there is a *conceptual* difference in the way these various items relate to quiddity (i.e., by being either internal or external to it, constitutive or non-constitutive, essential or accidental), so there is an *ontological* difference in the way they relate to the various senses and aspects of existence that Avicenna deploys in his works. One way in which Avicenna stresses this distinction is by ascribing proper existence to the items in (a) and acquired existence to the items in (b) and (c). Put differently, he correlates the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* distinction with different senses and modes of existence. Thus, in *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1, the master modulates the term *wujūd* to refer to essential being as well as to realized existence in the mind and in the concrete world. Realized existence refers

²⁸¹ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 199.

primarily to concrete individual existents, although it also applies to the complex universals in the mind. In both cases, what has been ‘realized’ in existence is not only the constituents of quiddity, but also its accompanying attributes and concomitants: it is ‘particular horse’ with its material accidents and ‘universal horse’ with its mental accidents. This ontological distinction between the constituents and the concomitants of quiddity is expressed by means of other terms in the Avicennian vocabulary, notably those derived from the roots *ḥ-q-q*, *ḥ-ṣ-l*, and *q-w-m*. There are two sets of terms in particular that should arrest our attention, given that they are frequently applied to quiddity in Avicenna’s works: *taḥqīq* and *taḥaqquq*, and *qiwām* and *qā’im*. These terms convey the notions of ‘ascertainment’ or ‘realization’ and ‘subsistence’ respectively. At first glance, they would seem to be restricted to the logical and conceptual plane. Thus, the essence ‘human’ could be said to be realized or to subsist logically by virtue of its constituents, namely, ‘animal’ and ‘rational,’ when these elements are apprehended by the mind and linked together in definition and conception to form a unitary concept. Yet, there is evidence indicating that these terms are also put to the service of Avicenna’s ontologization of logic. They participate directly in the discourse on the being of quiddity by elucidating how quiddity is self-constituted and self-caused intelligibly. In fact, in the very passage of *Pointers* mentioned above, Avicenna makes a basic distinction between “the realization of existence” (*taḥaqquq al-wujūd*) and “the realization of quiddity” (*taḥaqquq al-māhiyyah*).²⁸² In another section of *Pointers*, the master contends that essence and existence have different causes and that a thing is caused and realized with regard to both its essence and its existence.²⁸³ This suggests that *taḥaqquq*, when associated with essence, conveys a certain causative or ontological implication and does not express merely an epistemological concern. Accordingly, in this context, the term *taḥaqquq* does not correspond primarily to an epistemic exercise of ‘ascertaining’ or ‘verification,’ but rather to a kind of essential realization of quiddity that occurs in the mind and *in concreto*, albeit in different ways. The basic distinction articulated here appears to be between the realization of the concomitants (*lawāzīm*) of quiddity as a result of the external efficient cause that affects it, and the realization of the constituents (*muqawwimah*) of quiddity, especially to its internal self-constitution in the

²⁸² Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 1996–10.

²⁸³ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 441. The term *taḥaqquq* is often translated as ‘verification’ or ‘ascertainment’ in order to emphasize its epistemological scope and to bring out the notion of truth associated with the root *ḥ-q-q*. However, this root can also mean ‘reality’ or ‘what is real,’ and, thus, by extension, ‘realization in existence.’ In fact, the two meanings of ‘truth’ and ‘realization’ or ‘reality’ are connected, inasmuch as one sense of what is true for Avicenna is what has existence in reality and is the object of assent (*taṣdīq*). When applied to pure quiddity specifically, the term *ḥaqīqah* refers to its intrinsic truth (in being the quiddity that it is) and its reality (in that it exists, at the very least intelligibly in the mind). In so doing it points to the *internal realization* of quiddity as something essentially true and real, as opposed to its external realization in the concrete world. Thus, the sense that should be emphasized here in connection with essential being is intelligible and essential realization, not existence acquired through a cause.

mind, which is to be associated chiefly with quiddity as a formal and final cause.²⁸⁴ That Avicenna in fact conceives of the self-realization of quiddity as implying a kind of internal, essential causality seems confirmed by the following passage of *Notes*:

Text 35: What is prior in essence to the thing is what is a cause for the thing in its quiddity [*al-mutaqaddim 'alā l-shay' bi-l-ṭab' huwa mā yakūn 'illah li-l-shay' fī māhiyyatīhi*]. For example, 'one' is a cause of 'two' in its twoness [*fī ithnayyiyatīhi*], and the lines of the triangle [i.e., its being a shape] is a cause of its being a triangle, and the parts [*ajzā'*] of the definition are the cause of the definition in its being what it is [*fī annahu huwa*]. As for the prior in causality, it ought to be a cause for its existence, not for its quiddity [*wa-ammā l-mutaqaddim bi-l-'illiyyah fa-huwa an yakūna 'illah li-wujūdihi lā li-māhiyyatīhi*], for the quiddity of a thing is other than its existence [*inniyatīhi or anniyatīhi*]. For human to be human is other than for it to exist. Priority may be with regard to existence, such as the priority of 'one' over 'two,' or it may be in conception [*fī l-mafhūm*], such as the priority of substance over accident in predicating existence of these two [things].²⁸⁵

The use of the term “cause” (*'illah*) in connection with quiddity in this passage lends weight to the previous hypothesis according to which quiddity possesses a special kind of internal causality. This special essential and internal causality concerns the relationships between the various constitutive parts of quiddity and the unity that is produced by them. The essences of ‘triangle’ and ‘two’—and, for that matter, of all other things—are essentially constituted by virtue of this internal causality. For all intents and purposes, this means that these essences *qua* essences are self-constituted and self-caused.

Avicenna goes on to contrast this internal, essential causality proper to essence with “the prior in causality” (*al-mutaqaddim bi-l-'illiyyah*) and “the cause of existence” (*'illah li-wujūd*), which, as should be clear by now, pertain to the external concomitants of essence. Although one could presume that only this latter aspect deals with causality proper and existence proper, this would be to miss the point entirely. For, as we saw above, the prior by essence is also explicitly called a cause (*'illah*). It is a cause for the inner constitution of the essence. It is, moreover, a cause of the internal and constitutive being of quiddity as an intelligible entity, making it conceivable in abstraction from realized existence. Thus, essence and realized existence have dif-

284 On a purely etymological consideration, there is no valid reason to dismiss the root *q-w-m* as expressing anything less than existence (*wujūd*), a meaning which has endured up to the modern period (one of the translations in Wehr's *Dictionary* for *qāma/yaqūmu* is “to be, exist, be existent”). Although Avicenna usually opts for *qiwām* in order to express the mode in which the constitutive parts of quiddity are realized, he sometimes uses the term *wujūd* as well; this is the case, for instance, in *Notes*, 394, section 698, where it is said that “[the differential] ‘rational’ makes possible the existence of animalness” (*al-nāṭiq bihi yaṣṣihu wujūd al-ḥayawāniyyah*). Why scholars of Avicenna generally avoid translating words derived from the *q-w-m* root in an ontological sense, especially when they are applied to essence, is due, presumably, to the assumption that quiddity has no existence of its own and bears no direct relation to existence. But, at the very least, the ‘realization’ and ‘subsistence’ of quiddity in the mind should be regarded as implying a kind of intelligible existence.

285 Avicenna, *Notes*, section 773, 426–427.

ferent kinds of causality. The former is intrinsic and self-constitutive, the latter external, synthetic, and concomitant.²⁸⁶ This self-constitution explains also why the pure quiddities never undergo variation or difference. As a passage of *Notes* explains, “animalness does not differ inasmuch as it is animalness, because this quidditative meaning is realized in itself [or by virtue of its essence]” (*fa-l-ḥayawāniyyah lā yakhtalifu min ḥaythu hiya ḥayawāniyyah li-anna hādhā l-ma‘nā yaḥṣulu bi-dhātihī*).²⁸⁷ What is more, there is a sense in which pure quiddity is a cause for its external and non-constitutive concomitants as well. Given that the latter essentially follow and are posterior to quiddity, they depend on it and are necessitated by it. Avicenna emphasizes this point in another passage of *Notes*:

Essence is not constituted by the concomitant [i.e., its external concomitants]; rather, essence necessitates and entails it. Thus, [essence] is the cause [of the concomitant], whose existence depends solely upon it (*lā tataqawwamu l-dhāt bi-l-lāzīm bal al-dhāt tūjibu l-lāzīm wa-taqtaḍihī fa-hiya ‘illatuhu wa-bihā wujūduhu*).²⁸⁸

It should be stressed that the master in this passage is not talking merely about logical entailment (*luzūm*). As the terminology makes amply clear, he is focusing on the causality of essence and intends this statement to reflect an ontological reality. In another but closely related passage of the same work, he explains that “the concomitants are not internal to the true essences, but follow after the constitution of the essences” (*al-lawāzīm lā tadkhulu fī l-ḥaqā‘iq bal talzamu ba‘d taqawwama [or taqawwum] al-ḥaqā‘iq*).²⁸⁹ In this fashion, Avicenna seems to advocate a fundamental distinction between two kinds of ontological realization: one pertaining to the *muqawwimāt* and their proper existence inasmuch as they form a unitary concept that can be grasped ‘in itself,’ and one pertaining to the *lawāzīm* and the derivative and acquired existence that characterizes them. Whereas the realization of existence calls for an external cause, the realization of quiddity is internal, essential, and prior, which is why Avicenna ascribes a different order of causality to the intrinsic being of quiddity and to realized existence.²⁹⁰ Quiddity is self-realized, one might say, inasmuch as its constituents are internal to it and not acquired or obtained from the outside. The subsistence (*qiwām*) of quiddity that is achieved through this kind of inter-

286 Cf. Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 11, where he explains that the constituents of the essence are bound together by an essential (*dhāti*) and internal (*dākhil*) principle, but are free of an external (*khārij*) cause. This is the case of the relationship between humanness and animalness, the former necessarily implying the latter. The emphasis here, as in Avicenna’s texts, is on the distinction between an internal organization of the essential constituents and an external causality that applies to the concomitants and accidents.

287 Avicenna *Notes*, 394, section 699.

288 Avicenna, *Notes*, 362, section 641.

289 Avicenna, *Notes*, 544, section 959.

290 Avicenna argues that quiddity possesses its own, internal, essential causality in *Pointers*, vol.1, 202.9 ff.

nal realization should be regarded as another way of referring to the special intelligible existence of pure quiddity. What is more, Avicenna also at times ascribes a certain causal role to quiddity in realizing its external concomitants. This is because they are entailed and necessitated by essence, even though an external cause is also required for their realization to occur.

Now, this self-realization and auto-causality of quiddity is first and foremost an intelligible event, so that the comments made above pertain primarily to mental existence. Inasmuch as the quiddities can in themselves be conceived by the human and divine intellects (see chapter V), and inasmuch as the intellectual ontologically precedes the material, the intrinsic causality associated with pure quiddity will be closely linked with its intelligible status in the intellect and thus with *mental* or *intellectual existence*. One of Avicenna's favorite examples to illustrate these notions is the triangle, which he borrows from Aristotle, but adapts to his philosophical argumentation.²⁹¹ The triangle is caused and realized in its essence and in its existence. But what makes it subsist (*qā'im*) or grants it essential subsistence (*qiwām*), and ensures its realization (*taḥaqquq*) as a pure quiddity, are its constituents (*muqawwimāt*), such as shapeness (*shakliyyah*), without which its essence cannot be conceived in the mind and without which it loses its intelligible reality. This phenomenon is hinted at linguistically by the common root of the terms *qiwām* and *muqawwimāt*. So there are strong reasons to presume that the subsistence (*qiwām*), realization (*taḥaqquq*), and proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) of the pure quiddity trianguleness in the mind all refer to the same notions, namely, its essential, intelligible being and self-causality, which make it an immediately cognizable concept in the intellect and provide it with its irreducible intelligible reality. This irreducible intelligible reality is apprehended in abstraction from all other considerations and attributes, whether mental or concrete.²⁹²

The hypothesis that essence is 'realized' not merely epistemically, but also ontologically, in virtue of its inner, essential structure reappears in other parts of the Avicennian corpus. In *Metaphysics* II.2, Avicenna refers to the actualization or realization of the nature of corporeality in itself (*hiya fī nafsihā ṭabī'ah muḥaṣṣalah*). This refers to corporeality "with no added meaning" and no relation, which is realized as such in the mind. Avicenna intends by this, one presumes, the realization of corporeality as a pure essence in the mind, in abstraction from the other meanings or concomitants that can be connected to it from the outside. He goes on to declare:

For the fact that a thing [*al-shay'*] is not found existing in actuality does not mean that its nature is not realized. For indeed everything about whiteness and blackness is realized [in its] nature as

²⁹¹ It appears, for instance, in *Categories*, II.1, 60.17 ff.; and *Pointers*, vol. 1, 182, 199; vols. 3–4, 441–442. cf. *Introduction*, I.6, 34.10–15; and *Metaphysics* I.5.

²⁹² All of these terms are applied to the example of the quiddity 'triangle,' which, it should be recalled, also appears in *Metaphysics* I.5 in connection with *wujūd khāṣṣ*.

a specific quidditative meaning with the utmost degree of specificity, which is itself [*mutaḥaṣṣil al-ṭabiʿah maʿnā mukhaṣṣaṣ atamm takhṣiṣihi alladhi huwa fi dhātihi*].²⁹³

It would appear, then, that the pure quiddities and natures are, in their very core, self-realized by the constituents that underlie them, and that this kind of essential and intelligible realization, which Avicenna contrasts to the realization of existence (construed as a concomitant acquired from the outside), is already a mode of existence in itself in the intellect. In this regard it is also significant that Avicenna applies the same ontological vocabulary to acquired existence and to the being of quiddity in the mind: *wujūd*, *taḥaqquq*, *qiwām*, etc. Yet, in those passages where the master applies these terms to quiddity, he is in general cautious to stress the distinction between realized existence and quidditative being, or between the realization of *wujūd* and the realization of *māhiyyah*, as in the passage of *Pointers* mentioned above. Moreover, one should not conclude that quiddity is necessarily apprehended as a composite or complex thing on the grounds that it subsists through its constitutive parts and is self-realized. Rather, as I showed in chapter II, it is conceived of as a unified and simple concept, as a kind of transcendental intelligible object.²⁹⁴

How do these considerations relate specifically to Avicenna's theory of the four causes? And what are their implications for the causation of mental and concrete entities? Bertolacci warned some time ago that there is probably no exact overlap between Avicenna's theory of causality and the essence/existence distinction, a question that was explored also by Wisnovsky.²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the previous points warrant a fresh, albeit brief, look at how causality relates to essence. Let us begin with pure quiddity in the mind. Because the realization of quiddity is internal and proper to it, one may say, in a way, that quiddity is self-caused. When Avicenna mentions the causes of quiddity in *Pointers* and the causes of thingness in *Metaphysics* VI.5, he probably intends the causality inherent to essence that is fully internal to it and attributable to its essential constituents.²⁹⁶ Now, Avicenna considers *wujūd* to be a modulated term and notion (*ism mushakkik*), one of whose implications is that existence can be said of things in a prior and posterior way. This aspect would seem to apply to the priority of the pure quiddities in the human mind vis-à-vis the concrete existents, at least when it comes to the artificial forms, which find their inception in the mind before they are actualized in external reality. Additionally, the existence of pure quiddity can be said to be essentially prior to that of

²⁹³ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, II.2, 70.1ff.

²⁹⁴ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 1, 203.7–8 explains: "All of the constitutive parts of quiddity are conceived of together with quiddity, even though they do not come to the attention of the mind individually."

²⁹⁵ Bertolacci, *The Doctrine*; Wisnovsky, *Towards a History*. More precisely, it is doubtful whether there is a neat correlation between the distinctions of immanent and transcendent causes, on the one hand, and essence and existence, on the other.

²⁹⁶ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VI.5, 292.11ff.; *Pointers*, vol.1, 202.9ff.

the complex universal concept in the mind, as was shown in chapter II. Finally, there is a sense in which all the forms and quiddities are prior intelligibly in the separate intellects.²⁹⁷ Some of these aspects of the priority of essence in the mind are brought together in a passage of *Introduction*:

Because the relation of all existent things to God and the angels [i.e., the separate intellects] is [the same as] the relation of [human] artifacts to the productive soul [*al-nafs al-ṣāni'ah*], that which is in God's and the angels' knowledge of the true nature [*ḥaqīqah*] of what is known and apprehended of natural things exists prior to multiplicity.²⁹⁸

This segment compares the status of the artificial forms in the human mind to that of the natural forms in the divine intellects. In this connection, two points are in order. First, there can be little doubt that in those various cases the priority of quiddity is to be identified with its 'special' or 'proper existence' (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), which belongs to it in itself in abstraction from other things and as a purely intelligible object. Quiddity and proper existence essentially and ontologically precede the essential concomitants and realized existence, Avicenna tells us, in the way that the simple precedes the complex.

Second, this priority of quiddity in the intellect should be connected with what Avicenna says about the priority of essence as a final cause. It is precisely *because* pure quiddity in the mind is self-realized and self-caused that, *qua* final cause, it is prior to the other causes in the exterior world, which, unlike the final cause, imply an external kind of realization and the postulation of exterior causes and concomitants (see section III.5). As Wisnovsky has shown in a detailed fashion, final causality plays a crucial role in Avicenna's metaphysics.²⁹⁹ It assumes a vital role in particular in Avicenna's explanation of cosmic reversion, the nature of the human soul, and—crucially for our purposes—the relationship of essence and existence. What is more, the master also follows in some of his works a Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotle that defines the material and formal causes as immanent and the efficient and final causes as extrinsic or transcendent to their object. Finally, in many of his works, Avicenna correlates efficient causality with the causation of (realized) existence and final causality with essence, with the latter in turn serving as a linchpin for his doctrines about the substantial perfection and completion of being. By building on Neoplatonic sources and precedents, Avicenna is able to articulate an account of ontological reversion and perfection in terms of final causality and the teleological actualization of potentialities.

297 Black, *Mental Existence*, 21, "natures pre-exist prior to multiplicity in the separate intellects, in particular the closest of these to us, the Agent Intellect." I shall discuss this point in detail in chapter V.

298 Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 69.10–12; transl. Marmura, *Avicenna's Chapter on Universals*, 50.

299 Wisnovsky, *Towards a History*; idem, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*.

Like Aristotle, Avicenna often correlates the formal cause and the final cause, but he places an increased metaphysical emphasis on the latter notion.³⁰⁰ When it comes to the artificial forms in the human mind, these should be connected with both types of causality: the architect has the form and essential structure of the house in his mind (the formal cause) and his building activity tends towards an end that coincides with this form in his mind (the final cause). By extension, the same can be said about all the quiddities of natural things that are located in the Agent Intellect, the Giver of Forms. Formal and final causality overlap in the mode of existence of the quiddities in that separate intellect, which fulfils the same role with regard to nature—alogically speaking—that the architect does with regard to the artificial form of house.³⁰¹ Hence, Avicenna establishes a crucial correlation between quiddity/thingness and final causality in the human intellect. He often describes quiddity (*māhiyyah*), thingness (*shay'iyah*), and the quidditative meaning (*ma'nā*) as a final cause in the human intellect, a claim that rests on the conceivability of these notions and the fact that their apprehension may occur without their having a corresponding entity in exterior reality. In this connection, Avicenna argues that quiddity *qua* final cause essentially and teleologically precedes the efficient cause. In some passages he describes the final cause as “the cause of the efficient cause” and “the reason why the other causes actually exist as causes.”³⁰² The master therefore intends these comments to apply with special force to the sphere of rational thought and intellectuality, where quiddity can be conceived of in itself and in abstraction from existence. Indeed, in those passages where Avicenna is discussing the priority of final causality, his focus is chiefly on the intellect. The final cause is essentially prior *in the intellect that is thinking it*, but it is posterior in terms of the realization of existence in the concrete world.³⁰³

But how exactly does this fit in Avicenna's ontology of pure quiddity? Is this priority of quiddity and thingness *qua* final cause in the mind itself connected with a kind of essential intelligible existence? Avicenna appears to answer this question in the affirmative. In *Metaphysics*, he explains that:

Text 36: The final cause is prior to the other causes *in its existence in the soul* [*fī wujūdhā fī l-nafs*]. As for [the final cause's being prior to the other causes] in the agent's soul, this is because

300 For instance, in *Physics* I.11, Avicenna seems to collapse the formal, final, and efficient causes in his discussion of natural phenomena; see Bertolacci, *The Doctrine*, 151.

301 For an insightful study of Avicenna's theory of material and formal causality, see Bertolacci, *The Doctrine*.

302 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VI.5, 292.6–7.

303 This point is emphasized, and also presented as a problem, in Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 175. In certain Avicennian texts, the causality of the final cause seems to be restricted to the sphere of intentionality and thought. Wisnovsky alleviates this problem by reminding us that Avicenna collapses the final and formal causes in natural beings as well, so that the essential forms of natural things also represent their ends. For me the main point concerns the relation between quiddity and mental existence.

it [the final cause] comes to exist first and then agency, seeking out a receptive patient, and the quality of the form come to be represented as images *In terms of thingness and in terms of existence in the intellect* [fī i'tibār al-shay'iyah wa-i'tibār al-wujūd fī l-'aql], there is no cause prior to the final [cause]; instead, it is a cause of the rest of the causes' becoming causes The final cause is a cause not insofar as it is an existent, but insofar as it is a thing.³⁰⁴

Two important points emerge from this passage. First, thingness or quiddity possesses its own existence in the intellect *qua* final cause. Second, this mode of existence should be distinguished from the realized existence that is associated with the efficient cause, and which is itself a cause of the final cause *in concreto*. That Avicenna is referring here to a special intelligible mode of existence proper to thingness and quiddity cannot be doubted, given that quiddity or thingness is the final cause that causes the efficient cause to exist in the first place. This efficient cause, which is entailed by the intelligible final cause, is in turn responsible for endowing beings with their realized or acquired existence in the concrete world. In sum, those passages in which Avicenna discourses on the final causality of quiddity lend some weight to the idea that pure quiddity or thingness *in the mind* is endowed with its own mode of existence, which has nothing to do with efficient causality and realized existence. Although the same point holds in the case of the concrete individual beings, where essence exists inherently as a formal-final cause, it applies with particular strength to the context of intellectual activity and thought, both human and divine, where pure quiddity can be apprehended in itself.

In this connection, it is remarkable that Avicenna specifies that the final cause in the intellect is a cause not *qua* existent, but *qua* thing. In other words, it is a cause *qua* essence or quiddity. Or, as Avicenna puts it in *Metaphysics* VI.5, it is a cause thanks to its thingness (*shay'iyah*).³⁰⁵ Naturally, the master is not saying that the final cause in the mind does not have, as such, any existence at all, since he states at the beginning of the passage that “the final cause is prior to the other causes *in its existence* in the soul.” Rather, his comments pertain to the proper existence of thingness in the mind, as opposed to the realized existence of concrete existents. Pure quiddity in the intellect is a final cause for the other causes, whose existence is, in contrast, realized in the concrete world. The emphasis placed on the intelligibility of the final cause is strengthened by the latter's ascription to the divine intellects as well. In that case, nothing will be prior in existence to the pure quiddities *qua* final causes in the divine intellects. This doctrine ultimately culminates in the self-thinking *māhiyyah* and *ma'nā* of God, who is a universal and absolute final cause for everything else.³⁰⁶ Regardless of whether one studies it in its human or divine

304 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VI.5, 293.5–10. The translation is taken from Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 162. For an insightful discussion of this passage and the reciprocity of efficient and final causality in Avicenna, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 162ff.

305 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VI.5, 292.6ff.

306 See Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VI.5, 293.12ff.

contexts, the final cause *qua* thingness or quiddity in the intellect, Avicenna argues, is itself uncaused. By ‘uncaused’ here I mean that quiddity is devoid of external causes, in spite of the fact that Avicenna also at times alludes to the internal causality of thingness or quiddity, by which he means the relationship of the constitutive elements of essence, which make it what it is. This unique state of exterior uncausedness and internal self-causedness explains why thingness *qua* final cause in the intellect is prior to all the other causes. In this intellectual domain, nothing prior can cause its reality and essential being, and it is, by virtue of itself, a self-constituted intelligible. This intelligible priority of the final cause in the mind should be connected with Avicenna’s remarks concerning the priority of pure quiddity as well as, more generally, the priority of the intellectual over the material. It is on account of these points that Avicenna intimates that quiddity *qua* final cause “possesses [its own] being” (*li-annahā dhāt kawṇ*).³⁰⁷

We may therefore conclude that thingness or quiddity amounts to a formal and final cause in Avicenna’s metaphysics.³⁰⁸ However, its status as a self-constituted, self-caused, intelligibly existent final cause in the human intellect is primordial. Quiddity possesses its own internal causality, which is inherent to it, and which makes the thing that it is and provides it with its thingness. This intelligible reality is granted by the essential constituents (*muqawwimāt*) of the thing and is expressed, for example, in the triangle’s shapeness, or what makes blackness blackness, which

307 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VI.5, 293.15. This statement is likely a reference to the special being of the final cause *qua* quiddity. Marmura angles in this direction as well in his commentary (see Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 411, notes 19 and 20). The previous analysis nevertheless requires two clarifications: first, the final cause *qua* thingness is not *essentially* caused by an exterior cause, although its realization in external reality is due to an efficient cause. Yet, one may wonder, is there not also an efficient cause that causes quiddity to exist as such in the mind? In the passages under discussion, Avicenna limits the sphere of efficient causality to the external, concrete world, his point being that the final cause can exist as a concept in the mind before being actualized concretely. The position taken in this study is that, inasmuch as one can ascribe efficient causes to concepts in the mind, they can only be connected with the complex universal concepts, not with the pure quiddities. Second, thingness can be said to be *internally caused*, in the sense that it possesses internal constituents that are bound together to form a certain quidditative unity and meaning (this is reflected in the multiplicity expressed by the definition of a thing). But it is important to point out that Avicenna regards this kind of essential causality as fundamentally ungraspable. This is why one can account demonstratively for the factuality of realized existence, but not for the foundational cause of proper existence and the inner structure of quiddity. In other words, there cannot be a demonstration of why, say, the definitional elements and quidditative parts of a tree make that thing a tree and not a stone. Ultimately, I surmise that Avicenna solves this problem by relating the individual realities and quiddities to God’s absolute reality and quiddity (see chapter V). At any rate, this consideration does not make the final cause dependent on something exterior for its inner being and reality.

308 Making quiddity in itself in the mind the final cause also has the merit of explaining how the quidditative *ma’nā* could be said to exist in the mind prior to the other causes, as well as—in a qualified way—in the concrete object together with the other causes. Pure quiddity, *qua ma’nā* and final cause, would therefore be both immanent and transcendent to the concrete existent, in a way that the universal concept could not.

is immediately conceivable in the mind and possesses an irreducible intelligible being. What is more, it appears that the final causality of quiddity or thingness vis-à-vis the other causes—what makes it the cause of all the other causes—derives precisely from this state of internal coherence and essential self-causation. In sum, a pure quiddity is a final cause in virtue of its essential and intelligible being, which precedes causality and existence in the concrete world. When applied to the mental context, this 'causality of thingness' (*'illiyat al-shay'iyah*) could also be used to express the causal priority of quiddity with regard to its mental concomitants (*lawāzim*), such as oneness and universality, and, hence, its priority vis-à-vis the universals. Pure quiddity encapsulates triangle in itself or 'what it is to be a triangle,' regardless of whether 'this' or 'that' particular triangle exists or whether one apprehends triangle in connection with multiplicity.³⁰⁹

On the basis of these remarks, one can surmise that, if the divine intellects contemplate the quiddities, then the quiddities *qua* final causes in those intellects would essentially and ontologically precede the efficient causation of concrete individuals in the sublunary world. For example, the quiddity humanness in the divine intellects would essentially precede individual humans and therefore also the efficient and material causes that give rise to these concrete entities. What would be true of the divine intellects would be eminently true of God: if God were to intellect the quiddities, this intellection would essentially precede their actualization in the concrete world. This hypothesis of a divine intellection that precedes the material instantiation of essence is encapsulated in the notion of the universal 'prior to multiplicity' that Avicenna outlines at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12, as well as in another passage of this work at I.12, 69.7–18 (see Text 45). As Bertolacci aptly noted, the status and activity of the Agent Intellect bring together the formal and efficient causes, inasmuch as this Intellect causes forms to exist in the sublunary world through its demiurgic agency.³¹⁰ But, building on Bertolacci, it may be said in this case that three, not two, causes are brought together in this being: the formal, efficient, and final causes, the first two of which stem, in a sense, from the priority of the final cause in that superlunary intellect.

Moving on to the concrete existents, the questions of the relation between essence and causality in this context and of how exactly quiddity comes to be realized

309 Avicenna, however, does not discuss this second plane of final causality in the mind, which again raises the question already asked earlier: could the universal not already be regarded as requiring an efficient cause for its realization and existence in the mind? If answered in the affirmative, could the final cause still be said to precede the efficient cause when it comes to mental existents? After all, complex concepts in the mind (i.e., quiddities together with their mental concomitants) need a cause for their unification and complex existence.

310 Bertolacci, *The Doctrine*, 152, note 129: "The concept itself of the Giver of Forms as an efficient cause implies a tight relationship between formal and efficient causality."

ontologically and causally in those existents are nebulous.³¹¹ In one passage of *Pointers*, where he is speaking about concrete existence, Avicenna contrasts “the causes of quiddity” (*asbāb al-māhiyyah*) and “the causes of existence” (*asbāb al-wujūd*) and correlates the former with the material and formal causes and the latter with the efficient and final causes.³¹² The underlying idea seems to be that whereas the former pertain to the essential nature of a thing and are immanent in it, the latter pertain to existence as an added concomitant and therefore refer to an exterior cause. As was shown previously, connecting formal causality with essence (whether in the mind or in the concrete) is a key Avicennian move, which is also an elaboration on a well-established Aristotelian doctrine. Since essence exists in composite beings primarily as form, and since Avicenna regards form as one of the four causes of concrete beings, then essence will amount to a formal cause in the concrete being, e.g., the nature and form of humanness in Socrates. In that sense, the species-form human is an inherent form and an inherent cause and principle of the individual, and it is also a part (*juzʿ*) of the composite substance. In conveying the thingness and whatness of a thing, quiddity encapsulates, so to speak, the material and especially the formal principles of an existent. In that sense, the pure quiddity humanness suggests rationality and speech as well as corporeality and body. In this particular passage of *Pointers*, Avicenna explains that the quiddity triangle points to the formal and material causes of triangle. Whereas the formal cause is indistinguishable from the essence of triangle, even in the mind, the materiality of triangle is only realized in concrete existence. Nevertheless, figureness or shapeness (*shakliyyah*), as well as the fact that the triangle has sides and lines, make it clear that, whenever triangle actually exists in the concrete, it must be endowed materially with these features; and this material aspect is accounted for in the very definition of triangle. It is perhaps in this sense that the material and especially the formal causes can be regarded as being internal to the thing itself and, in that regard, closely tied with essence or quiddity. This explains Avicenna’s strong correlation of quiddity and form even with regard to concrete realization and existence. Thus, in *Physics* I.10, he states that “form [*ṣūrah*] may be said of quiddity [*māhiyyah*], which, when it is realized [*ḥaṣalat*] in matter,

311 One helpful study in this connection is Bertolacci, *The Doctrine*, especially 152–154. As Bertolacci notes, the formal and material causes can be regarded as causes of existence or of the concrete realization of the thing in addition to the efficient cause, a view which Avicenna sometimes seems inclined to adopt. By extension, quiddity in the concrete can be connected with formal, material, and even efficient causality in Avicenna’s metaphysics, albeit in different ways.

312 For a discussion of this passage, see Wisnovsky, *Towards a History*, 66–68. Wisnovsky argues that Avicenna’s framework for discussing causality evolved over the course of his career from one focusing on the immanence-transcendence distinction (inherited from Neoplatonism) to one focusing on the essence-existence distinction, which Avicenna devised. Accordingly, the formal and material causes are immanent in the thing, while the efficient and final causes are transcendent. Although, as Wisnovsky rightly points out, the emphasis in this passage of *Pointers* is on the essence-existence distinction, I think that the two frameworks are compatible and were not designed to be mutually exclusive.

constitutes it [*qawwamathā*] as a species.”³¹³ In other words, form and matter are parts (sing. *juz'*) and principles of the composite existent, although one, namely form, is actual, whereas the other, namely matter, is potential. Moreover, form is primarily what *realizes* quiddity in the concrete. Here the link between Avicenna's mereological construal of essence in concrete reality—already broached in chapter III—and his theory of causality come together: it was shown previously that form, which conveys essence, can be regarded as a part of the composite and, it now appears, as one of the causes (*'illah*) and principles (*mabda'*) of existence as well. By the same token, when Avicenna speaks of quiddity and form as a part of the concrete individual (as in *Metaphysics* VI.1), this implies their participation in the existentiating of that thing through formal, final, and even, to some extent, efficient causality. Thus, to return to Avicenna's example of triangle, the parts (*ajzā'*) of triangle, which necessarily accompany and constitute the essence triangle and are responsible for its subsistence (*qiwām*), are also in a qualified sense causes (*asbāb*, *'ilal*) of the existence of triangle through final, formal, material, and even, it seems, efficient causality. The foregoing hypothesis seems confirmed—at the very least with regard to the essential formal cause—by this statement taken from *Physics* I.2:

Text 37: Form is distinct from privation in that the form is, in itself, a certain quiddity [*al-šūrah māhiyyah mā bi-nafsihā*] that adds existence to the existence that matter possesses [*zā'idat al-wujūd 'alā l-wujūd alladhī li-l-hayūlā*], whereas privation does not add to the existence that belongs to matter.³¹⁴

Here the formal cause is clearly defined as essence or quiddity, and it is moreover described as being responsible for causing one aspect of the existence of the composite being. There can be little doubt that Avicenna's comments go beyond a purely conceptualist framework and point to essence and form as ontological and causal principles of the natural beings. Since Avicenna closely connects the formal and final causes in concrete beings, one may proceed to describe quiddity in concrete beings as a formal-final cause.³¹⁵ In some cases, it will not only provide the essential structure and properties of a thing, but also complete and perfect its substance (e.g., the rational soul or rationality as the formal-final cause of the human being). It is in this regard that essence can also be regarded as an immanent final cause. So that, given their nature, the ultimate ontological perfection of human beings will be to actualize fully their rationality by reflecting on the intelligible forms and connecting with the Agent Intellect.³¹⁶ It is also in this regard that *all* the quid-

³¹³ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.10, 70.1–2.

³¹⁴ Avicenna, *Physics*, I.2, 21.5–7.

³¹⁵ Avicenna, *Notes*, 377, section 670: “the ends in natural things are the very existence of form in matter.”

³¹⁶ See Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 126–139, especially 132. As Wisnovsky explains, “ends that are immanent in the patient are forms contained *in matter*; that is to say, they are natures, es-

dities and forms in the human mind, and not merely the artificial forms, can be regarded as final causes in their own right: they all participate in the gnoseological and ontological realization and perfection of the soul through the acquisition of intellectual knowledge and the activity of theoretical contemplation.

In this manner, as Wisnovsky showed, Avicenna follows, but also builds on, a well-established Neoplatonic precedent that regards final causes as both immanent in and transcendent of their effects. In Avicenna's system, the final cause cannot be a transcendent cause in the manner of a Platonic form, since Avicenna adamantly rejects that philosophical doctrine. But given that the pure quiddities exist in the divine intellects (this is discussed in chapter V), pure quiddity can be regarded as the principle that connects the final causality inherent in beings with the final causality associated with cosmic reversion and the intellectual activity of the Agent Intellect. Positing the existence of the pure quiddities in concrete individuals *and* in the human and divine intellects helps to explain Avicenna's dual theorization of final causality as inhering in and transcending individual things. It is the special existence of pure quiddity in the human and divine contexts that connects these two levels of final causality and enables us to regard it as both inherent and transcendent. To conclude, the analysis has shown that quiddity plays a crucial role in Avicenna's explanation of causality and how it relates to existence: a primary role when it comes to intellectual existence, where the inherent and essential formal and final causality of quiddity define it as something self-caused and prior to the complex existents and, hence, to the other causes in external reality; and an instrumental, but by no means negligible, role with regard to concrete existence, where quiddity can be connected with the material and formal causes of a thing, and even, in a qualified sense, with immanent final causality (e.g., the human soul) and efficient causality (in the case of the Agent Intellect and the artificial forms in the human intellect).

4 Substance, essence, and the metaphysical inquiry

One upshot of the previous comments is that proper existence is an ontological mode equally deserving of scrutiny and included, together with realized existence, in the subject matter of the metaphysical inquiry. What is more, realized existence and proper existence both fall within the scope of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), which examines not only the states (*aḥwāl*) of the categorial beings, but also the mode of existence of the supernal intellects and of the First Itself. This observation is methodologically relevant, because God's existence is His quiddity and so amounts to a kind of essential being. Thus, theology would be based ultimately on

sences, and quiddities." The best example of a formal-final cause in the patient is the form of human-ness, which is both the essential form of a human being and also an end and final cause in that it endows the human being with the intellectuality and rationality it needs to perfect its nature and connect it with the transcendent final cause that is the Agent Intellect.

the study of the divine proper existence, making this query also one of the main goals (*maṭālib*) of metaphysics as a whole. By implication, there is a sense according to which ontology in general, or general metaphysics, would be based on the study of quiddities and their mode of existence, not only by derivation from the divine case, but also on account of the ontological priority, irreducibility, and ubiquity of quiddity in Avicenna's philosophy. Yet, in this particular context, the question of how the proper existence of quiddity relates to substance, and especially to substance taken as whole or *sunolon* (together with the external and non-constitutive attributes of essence), calls for additional comments.

In order to shed light on this topic, the relationship between quiddity and substance in Avicenna's philosophy must be tackled, since it bears directly on how existence relates to quiddity in itself. Avicenna's views on this issue, however, are anything but simple, as they display different and not immediately reconcilable elements. At first blush, Avicenna's conception of substance seems to overlap neatly with the Stagirite's theories of *ousia* and with a standard interpretation of *Categories*. Like Aristotle, Avicenna recognizes primary substances (individual concrete beings) and secondary substances (universal concepts in the mind). Moreover, Avicenna adopts the basic distinction put forth by Aristotle between 'present-in' and 'not present-in,' which is conveyed in his works by the Arabic expressions *fī mawḍū'* (and *al-mawjūd fī mawḍū'*) and *lā fī mawḍū'* (*al-mawjūd lā fī mawḍū'*), which serve to underscore the basic distinction between substances and accidents. Whereas the former exist 'not in a subject,' the latter exist 'in a subject.' Thus, for Avicenna, as for Aristotle, substance is defined chiefly in relation to extramental existence, with the implication that substances are primarily co-extensive with the individual existents of the concrete world. According to Avicenna, substance is, first and foremost, that concrete being that can be pointed to (*al-mushār ilayhi*) and that possesses existence 'in itself' or 'from itself' (*bi-dhātihi, min dhātihi*), and which therefore does not rely on another for its existence and does not exist in a subject. Accordingly, Avicenna's standard definition of substance or *jawhar* is 'that which exists not in a subject' (*al-mawjūd lā fī mawḍū'*).³¹⁷ This immediately separates substances from their accidents (*a'rāḍ*), which, in contrast, exist only *in* a subject and are therefore dependent on that exterior subject for their existence. Note that Avicenna's conception of sub-

³¹⁷ This is the standard definition of the quiddity of substance, so to speak. Avicenna often refers to the quiddities (*māhiyyāt*) of the categories, with the implication that each category, including substance, has a quiddity by which it is conceived of and defined in the mind; see, e.g., Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, III.1, 93.5 and 11, and III.8, 140.9 ff., where the master refers to the quiddity of substance (*māhiyyat al-jawhar*) and the quiddities of the categories (*māhiyyatihā*). In the logical works, as in *Categories*, Avicenna's entire analysis is based on the notion of quiddity, which enables us to conceive of the category as a thing in itself and its special existence, and also allows us to relate it intellectually to other things in concrete existence. Framing the discussion of the logical categories in terms of quiddity seems to be proper to Avicenna and should of course be related to his doctrine of *māhiyyah* as something that is eminently conceivable in the mind and can be considered under various aspects, with or without relations, as existing in the mind or in concrete reality, etc.

stances and of the fact that they possess existence in or from themselves does not imply that substances are uncaused or lack a cause. Rather, the point is that the existence they acquire from their cause can be said to belong to them alone and to nothing else, making them the unique recipients and subjects of their existence.

Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that there are salient features that demarcate Avicenna's approach from previous treatments of substance. Recent studies on Avicenna's reception and interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories* have underlined the numerous elaborations the Arabic thinker initiated on the Greek and early Arabic legacy of this treatise. Perhaps the most fundamental of these elaborations concerns Avicenna's conception of the overall scope and nature of Aristotle's treatise, which he decisively reorients toward metaphysics and away from logic. This means that the discussion of the categories, and of substance in particular, perceived by many as a logical inquiry dealing solely with words and notions in the mind, is thoroughly ontologized in Avicenna's system and anchored in a metaphysical framework. For Avicenna, the investigation into the categories is primarily a metaphysical project whose ramifications extend to ontology and even to theology.³¹⁸ In light of this quite drastic rehandling of the function and scope of *Categories*, it is not surprising that Avicenna's conception of substance is characterized by several original features. For my purposes, the most thought-provoking one concerns the relation between essence and substance and Avicenna's tendency to discuss substance in light of the notion of quiddity. As Benevich remarked in a recent article devoted to this issue, "Avicenna lays a strong emphasis on the notions of essence and quiddity of a thing while he defines substance and accident."³¹⁹ This is noticeable in the definitions of substance Avicenna provides in his works. At *Metaphysics* I.5, for example, the master attributes the term *mawjūd* in a primary and eminent way to "the quiddity of substance":

Text 38: We say: Although the existent [*al-mawjūd*], as you learned, is not a genus and is not predicated equally of what is beneath it, it has a meaning agreed upon with respect to priority and posteriority [*'alā l-taqdīm wa-l-ta'khīr*]. The first thing to which it [the notion of 'the existent'

318 For penetrating insight into Avicenna's conception of the categories and of substance in particular, see Bäck, *Avicenna's Ontological Pentagon*; Kukkonen, *Dividing Being*; Benevich, *Fire and Heat*; and Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, especially 26. These studies have established two vital points regarding Avicenna's interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories*, which inform my analysis of substance. First, Avicenna removes the inquiry into the categories from its original logical context and places it squarely within the frame of the science of metaphysics, thereby breaking with a long Greek tradition that had defined the main function of this treatise as a propaedeutic to logic alongside Porphyry's *Eisagoge*. Second, Avicenna expands the notion of substance to include the immaterial beings and separate intellects. In doing so, he departs from earlier Arabic thinkers who restrict the categories to the material primary substances of the world.

319 Benevich, *Fire and Heat*, 257; see also Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 61 ff.

or existence] can be applied is the quiddity that is substance, and then to what comes after it [*wa-awwal mā yakūn li-l-māhiyyah allati hiya l-jawhar thumma yakūn li-mā ba'dahu*].³²⁰

In other passages, Avicenna contrasts the quiddity of substance to the quiddity of accident, and he also at times refers more generally to the quiddities (*māhiyyāt*) of the categories. For instance, at *Categories* I.6, it is said that “the reality of the essence [*ḥaqīqat dhātīhi*] [of substance] is to exist not in a subject,” while the quiddity of accident (*māhiyyatahu*) is to be realized and existent in another thing.³²¹ This habit of talking of the ‘quiddities’ of the Aristotelian categories, including substance, is typically Avicennian and establishes from the outset a narrow link between quiddity and substance. This approach is further amplified by the master’s description of every true substance as that which, *in its very essence or quiddity*, exists not in a subject. Thus, for example, it is in the quiddity or essence of ‘horse’ to exist not in a subject, where horse refers to the essence horseness. In contrast, accidents have a quiddity that prevents them from existing in themselves in an autonomous way and separately from other beings. Accidents, by essence, need a subject to exist.³²²

I should insist at this juncture that Avicenna conceives of the proposition ‘that which exists not in a subject’ as referring either exclusively or primarily to the individual beings of the external, concrete world. Indeed, the main condition for a thing to be a substance is for it to exist not in a subject *in the concrete world*. As Avicenna puts it in *Metaphysics*, “the quiddity of substance is substance with the meaning that it is the existent not in a subject *in concrete reality* [*fī l-a’yān*].”³²³ The essence of substance, therefore, is, at the very least, a potentially existent individual in extramental reality. I say ‘potentially,’ because the description of substance can still apply to a quiddity, which is not *actually realized* as such *in concreto*, but which, if it were to be realized, would be a substance. This formulation, if it corresponds in part to Aristotle’s definition of primary substance, nevertheless shifts the emphasis away from the actually existing primary substance to the more theoretical aspect of the quiddity of substance. More precisely, it stresses the fact that it is the quiddity that is potentially realized in external reality *qua* primary substance. Hence, what seems particularly innovative in Avicenna’s approach is that it identifies quiddity in itself, rather

320 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, I.5, 34.16–17; translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 27, slightly revised.

321 Avicenna, *Categories*, 46. 8–13.

322 As Benevich, *Fire and Heat*, 259, noted, for Avicenna, “being a substance is something non-relational,” that is to say, it has to do with a thing’s quiddity or essence considered in *itself* and not in relation to something else, i.e., an exterior subject. This author elsewhere refers to “the essential character of being substance or accident” (255) and to Avicenna’s “essentialist approach to defining the condition of being substance or accident” (266). The strong connection Avicenna establishes between essence and substance was likely inspired by passages of the Aristotelian corpus, such as *Posterior Analytics* II.7 and *Metaphysics* Z, where Aristotle seems to construe substance in terms of essence.

323 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, III.8, 140.9.

than form or matter or the composite of the two, as the foundation for substantiality. This formulation of substance, it should be noted, can apply equally to the material, composite beings and to the separate, intellectual beings, which Avicenna sometimes describes as substances and immaterial quiddities.³²⁴

Now, given that quiddity can be regarded in itself and with no relation to other things, it is not surprising that Avicenna often portrays the ontological autonomy of substance as corresponding to that of quiddity. For instance, in *Metaphysics* IV.2, he remarks that “since it [the contingent existent] is a substance, it has a quiddity [*māhiyyah*] that includes nothing of relation.”³²⁵ In another passage, he hints that what is realized in existence is the quiddity of the substance (*taḥqīq māhiyyat jawhar min al-jawāhir*).³²⁶ In chapter 3 of *Philosophical Compendium*, Avicenna describes one aspect of substance as form (*ṣūrah*), which is immediately equated with the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and nature (*ṭabi‘ah*) of a thing. Recall that the last two terms are synonyms of pure quiddity in concrete beings and that Avicenna otherwise equates quiddity and form. In the same passage, substance is also said to be like the soul (*jān*) or intellect (*‘aql*) of a human being. In chapter 25 of the same work, Avicenna proceeds to describe substance as “that which has a true reality [*ḥaqīqah*] that does not exist in a subject when the substance exists.” In the same style, he describes substance (*jawhar*) as “that whose being is not in a subject and is a reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and a quiddity (*māhiyyah*) whose being (*hastī*) is not receptive of another thing.”³²⁷ In other passages of his works, Avicenna uses the notions of quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and substantiality (*jawhariyyah*) virtually to the same effect and with the same meaning in mind. This is the case, for example, of the issue concerning the quiddity and substantiality of numbers and quantities in *Metaphysics* III.1.³²⁸ Finally, at the beginning of the meta-

324 See, for instance, *Elements of Philosophy*, 48.11, where substance is glossed as quiddity. Avicenna also insists on this point particularly at the beginning of *Metaphysics* III.8 when he tackles the notion of substance in connection with human knowledge. As shown below, Aristotle also establishes a narrow link between substance and essence, but I argue that Avicenna amplifies this aspect to make it one of the cornerstones of his doctrine of substance. For various formulations of substance in Avicenna’s works, see Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 77–78 and note 197. One passage that brings home the point that substance is quiddity and that substantiality has to do with the potentiality of quiddity to exist not in a subject in the concrete world, rather than to actually exist as such in the concrete world, is found in *Pointers*: substance “is a quiddity and a true nature whose existence only comes about as being not in a subject.”

325 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, IV.2, 178.1–2. It should be noted that this statement appears in the midst of an argument that Avicenna ultimately refutes. What is important for my purposes, however, is the correlation between substance and quiddity that Avicenna makes in that passage. This position is echoed in many other parts of his corpus where substance is expressly equated with quiddity.

326 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, III.3, 106.12–13. I return later to the notion of the realization (*taḥqīq*) of quiddity.

327 Avicenna, *Philosophical Compendium*, 9.13–15.

328 The issue of whether numbers exist as ‘pure quiddities’ or as ‘substances’ is virtually the same and boils down to a matter of phrasing. This explains why Avicenna refers to numbers alternatively in

physics section of *Elements of Philosophy*, Avicenna explains that there are four kinds of substances (*jawāhīr*), the first of which is “immaterial quiddity” (*al-māhiyyah bi-lā māddah*).³²⁹ The expression “immaterial quiddity” refers in this context to the beings or forms that are not in matter, i.e., the separate intellects. Nevertheless, the phrasing is important, because it shows the synonymy of quiddity, form, and substance when talking about the immaterial beings.³³⁰ What is more, Avicenna at *Metaphysics* II.1 defines substance as that which has existence “in itself” or “essentially” (*al-wujūd alladhī bi-l-dhāt*) and what is “self-subsistent” or “self-existent” (*qā'im bi-nafsihi*).³³¹ In *Categories*, he employs a formula that is slightly divergent, but which conveys a similar intent: substance is what has existence “from itself” (*min dhātihī*).³³² In both cases, the formulation takes into consideration the essence or quiddity of the thing. Thus, to return to the first text, Avicenna explains that one example of substance is the existence of the human *qua* human (*wujūd al-insān insānan*). Now, we know that for Avicenna what makes the human exist *qua* human is nothing other than the pure quiddity humanness taken in itself (*min haythu hiya hiya*). It is the quiddity in itself humanness that makes human exist *qua* human and not *qua* triangle or horse, and it is also this pure quiddity that determines human as a substance in the concrete world. Interestingly, the First, who is a quiddity (*māhiyyah*), albeit not a substance (*jawhar*) in any straightforward sense, is also “self-subsistent” or *qā'im bi-dhātihī*.³³³

On the basis of these passages one may infer that Avicenna, on one important level, conceives of substance and substantiality in terms of quiddity. The master routinely refers in his works to ‘the quiddity of substance’ and to a thing’s existing on its own and in itself and ‘not in a subject.’ He ties these notions to the very quiddity or essence of an existent. Now, since all substances are or have quiddities to which this definition applies, the notion of substance can be extended to all things taken ‘in themselves’ and considered in terms of their essence alone. For instance, horseness in itself or the essence of horse would appear to be primarily substance, because

terms of their quidditative natures and their substantiality; the crux of the problem in both cases is whether number ‘in itself’ exists separately in the exterior world, as some ancient philosophers would have it. Avicenna rejects the theory of the separate existence of numbers, just as he rejects the separate existence of the natural quiddities, but he believes that numbers exist in the mind and in concrete things; on this point, see Tahiri, *Mathematics*.

329 Avicenna, *Elements of Philosophy*, 48.11–12. The three others are (1) matter without form; (2) form in matter; and (3) the composite of matter and form.

330 Naturally, “immaterial quiddity” could also refer to the ideas in the mind. This would allow for an alternative and more expansive interpretation of this sense of substance, which would include the intellectual concepts as well. Although this hypothesis is ultimately correct, and although Avicenna reserves a sense of substance for concepts in the intellect, I think the reference in *Elements of Philosophy* is exclusively to the separate intellects.

331 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, II.1, 57.

332 Avicenna, *Categories*, I.2, 10.13; see generally 10–11.

333 Avicenna, *Notes*, 572.11, section 996.

each individual horse that comes to exist exists ‘not in a subject’ and as a fully autonomous and self-contained entity, a state of affairs which is due to nothing other than the pure quiddity horseness. In other words, it is determined by the very essence of horseness for horses to exist not in a subject whenever they exist in the concrete world. In connecting substance so thoroughly with quiddity, Avicenna seems to suggest that it is quiddity in itself that is the main criterion and cause of substantiality in an entity, and that it its quiddity also that fulfills the primary sense of substance.

Avicenna’s move to define substantiality in terms of essence or quiddity is philosophically coherent, given the primacy of the latter notion in his metaphysics. But it has another implication that needs to be fleshed out with regard to the ontology of quiddity: the previous interpretation would seem to make both concrete individuals and intelligible concepts qualify as substances. For quiddities are not just found in the exterior world; they are also apprehended by the mind and can be said to exist intellectually as universals in the mind. Now, since concepts in the mind consist, fundamentally, of pure quiddity, and since being a substance appears to be determined by the very essence or quiddity of a thing, then it is reasonable to infer that concepts in the mind are also determined by a state of substantiality brought about by pure quiddity. What is more, since the quiddities of substances exist in the concrete world and in the mind, it seems that both concrete entities and mental entities that have a common quiddity will all somehow qualify as substances. They will possess their own, irreducible, substantial existence by virtue of this common quiddity.³³⁴ Avicenna alludes to this line of reasoning in a passage of *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*, when he writes the following:

Text 39: For the quidditative meaning humanness [*ma’nā l-insāniyyah*] entails substantiality [*jawhariyyah*] in one way or other. It may accidentally occur to humanness that it be considered together with generality [*‘umūm*], in which case it becomes a species [*naw’*], or that it be considered together with specificity [*khuṣūṣ*], in which case it becomes an individual. Indeed, the substantiality of anything that is substance in itself [*jawhar bi-dhātihi*] does not cease when consequent accidents are [added] to it, whichever these may be.³³⁵

This passage unequivocally supports the hypothesis that, fundamentally, it is pure quiddity—in this case humanness—that conveys substantiality to realized entities in the mind (the species human) and the concrete world (this individual Zayd). Be-

334 There is an intriguing parallel in Avicenna’s philosophical system between the relationship of pure quiddity and its concomitants and the relationship of substance and its accidents. This parallel might explain why Avicenna sometimes describes the concomitants (sing., *lāzim*, *lāḥiq*) of quiddity as accidents and attributes (sing., *‘araḍ*, *ṣifah*), a habit which has often proved vexing to his readers. The previous remarks are all the more relevant, given that the definition of substance as something whose existence is not related to another thing can only be strictly speaking attributed to pure quiddity, which is the only thing that can be envisaged solely in itself.

335 Avicenna, *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*, 332.5–7.

yond and above the accidents and concomitants that attach to essence from the outside, substance is, for Avicenna, grounded in the quiddity in itself. One implication of this position is that all the universal concepts of species and genera in the mind will be substances as well. Although Avicenna is not typically expansive on the subject of the substantiality of mental entities, in *Categories* he forthrightly acknowledges that concepts in the mind represent secondary substances and therefore qualify for the status of substance as well:

Text 40: Individual [things] in concrete reality are substances, and the universal concept [*al-ma'qūl al-kullī*] is also a substance. For it is correctly said of it that it is a quiddity [*māhiyyah*] whose truth in concrete existence is not to be in a subject, not, [however], because it is the concept of substance—for one may ponder about the concept of substance in itself and deem that it is knowledge and accident, where the knowledge [of it] is an accidental thing [connected with] the quiddity, and this is the accident. As for its quiddity, it is the quiddity of substance, and what participates in substance with its quiddity is substance [*wa-l mushārik li-l-jawhar bi-māhiyyatihi jawhar*] ... The universals of substances are substances in their quiddities [*kulliyāt al-jawāhir jawāhir fī māhiyyātihā*].³³⁶

In this important passage, Avicenna perspicuously describes quiddities in the mind as substances inasmuch as they are the universal concepts that correspond to the primary substances in extramental reality. Here the master adopts the common distinction between primary and secondary substances that characterizes much of the medieval reception of Aristotle's metaphysics. He follows Aristotle in regarding universals as intellectual substances that can be predicated of primary substances, but that are not present in them. Thus, the universal human in the mind is a substance that is said of individual concrete human beings. It fulfils the two criteria that Aristotle had set out for these kinds of substances: it is said of (*maqūl 'alā*) and not present-in (*lā fī mawḍū'*) the concrete beings. However, what is remarkable in this passage is that Avicenna makes pure quiddity the main foundation for the substantiality of things, to the extent that concrete beings and universal concepts are both said to be substances in virtue of their quiddities. Concepts are not substantial by virtue of their conceptuality or the fact that they are known, which is accidental, but because of their quiddities, i. e., pure quiddities, which specify these things in their very essence. These quiddities are present in the mind, just as they are present in the concrete individuals.

In other passages, Avicenna proceeds to identify genera and species as likely candidates for secondary substances, since they are directly predicated of the concrete individuals that are the primary substances.³³⁷ As a result, their existence in the mind seems dependent on the existence of the concrete individuals in exterior

³³⁶ Avicenna, *Categories*, III.1, 95.1–11. At III.2, 100.11, Avicenna describes species and genus as intelligible or intellectual substances (*jawāhir 'aqliyyah*). It is interesting in this passage that Avicenna uses this expression to refer *both* to concepts in the mind and to the separate existents.

³³⁷ Avicenna, *Categories*, III.1, 95.5ff., 98.10ff.

reality. What connects the two, however, is quiddity. The concrete individual and the universal substance share a common quiddity, e.g., horseness, whose nature it is, whenever it exists in concrete reality, to exist 'not in a subject' and therefore be a substance. In this regard, perhaps the most significant departure one finds in Avicenna's treatment of Aristotle's categorialism focuses on the notion of substance in the mind in its connection with pure quiddity. More specifically, it appears that Avicenna to some extent reshaped the Stagirite's doctrines in light of his subjective distinction between the universal and pure quiddity. This Avicennian distinction, which is not found in Aristotle, requires a reconsideration of how substantiality can apply to essences in the mind when they are apprehended in themselves. For Avicenna, the state of substance is determined by the lack of a relationship between an essence and another thing, since substance is an essence that can exist on its own and thus be conceived of and considered as such in abstraction from other things. Now, it is noteworthy that this description can accommodate the pure quiddities in the mind, which, I have argued, exist in a true sense, and which are things that are considered in themselves in abstraction from other things and external relations (even if, admittedly, their knowledge or conception always implies an accidental relation between knower and object of knowledge that is exterior to them). Avicenna's essentialist account of substance also allows for the quiddities in the mental sphere to qualify as such. True, in some passages he insists that it is *concrete existence* (not in a subject) that is the ultimate criterion for the substantiality of a thing, so that this thing will necessarily have to exist in this mode in the real, concrete world in order to qualify as a substance. But this condition is potential, not actual. It applies to the essence that need not exist as such in actuality, but only potentially, that is, to the essence that exists solely in the mind. Moreover, given that this condition or criterion is attached to the quiddity of a thing specifically, and that quiddities also exist in a mental context, where they can be envisaged solely in themselves and with no parasitical relation to what is external to them, the notion of substantiality does not seem to be absolutely confined to the primary substances in concrete existence. This assumption is vindicated by Avicenna's recognition of secondary or mental substances in *Categories*, as well as by his claim that substantiality proceeds from the quiddity in itself. In other words, there are some grounds for transferring the autonomy of 'being a substance' that Avicenna attributes to concrete substances to the quiddities in the mind when these are considered solely in themselves. Alternatively, one could contend that the condition of concrete existence not in a subject is determined by the very quiddity prior to its realization, so that this mode of existence necessarily occurs when quiddity becomes realized in concrete existence. Either way, it is quiddity in itself that appears to encapsulate substantiality. This interpretation, it should be noted, is partly aligned with one of the senses of substance *qua* essence Aristotle provides in *Metaphysics Book Zeta*, although Avicenna was keen to adapt it to this doctrine of pure quiddity.

If it is the quiddities in themselves that are fundamentally or primitively substances, regardless of whether they are found in a concrete or mental context, then one

implication would seem to be that all quiddities that are conceived of in the mind can be regarded—on one qualified sense—as substances. On this alternative reading, any quiddity that is apprehended ‘in itself’ in the mind will, on one account, qualify as substance, even if it does not find a match or correspondence in the concrete world and amounts to a fictional or artificial form. Thus, the heptagonal house will be substance, because it is a universal and conceivable essence in the mind, and because, were it to exist in external reality, it would indeed exist not in a subject and not *qua* accident. Considerably more disquieting is the hypothesis that even those quiddities that are accidents proper in the concrete world could be said—again, on this qualified sense, and when considered purely in themselves with no external relations—to be kinds of substances in the mind. Thus, blackness, which always exists as an accident *in* concrete things, and which can also be described as a universal accident in the mind, when construed in the mind *qua* quiddity in itself, could in a sense amount to its own substance. This claim, which derives from the strict correlation Avicenna establishes between essence and substance, might not be as outlandish as it first looks. For the master does posit the possibility of the pure conception of blackness in abstraction from its universality and, one surmises, of its accidental nature as well; in short, in abstraction from its being a universal accident, since the nature of blackness is other than that of either universality or accidentality. Indeed, the intelligible reality of ‘being blackness’ is other than ‘being an accident’ or ‘being universal.’ This more inclusive construal of substance would accommodate the presumption that all the forms in the intellect—which, for Avicenna, exist in a strong sense and not merely by derivation—are also kinds of substances. Yet, this would undermine the axiom reiterated by Avicenna on several occasions according to which the same thing cannot be both accident and substance. So how can one resolve this tension?

Avicenna himself seems at times to entertain in his works the possibility that all quiddities are intellectual substances regardless of their categorial status. Again in *Categories* he explains that being an accident is something external to and non-constitutive of the essence of a thing, something that is related to its existence or realization in the concrete world:

Text 41: The relation of ‘the accident’ to these nine [categories] is like the relation of ‘the existent’ to the quiddities [*māhiyyāt*] of these ten [categories] inasmuch as it is not internal to quiddity [i.e., not constitutive of it]. Just as ‘the existent’ is non-constitutive of the quiddity of these ten [categories], so accidentality [*al-‘araḍiyyah*] is non-constitutive of the quiddity of these nine [categories]. For this reason, being an accident [*‘araḍ*] is not present in the definition of a thing.³³⁸

338 Avicenna, *Categories*, II.2, 66.2–5. Bäck’s more literal translation of the last sentence is perhaps preferable (in Avicenna, *Al-Maḳūlāt*, 120): “there is not present in the definition of a thing that it is an accident.” In the same work, Avicenna defines existence as “a concomitant thing or entity” (*amr lāzim*) (61.3–4) and “as something that follows quiddity” (*amr yalḥaqu l-māhiyyah*) (62.3–4).

One finds a similar formulation in *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*:

Text 42: Likewise, if we know whiteness and heat, we know by necessity that they are both qualities, whereas—as long as it has not been proven—it remains unclear to us that they are both accidents [*araqān*]. ‘Accident’ attaches to the nine and is not essential for them. Likewise, it [accident] does not make known their essences but only makes known their relations to the subject; at first their essences exist in the intellect and only subsequently they become related to the subject. Hence, it has become clear that neither ‘the existent’ nor ‘the accident’ is essential.³³⁹

If this is the case, then the definition and especially the quiddity as it is apprehended in the mind ‘in itself’ and in abstraction from all other things could amount to an intelligible substance, even when certain qualities such as blackness, whiteness, or heat are concerned. Since the state of ‘accidentness’ is external to quiddity itself and is something non-constitutive of essence, it is to be connected with realized existence in the concrete world. For existence itself is, like accidentness, external to and non-constitutive of quiddity. The basic idea seems to be that ‘the accident’ and ‘the existent’ are connected in the realization of the essence in the concrete world as two non-constitutive concomitants of quiddity. In contrast, pure quiddities in the mind are *essentially* intelligible substances.

Avicenna enounces such a sense of *jawhar* in *Definitions*, although it remains unclear in that text whether he does so chiefly by way of report or whether he himself would have embraced this definition. There he explains that “substance is said of the essence of each thing [*li-dhāt kull shay*’], be it humanness or whiteness.”³⁴⁰ The master returns to this point toward the end of the passage, where he mentions whiteness, heat, and movement as examples of this sense of substance. In contrast, in other instances, as in *Categories*, I.3–6, Avicenna defines whiteness as an accident, that is to say, an accident by its very essence, a statement which appears to flatly contradict the one found in *Definitions*. This in turn may suggest that the latter is really to be construed as a report of, say, a Platonic position that grants substantiality to all essences in the concrete world *qua* eternal paradigms. Alternatively, however, it may be that, on the interpretation advocated above, Avicenna reserves a specific sense of substance for all quiddities as they are thought in the mind and another sense for their status *qua* realized entities in the concrete world. This would make substance a somewhat modulated term, like so many other notions of Avicenna’s philosophy.

³³⁹ Avicenna, *Categories of Middle Compendium of Logic*, 331.14–17; translated in Kalbarczyk, *Predication*, 191.

³⁴⁰ Avicenna, *Definitions*, 23.8. This is the first of five definitions of *jawhar* that Avicenna sketches in this section of the work. There are textual variants of this statement depending on the edition consulted, the most important of which is: *bi-l-dhāt li-kull shay*’, i.e., essentially, or in virtue of the essence of each thing. But the point seems to be the same, namely, that each thing ‘in itself,’ i.e., each quiddity in itself, is a substance on one construal of that term. True, this first definition of substance may be a report of an earlier philosophical position, but I think it also illuminates an important aspect of Avicenna’s own understanding of substance in relation with mental existence.

For example, horseness in itself and whiteness in itself, when apprehended intellectually and in pure abstraction from everything else, are intelligible and irreducible entities and intellectual substances. Nevertheless, when they are considered as concrete and realized entities in the world, i.e., in relation to existent subjects and their concomitants and accidents, then relations are introduced that modify their categorial status: horseness remains a substance in the concrete world, but blackness can only be considered as existing in relation to a subject, which makes it an accident.³⁴¹ What is more, it would seem that this shift from a pure intelligible substance (blackness in itself) to its becoming a universal accident can occur already in the mind, when accidentality and universality become attached to pure quiddity as external and added intentions. So, on Avicenna's mind, just as there is a distinction between 'humanness in itself' and 'universal species human,' so there is a distinction between 'blackness in itself' and 'universal accident black.' On this interpretation, the things that determine the categorial status of the universals in the mind are really mental attributes and external concomitants that are not intrinsic to pure quiddity. As mentioned above, Avicenna regards accidentality or 'being an accident' as external to the nine categories. In the same fashion, he explicitly dissociates genusness and speciesness, or 'being a genus' and 'being a species,' from the pure nature or quiddity of a thing, for instance, genusness from animalness and speciesness from humanness. In themselves, the natures 'animalness' and 'humanness' are neither genus nor species, just as 'blackness,' in itself, is not an accident. Avicenna develops this idea in his logical works, such as *Categories*, as well as in *Metaphysics*:

The nature of animal is not genus That of which genusness [*al-jinsiyah*] is predicated is the nature of animal [that is posited] in order that it be considered [as it is] in actuality, and this consideration is its abstraction in the mind.³⁴²

341 Avicenna's treatment of the notion of accident (*'araḍ*) in this same work can help us to better understand this point; see Avicenna, *Definitions*, 25. It appears that none of the five definitions of accident he outlines can be applied to quiddity *in itself* in the mind. An accident, according to this passage, is (a) what exists in a subject in reality; (b) a universal simple concept (*ma'nā*) predicated of many; (c) any meaning or entity (*ma'nā*) that exists externally of a thing's nature; (d) a notion predicated of a thing on account of its existing in another to which it is connected; and (e) a notion or entity whose existence was not at the beginning (i.e., what comes into existence). Even definition (b), which refers to the accident as a universal logical notion in the mind, cannot apply strictly to quiddity in itself (e.g., blackness in itself), which should be distinguished from universality and, hence, the universal; for universality is itself 'accidental' and a concomitant of essence on Avicenna's account and does not constitute the quiddity itself. Thus, if the universal concept 'black' can be predicated of many concrete things *qua* accident, such as 'this black horse' and 'this black chair,' blackness in itself cannot, which undercuts its status as an accident. In brief, just as 'genusness' and 'speciesness' are something added to pure quiddity, so 'accidentness' is, strictly speaking, external and added to it.

342 Avicenna, *Categories*, I.5, 39.3–5; but see, more generally, 38.17–40.6.

This consideration [of pure quiddity] is prior in existence ... With [or in] this existence, it is neither genus nor species, neither one nor many, but it is with this existence only animal and human in itself.³⁴³

Recall in this connection that universality itself (*kulliyah*)—universality taken as a mental concomitant or attribute of essence—is also accidental to pure quiddity in the mind. The implication of all this is that pure nature or quiddity, when apprehended in itself, is neither universal nor genus, species, or accident; it is just itself and nothing else.³⁴⁴ But this does not mean that pure quiddity has no substantiality: rather, as an intelligible and irreducible entity or concept in the mind, it must amount to its own kind of substance or possess its own special substantiality. If not, there is nothing *to which* universality, genusness, speciesness, or accidentness could connect or be attached, with the result that these would amount merely to floating mental attributes without any ontological anchor. Rather, the foundation and ground for these concomitants and attributes is the ‘meta-substance’ of pure quiddity in the mind. Thus, when Avicenna states that “genusness is an accident in this nature [animal in itself] existent in it with the existence of the thing in a subject,”³⁴⁵ he is explicitly designating pure quiddity as a subject and a kind of substance for the accident genusness in the mind.

On one particular interpretation of Avicenna, then, ‘being a substance’ or having substantiality (*jawhariyyah*) would amount to precisely the kind of epistemic and ontological irreducibility, distinctness, and autonomy that qualifies pure quiddity in the mind. The latter would represent a kind of intelligible, quidditative substance in itself. After all, there is no significant difference from the point of view of human cognition and intellection between conceiving of ‘humanness in itself’ and ‘blackness in itself,’ even though these things turn out to be, in the concrete world, either substances or accidents. From a purely epistemological perspective, the same quidditative reality, irreducibility, and distinctness attaches to ‘humanness in itself’ and ‘blackness in itself,’ and nothing internal makes these pure concepts either substances or accidents at the level of their transcendental ontological presence in the mind. It is this ontological and epistemic equivalence that would seem to justify the equal attribution of a kind of intelligible and irreducible substantiality to both types of notions. By the same token, and in spite of Avicenna’s caveat regarding this point, it appears that the same quiddity can be regarded in turn as substance and accident depending on whether it is considered strictly ‘in itself’ or ‘in connection with’ its external attributes and realized existence. This evokes the parallel dis-

343 Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, V.1, 201.10–13: *fa-hādḥā l-i’tibār mutaqaḍḍim fī l-wujūd ... wa-bi hādḥā l-wujūd lā huwa jins wa-lā naw’ wa-lā shakḥṣ wa-lā wāḥid wa-lā kathīr bal huwa bi-hādḥā l-wujūd ḥay-awān faqaṭ wa-insān faqaṭ.*

344 In *Notes*, 60, section 47, Avicenna distinguishes between universality, genusness, and speciesness, on the one hand, and between these notions and pure quiddity to which they relate accidentally, on the other.

345 Avicenna, *Categories*, I.5, 39.20.

inction between quiddity considered ‘on the condition of something else’ and ‘on the condition of nothing else.’ Nevertheless, and in spite of the previous remarks, any definitive answer to this complex question must remain hypothetical at the present, especially given the contradictory elements embedded in Avicenna’s accounts.³⁴⁶ Regardless of the previous intricacies, the analysis has shown that Avicenna’s notions of substance and substantiality should in some way or other be extended to the pure quiddities in the mind. This is not to say, of course, that he rejects the definition of substance as concrete primary substance. Although Avicenna endorses it, I would contend that it does not represent his fundamental position on substance. Certainly, this individual horse *qua* compound of form and matter is substance. But I would argue that for Avicenna its quiddity ‘horseness’ qualifies in a more direct and primitive way as substance due to its irreducible and constant reality. This irreducible reality of horseness, it so happens, exists also in the mind, which has the effect of distending the notions of substance and substantiality to these two domains or contexts. Thus, it is pure quiddity, which, in the final analysis, is the main criterion for substance and substantiality. Avicenna appears to say as much himself in the following statement: “the particulars are not first in the reality of substantiality, for this reality belongs to quiddity and does not differ in it from something else.”³⁴⁷ It finds additional traction in a cluster of passages from *Notes*, which emphasize the equation between substance and essence:

Substance is quiddity [*al-jawhar māhiyyah*]—such as corporeality, soulness [*nafsiyyah*], humanness, and horseness—whose existence, if it exists [as a realized entity], is not in a subject.³⁴⁸

The true reality of substance is quiddity [or, Substance in its true reality is quiddity, *al-jawhar ḥaqīqatuhu māhiyyah*].³⁴⁹

346 Avicenna, *Categories*, I.6, 45–46, rejects the idea that one and the same thing can be both substance and accident; cf. Benevich, *Fire and Heat*, who explores the master’s refutation of this point. This reading would seem to cohere with the bulk of the evidence and is likely to represent Avicenna’s principal interpretation of substance. However, it is important to point out that this interpretation relies heavily on the criterion or condition of realized concrete existence in defining substance, which is one that does not apply to the mental quiddities as such. This, of course, raises the question of the ontological status and substantiality of the latter, when considered as pure objects in the mind. Concluding that the quiddities in the mind are not substantial in any way seems too easy a solution and does not pay heed to Avicenna’s belief that they are also substances and that they have intellectual existence in themselves in the human and divine minds. Since his analysis focuses mostly on the concrete or primary substances, Benevich does not envisage this possibility or address this problem in earnest.

347 Avicenna, *Categories*, III.2, 96.3–4: *wa-l-juz’iyyāt laysat awwal fī ḥaqīqat al-jawhariyyah idh tilka l-ḥaqīqah li-l-māhiyyah allatī lahā wa-lā tukhālifu fihā ghayrahā.*

348 Avicenna, *Notes*, 562.4–5, section 985.

349 Avicenna, *Notes*, 562.7, section 986. In this particular section, Avicenna argues that the First is not a substance *because* He does not have a quiddity. This shows the intertwinement of these two notions in his thought; cf. section 992.

This helps to explain why Avicenna often interchanges the terms *māhiyyah* and *jawhar* in his discussions of substance, and why he also frequently refers to the quiddities of substances (sing., *māhiyyat al-jawhar*). Thus, on one reconstruction, the dual doctrine of the commonality and irreducibility of pure quiddity allows this concrete horse and the quiddity horse in the mind to be substances. What makes them substances is their shared quiddity horseness, with the implication that the pure quiddity horseness is substance or substantiality in a primary way. This in turn should be connected with the statement from *Definitions* quoted above, which suggests that all quiddities can qualify as substances, regardless of whether they are quiddities of substantial things (horseness) or of accidents (whiteness) once they become realized in existence. For the notion of substantiality in this case derives from the immediate and irreducible ontological and epistemic reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of the pure quiddities.³⁵⁰

Avicenna's attempt to combine and elaborate on a rather straightforward Aristotelian theory of concrete primary substance (as exposed in *Categories*) with a more abstract Aristotelian theory of substance *qua* essence (as exposed in *Metaphysics Z*) led him to emphasize the status of substance as a concept in the mind and even to identify it with pure quiddity. But this inevitably led to the formation of tensions in his works. With regard to certain specific points, his arguments seem fraught with ambiguity. For instance, Avicenna recognizes that the universal concepts in the mind are kinds of substances. But he claims also that being a concept in the soul is like being *in* a subject, which is precisely the definition of an accident.³⁵¹ Additionally, he seems at times to connect the states of being a substance and being an accident with essence, so that something is *in itself* an accident or a substance. But on other occasions, as was shown above, he dissociates these notions from quiddity altogether and is intent rather on connecting them either with the mental concomitants (such as genusness and universality in the mind) or with the state of being concretely realized in existence. Finally, he chastises those who commit the mistake of defining the same thing simultaneously as substance and accident. But his own views on mental existence and on the irreducibility, distinctness, and autonomy of pure quiddity in the mind appear to lead to a similar conclusion, albeit by a different route. For when conceived strictly in itself and as a simple and irreducible quidditative mean-

350 Goichon, *La distinction*, 23, perceptively noted the connection between substance and essence in Avicenna's philosophy, bringing attention to the fact that both are what they are by virtue of themselves (*min dhātihi*). Thus, quiddity has its special ontological status and essential entailment by virtue of itself (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) and substance has existence from itself (*min dhātihi*). One apparent consequence of Avicenna's theorization of substance in terms of quiddity is that substance can be attributed to entities that otherwise could not be said to be substances in a direct manner. One salient example is prime matter, not the matter of a specific concrete being, but the quiddity of pure matter or matter in itself, which Avicenna seems at times to regard as substance; see Goichon, *La distinction*, 20–21.

351 Avicenna, *Categories*, III.1, 92.4 ff.

ing, blackness must have the status of a kind of primitive intelligible substance in the mind, although it can also be conceived of as a universal accident when combined with mental concomitants and considered in relation to a subject. Moreover, it only ever exists *qua* accident in concrete beings.

Perhaps the solution to these apparent contradictions lies in the distinctions Avicenna draws between essential being and realized existence, on the one hand, and between quiddity taken ‘in itself’ and ‘with something else,’ on the other. Inasmuch as all of the pure quiddities in the intellect have their irreducible and essential being, they qualify as kinds of intelligible or intellectual substances. This sense of intelligible or intellectual substance is implicitly postulated and latent in many of Avicenna’s discussions of substance, but it is never fully spelled out and must be reconstructed piece by piece.³⁵² In contrast, there is also the sense of substance that includes realized or acquired existence, and which pertains primarily to the extramental beings and the universal concepts that correspond to them in the mind. It is this Aristotelian sense of substance that Avicenna defines as existence ‘not in a subject in the concrete world,’ and it is also this sense that is distinguished from that of the accident, which inevitably exists ‘in a subject in the concrete world.’ It should be noted, however, that these senses of substance and accidents are connected with quiddity only inasmuch as it is a necessary concomitant of the quiddity of a thing for it to exist ‘not in a subject’ or ‘in a subject’ once it is realized in concrete existence. This is why Avicenna argues that ‘accidentness,’ like ‘genusness’ and even like existence itself, is external to quiddity. In any case, this definition of substance requires the postulation of the concomitant of existence, since it is the *realization* or *concretization* of quiddity in the world *qua* substance or accident that determines its categorical status. It is in this regard, I believe, that Avicenna rightly insists that the same thing cannot be both a substance and an accident; that is to say, the same thing cannot have concomitants or *lawāzīm* that make it both a substance and an accident *in concrete reality*. Yet, this full sense and definition of substance, which includes realized existence and, thus, the realization of the concomitants of essence, is not intrinsic to the quiddity of a thing. In fact, Avicenna explicitly acknowledges this point in *Categories*:

You know that whenever a quiddity [of substance] is existent in concrete individuals, it [exists] not in a subject, and you know that this is the first constituent of its reality, just as you know that it is a substance. But you do not know *whether* it is existent in concrete reality not in a subject. Hence, *existence in actuality in concrete reality not in a subject* [*al-wujūd bi-l-fi’l fī l-a’yān lā fī mawḍū’*] is not constitutive of the quiddity of Zayd and is not something [essential to] substance. Rather, it is something that is [inseparably] attached to the existent and that is concomitant to the quiddity of things [*lāhiq li-māhiyyat al-ashyā’*], as you have [already] learned.³⁵³

³⁵² I mean substance with regard to the pure quiddities in the mind, not with regard to the separate existents and intellects, whose sense is well established in Avicenna.

³⁵³ Avicenna, *Categories*, III.1, 93.1–2.

Thus, this sense of substance is not intrinsic to, or constitutive of, quiddity, but dependent on the postulation of realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) and concrete existence (*wujūd fī l-a'yān*). More precisely, it points to the actual realization of the concomitants (*lawāzim*) of quiddity in the concrete world. Clearly, it has little to do with the substantiality of the pure quiddities in the mind, which are apprehended in abstraction from realized existence and concrete substances. Once again, the ontological chasm in Avicenna's metaphysics between the realm of pure intelligibility and the domain of caused, realized, and concrete existence becomes apparent. Overall, it seems coherent with the rest of Avicenna's metaphysics that, at the very least, one qualified sense of substance and substantiality should be reserved for the pure quiddities, and more specifically for the quiddities as intelligible and irreducible entities, especially if one is to take Avicenna's theory of mental existence seriously. At any rate, substance proves an elusive and complicated notion in Avicenna's philosophy, one which cannot readily be limited to the Aristotelian primary substances construed as concrete individuals.

4.1 The notion of 'existing by virtue of one's self' or 'from one's essence' (*al-wujūd bi-dhātihī, min dhātihī*)

What exactly are the ontological implications of these observations when it comes to pure quiddity? Returning to Text 38, one notices that Avicenna attributes the most prior sense of 'the existent' to the quiddity of substance. This is in line with many other passages drawn from the logical and metaphysical works of the master where he makes substances prior vis-à-vis their accidents with regard to existence. On the most straightforward reading, this ontological priority applies to all the quiddities that, in the concrete world, are actualized as individual substances, such as 'this human' or 'this tiger.' But on the more particular and hypothetical reading expounded above, this notion of priority could be narrowed down to the pure quiddities *qua* substances in the concrete world and in the mind, so that it is really 'humanness' and 'tigerness' that could be said to exist as substance in a prior way. Construed in this manner, the thrust of Avicenna's argument would be that it is quiddity *qua* substance that is *muqaddam* or *mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd*, prior in existence, vis-à-vis the accidents and concomitants that attach to it, because it is something that possesses a kind of autonomous and intrinsic ontological reality. It is notable that the various descriptions of substance Avicenna provides, namely, that it has existence "from itself" (*min dhātihī*), "by itself" (*bi-l-dhāt* and *bi-dhātihī*), or "with regard to its essence" (*li-dhāt al-shay'*), can be applied to pure quiddity, which exists "in itself" (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya, bi-dhātihī*, etc.) and whose essence belongs only to itself (*fa-dhātuhu lahu bi-dhātihī*).³⁵⁴ In *Metaphysics* V.1, Avicenna proceeds to emphasize that

354 Cf. Avicenna, *Metaphysics* I.5, 34.16–17; II.1, 57.4–6, 58.3–4; *Categories*, I.2, 10; *Definitions*, 23–24.

the existence of pure quiddity is prior to ‘natural existence’ (*wujūduhā aqdam min al-wujūd al-ṭabīʿī*), which in this context refers to the concrete existent taken with its concomitants and accidents. What is said to follow quiddity in this same chapter, i.e., the various quidditative accidents and concomitants, finds a parallel in Text 38 in Avicenna’s mention of “what comes after” the quiddity of substance, namely, the accidents that inhere in a subject.³⁵⁵ In brief, one could argue that the ontological priority that Avicenna attributes to substance is not altogether disconnected from the ontological priority he attributes to pure quiddity vis-à-vis its concomitants. These parallels are strengthened by Avicenna’s essentialist construal of substance, which reduces one sense of substance and substantiality to quiddity and its constitutive elements, including the state in which these exist in the mind. The key idea here is that what is substantial and essential is prior to what is merely accidental, where ‘accidental’ refers not only to the accidents that attach to substance in the concrete world, but also to the concomitants that follow quiddity in the mind, i.e., to all the things that are external to ‘the thing in itself.’ In both cases, the kind of priority Avicenna has in mind is an essential and ontological one, whereby the quidditative meaning (*maʿnā*) precedes all the other meanings that associate with quiddity to constitute the composite substance or existent, whether the universal in the mind or the concrete composite. This ontological priority of the *maʿnā* of pure quiddity applies to both concrete and intellectual existents.³⁵⁶

If the foregoing hypothesis is correct, then it strengthens the central position of essence and its special mode of existence in Avicenna’s conception of metaphysics. For the latter science would consist to a large extent of an investigation of the senses and modes of existence that pertain to quiddity and its essential concomitants. This of course is different from saying that metaphysics studies primary substances in a sense that coincides exclusively with the existent or *al-mawjūd* in external reality. Rather, the primary object of the metaphysical inquiry is the quidditative meaning and entity, *maʿnā*, as it exists in the mind and in concrete reality, and as it relates to its external concomitants and accidents. So that whenever Avicenna states that ‘absolute existence’ or ‘existence *qua* existence’ or ‘the existent inasmuch as it is

355 Admittedly, Avicenna in this passage intends to refer primarily to quiddity in complex beings and substances, i.e., to quiddity in actual concrete beings and mental universals, rather than to quiddity in itself as an abstract and distinct form in the mind. This is indicated not only by the connection between this passage and *Posterior Analytics* II.7, where the emphasis is on actually existing substance, but also by Avicenna’s equating *māhiyyah* with *jawhar*. In spite of this, recall that quiddity is always just quiddity, even in complex substances, and remains irreducibly itself with its *wujūd khāṣṣ* and its own mode of being. So that the particular phrasing of this passage and the statement concerning the ontological priority of quiddity remain noteworthy and stand as departures from Aristotle’s text.

356 Again, the focus here is on a kind of *ontological* priority. This is made clear in *Metaphysics* IV.1, where Avicenna describes the priority of the one over the multiple as a priority *in existence*. This case is also comparable to the priority of the simple over the complex that is mentioned in V.1 in connection with essence.

the existent' is the primary subject of metaphysics, he is implicitly including the ontology of quiddity in its scope. What is more, he is also implicitly subsuming the various modes of *tashkik* and the senses of realized and special existence. Finally, he is implicitly including the special essential mode of existence of God, which lies at the center of the theological inquiry. For the theological study of God's existence and the study of general ontology entail an analysis of how quiddity relates to its concomitants, including realized existence. In many cases, this is another way of saying that it also studies how substance relates to its accidents. Yet, since proper and realized existence, since 'the thing' and 'the existent,' are virtually always co-extensional (at least when it comes to the composite beings), the subject matter of the metaphysical inquiry, for all intents and purposes, can be described as focusing on *al-mawjūd*.

These remarks can account for two important phenomena in the Avicennian sources: first, Avicenna's salient self-awareness regarding the task of disambiguating the various modes and senses of existence that are at the epicenter of the metaphysical project, including that which applies exclusively to quiddity and substance, and that which applies to its accidents and concomitants. This is why he frequently refers to the modes of existence (*anḥā' al-wujūd*), the various senses of existence (*ma'ānī l-wujūd*), the 'howness' or manner of existence (*kayf al-wujūd* and *kayfiyyat al-wujūd*), and, of course, to modulation (*tashkik*) and the modalities (*jihāt*). For Avicenna, these distinctions refer not so much to kinds of existents (*ajnās al-mawjūdāt*), as they did for Fārābī and Ibn 'Adī, but rather to modes and senses of existence as these apply to substances in concrete reality and in the mind, that is to say, to pure quiddity and its concomitants in concrete reality and in the mind, and, additionally, to God's special *ma'nā* and *māhiyyah*.³⁵⁷ Second, and equally importantly, framing metaphysics as an investigation into essence sheds light on why Avicenna frequently defines substance (*jawhar*) in terms of quiddity (*māhiyyah*). Following some leads in Aristotle and his commentators, Avicenna frequently describes substance not primarily as a compound of form and matter, nor even as an individualized and concrete realized essence (one possible meaning of *dhāt*), but expressly as quiddity and even sometimes as abstract or intelligible quiddity.³⁵⁸ For the sense of substance *qua* quiddity is for him metaphysically primitive and foreshadows these other senses of substance. More specifically, the upshot with regard to ontology is that the statement that substance exists 'in itself' or 'from itself' is in many ways convertible with the statement that

357 Thus, at *Metaphysics* I.2, 16, the master explains that what is investigated in metaphysics is the quidditative meaning and entity (*ma'nā*) and its mode of existence (*naḥw al-wujūd*) with regard to both material and immaterial beings. One exemplification of this statement appears later on in chapter I.4, where it is said that the essence of number (*dhāt al-'adad*), that is, the quiddity of number 'in itself,' is among the topics explored in metaphysics. But of course, the notion of *ma'nā* can be extended to all quiddities, placing them at the heart of the metaphysical project.

358 I already mentioned some key examples, but other instances can be found in *Categories*, 31.8 (substance is that whose thingness (*shay'iyyah*) is realized and subsistent in itself); 48.5 ff.; 92.4–93.3 (substance is quiddity that is realized in the world); 94.13 ff.

quiddity exists ‘in itself’ or ‘from itself.’ These formulations are equally permissible, given that substance under one angle is essence. The primacy and priority of substance in existence is essentially that also of pure quiddity, not only in the concrete world, but also in the mind, since the quiddities in the intellect are also substances.

Categories I.2 offers additional insight into the relation between substance, quiddity, and existence. In that chapter, Avicenna relies on the same framework and set of arguments than in *Philosophical Compendium* and *Metaphysics* to argue for the relative semantic malleability and modulated nature of the notion of existence. There too, he refrains from classifying it as either a pure univocal or equivocal term and discourses on its various predicative distinctions and nuances. As in these other works, he refers to “modulation in priority and posteriority” and “modulation in strength and weakness,” but in addition he introduces another aspect, “modulation in degree of deservingness,” which is of direct relevance to the present analysis.³⁵⁹ The crucial passage reads as follows:

Text 43: It [existence and the way in which it is predicated] can also differ by way of being more deserved and more appropriate [*al-awlā wa-l-aḥrā*], since the existence of some things comes in virtue of themselves [*fa-inna l-wujūd li-ba‘d al-ashyā’ min dhātihī*], and [the existence of] other things come in virtue of another [existent, *min ghayrihi*]. Now, that which exists in virtue of itself [*al-mawjūd bi-dhātihī*] is more deserving of existence than that which exists in virtue of another [*al-mawjūd bi-ghayrihi*].³⁶⁰

How does this distinction between primary and secondary in existence, or more and less deserving of existence, relate to quiddity/substance? The distinction Avicenna makes in this passage seems significant, because it focuses again on two aspects or modes of existence that can be said to pertain to quiddity/substance: “existence in virtue of oneself” or “in virtue of one’s essence” (*al-wujūd min dhātihī*), and “existence in virtue of another” (*al-wujūd min ghayrihi*). This distinction is correlated later on in the passage with “the existent in or by itself” (*al-mawjūd bi-dhātihī*) and “the existent by another” (*al-mawjūd bi-ghayrihi*) respectively. Recall that the two notions *bi-dhātihī* and *bi-ghayrihi* underpin Avicenna’s proof of God’s necessary existence and of the contingent existence of all other things. In this context, *bi-dhātihī* can refer *either* to God’s being necessary of existence *in Itself* (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*), or to all other things’ being contingent of existence *in themselves* (*mumkin al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*). As for the expression *bi-ghayrihi*, it refers to an existent’s necessary relation to its cause, which makes it necessary of existence by or through another (*wājib al-wujūd bi-ghayrihi*).

In the passage at hand, however, Avicenna associates necessity, not possibility, with *wujūd bi-dhātihī*. Not only does he state simply that some things *exist* or *have*

³⁵⁹ Treiger, Avicenna’s Notion, provides a cogent analysis of the text and its various implications. I take issue with a small point in his analysis, which I develop below. Bäck (in Avicenna, *The Maqūlāt*, 43–44) translates *al-awlā wa-l-aḥrā* as “primary and secondary.”

³⁶⁰ Translation based on Treiger, Avicenna’s Notion, 354, with some modifications.

existence in virtue of themselves, but he also adds that this mode or aspect or state of existence is more deserving of (*awlā*) the term *wujūd* than “existence in virtue of another” (*al-wujūd bi-ghayrihi*). Clearly, he would not make this assertion if he were talking about the possibility of existence that belongs to the self or essence of a thing. Moreover, nuances in the phrasing seem particularly relevant: in the first case, existence comes *from* the essence or self (*min dhātihi*); in the latter case, *from* another (*min ghayrihi*). The underlying idea is that existence in virtue of oneself is correlated with self or essence and, hence, with essential necessity, and existence in virtue of another with the possibility of exterior causation, i. e., the possibility that another existent can cause existence in the effect. This explains why the former is more deservedly and more appropriately called an existent than the latter. Thus, what is striking about this passage is that it turns Avicenna’s standard modal scheme on its head, where the self or essence is associated with possibility and existence coming from another with necessity. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in formulation: whereas the traditional or standard scheme fixes the distinction at the level of the modalities of ‘the possible’ and ‘the necessary,’ which implies that the same existent can be perceived from different angles, i. e., the same existent is both possible and necessary of existence depending on whether it is connected to its cause, the passage in *Categories* contrasts *the existence* associated with the essence or the self to *the existence* associated with the other, as well as “that which exists in virtue of itself” (*al-mawjūd bi-dhātihi*) to “that which exists in virtue of another” (*al-mawjūd bi-ghayrihi*). This suggests not only different entities or kinds of existents, but also (possibly) different modes of existence. This hypothesis would be in line with the tenor of the passage, which, as in *Philosophical Compendium*, seeks to disentangle ways in which existence can be predicated differently of different things. Fundamentally, then, this passage alters the way in which the modalities relate to the two relata: necessity is here connected with the self or essence, and possibility with the other.

This in turn raises the question of the objects to which Avicenna’s comments refer in this passage, which are left unspecified. What being or class of beings would justify reversing Avicenna’s traditional scheme of *mumkin al-wujūd bi-dhātihi* and *wājib al-wujūd bi-ghayrihi* into the one exposed in *Categories*, which associates necessary existence with essence or the self and possible existence with the other? In his commentary on this passage, Treiger cogently suggests that Avicenna is referring to causes and effects and especially—or perhaps exclusively—to the relation between the First and its effects. This, at first glance, makes sense, since God is the ultimate cause that has existence ‘in virtue of Himself,’ while all the other beings are effects that have existence ‘in virtue of another.’³⁶¹ However, upon further consideration,

361 Treiger, *Avicenna’s Notion*, 357: “In the latter example [i. e., “modulation in degree of deservingness”], the reference would appear to be to cause and effect in general, or more specifically to the Necessarily Existent ... and the contingent existents.” Treiger relies on this interpretation to further his claim that the notion of existence is modulated on the transcendental level in addition to the pre-

limiting the interpretation to this aspect alone seems problematic, and this for two main reasons. First, the argument seems too general to apply to the First specifically or exclusively. In this connection, Avicenna's statement that "some things" (*ba'd al-ashyā'*) have their existence in virtue of themselves seems to undermine Treiger's contention that the First is to be taken as the main or exclusive referent of the sentence. As for the idea that the passage refers more generally to causes and effects, it runs into the difficulty that all causes (except the First) are also effects, so that the qualification 'from itself' (*min dhātihī*) could not literally apply to any of them, if used to intimate ontological autonomy. So it seems that we are faced with a paradox: if the First alone is intended, then why does Avicenna mention "some things" (*ba'd al-ashyā'*) as opposed to "the thing"? And if other beings, such as all causes, are intended, then how can the claim that their existence derives from their essence or self (*min dhātihī*) be correct?

An alternative, yet potentially complementary, interpretation to that of Treiger is that Avicenna is referring in this passage to the distinction between the existence of substances and that of accidents. This would fit squarely with the contents and tenor of *Categories*. Substances have their existence 'in' or 'from themselves,' in the sense that they exist 'not in a subject.' Accidents, in contrast, exist 'in a subject' and, thus, can be said to possess their existence 'from another' and, hence, derivatively. This interpretation seems corroborated by the fact that Avicenna, in the larger section from which this passage is taken, expressly correlates the state of being more deserving (*awlā*) of existence with the state of being prior in existence, so that a substance, for example, is more deserving of existence than an accident precisely because it is prior to it. Naturally, these considerations can also be tied to the notion of causality: a substance *qua* cause is prior to an accident or to another substance *qua* effect (either temporally or essentially) and is thus more deserving of the notion of existence. In fact, these notions appear to be interconnected in Avicenna's mind: what is prior is usually a cause of some kind, and this causal priority justifies its being more deserving of existence relative to other things. While all of this might be true, it still does not provide an adequate gloss on Avicenna's claim that some things have existence 'by virtue of' or 'from themselves,' since all causes and substances will themselves, under another aspect, be posterior entities and effects in need of an exterior and prior cause. Now, given what has been said previously about the relationship between substance and quiddity, as well as about the essential being of quiddity, one can extend the scope of the argumentation here to include the pure quiddities. This is because the being of pure quiddity can be said to be 'in virtue of itself' or 'from itself,' in a way not dissimilar to how substance can be said to have existence 'from itself.' In fact, given that substance is quiddity on a certain reading of the evidence, it appears that each substance has existence 'from itself' precisely because it

dicamental level in Avicenna's philosophy. Although I think Treiger's overarching argument is correct, it does not on my view find traction in this passage.

has a quiddity that possesses its own essential being. It is not by virtue of its accidents and concomitants that a substance has existence ‘from itself,’ but rather by virtue of its having an irreducible quiddity and essential reality. This, I believe, is in part what is meant by “some things” in the *Categories* passage quoted above: these “things” are the substances construed as irreducible quiddities, at the very least in the intellect, but also, perhaps, in exterior reality, where substance is really synonymous with the realization of quiddity in the concrete world. So Avicenna’s statement here would be true of both concrete and mental quiddities/substances. On the one hand, the pure quiddities *qua* substances in the mind can be said to have existence ‘from themselves’ or ‘in themselves,’ as opposed to things in the exterior world, which require an efficient cause exterior to them. On the other hand, what makes the substance exist in itself or from itself in concrete reality is, fundamentally, the quiddity, the quiddity *of* substance, e.g., humanness in this concrete human being.³⁶² In this manner, quiddity can be said to have an essential being that belongs ‘to itself,’ that is realized ‘in itself,’ that is *dhātī*, as opposed to the realized existence that accrues to it from the outside, which is, in contrast, ‘*araḍī*. In this connection, one should note that the argumentative similarities and the terminological overlap between this passage of *Categories* and other passages of the same work, as well as the excerpts from *Philosophical Compendium* and *Metaphysics* discussed previously where the master explicitly defines substance in terms of quiddity, are striking. These texts contrast a sense or mode of existence that is extrinsic, accidental, and ‘from another,’ and which is usually limited to realized existence in the concrete world, to a sense or mode of existence that is irreducible, essential, and ‘from itself.’ Thus, one could argue that the term *dhātī* that is used in *Philosophical Compendium* to distinguish the mode of quiddity from realized existence can be connected with the ‘existence from oneself’ (*min dhātihi* and *bi-dhātihi*) that is invoked in *Categories*. What makes this linkage compelling is the merging of the notions of substance and quiddity in Avicenna’s metaphysics. This in turn should be connected with the notion of the ontological priority that Avicenna attributes to pure quiddity in *Metaphysics* V.1–2 and to ‘the quiddity of substance’ in I.5. More generally, the close interface of the notions of quiddity and substance means that the various distinctions related to the existence of substances that Avicenna introduces in these works have to be construed chiefly in light of his doctrine of pure quiddity.

362 Bäck (in Avicenna, *The Maqūlāt*, 44, note 102, and 156, note 301) seems to uphold a similar interpretation. He argues that *min dhātihi* is similar to *bi-dhātihi* and means “through its essence” and that quiddity in itself serves “as a constituent for the substance existing *in re*.”

5 Being quiddity: Avicenna's response to the *mutakallimūn*

5.1 Avicenna and Bahshamite ontology and theology

Some features of Avicenna's ontology of quiddity find an important precedent in the works of early Muslim theologians. As Jolivet, Wisnovsky, and others have shown, Avicenna's thought should be interpreted not only in light of the Greek sources, but also of the developments within Islamic theology (*kalām*) that were taking place before and during his life.³⁶³ Building on these studies, one contention made in the present book is that Avicenna's ontology of quiddity was decisively shaped by sources emanating from Bahshamite circles. As I argued in chapter II, the theory of pure quiddity, as well as the epistemological system Avicenna builds around it, bear many striking resemblances to Abū Hāshim's and his followers' theory of the Attribute of the Essence (*ṣifat al-dhāt*). In what follows, I explore in more detail the ontological implications of these theories and assess the extent to which Avicenna's theory of essential being should be regarded as a reaction to Bahshamite ontological theories.

Two key features that characterize the Bahshamite and Avicennian philosophical systems are the distinction between realized existence and thingness and the restriction of realized existence to a specific domain of their ontology. For the former, existence refers exclusively to concretely existent things and entities in extramental reality. For the latter, it delineates the realm of composite or complex beings in the mind (the universals) and in the concrete world (the particulars). Consequently, realized existence represents only one aspect of their ontology and is not exhaustive of all ontological aspects and modes. For the Bahshamites recognize the reality or subsistence of the nonexistent things (*ashyā' ma'dūmah*) as well as the reality of the states (*aḥwāl*), which are located midway between existence and nonexistence. These two classes of objects possess a special status in their ontology. Avicenna, for his part, reserves special senses and modes of existence for the First and the pure quiddities. Since the Bahshamite School precedes Avicenna chronologically, I argue that this aspect of the *shaykh's* system may have arisen out of a dialectical confrontation with the Bahshamite sources. Avicenna's ontology of quiddity was most likely informed by ideas streaming from this school, either by way of assimilation or by way of reaction to doctrines that he deemed unacceptable. The aim of the present section is to generate some insight into the way in which this process may have occurred.

Avicenna's ontological theories are in some important respects comparable to those formulated by his theological counterparts. For instance, he follows the Ash'arites in holding that 'the thing' and 'the existent' are co-extensional, so that there cannot be nonexistent things (*ashyā' ma'dumah*). On this point, Avicenna diverges from

363 Jolivet, *Aux origines*; Wisnovsky, *Notes*; idem, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*; Belo, *Essence*.

the Mu‘tazilites, for whom the nonexistent thing can be said to possess a degree of reality and to be (at the very least) an object of mental consideration inasmuch as it is defined by the Attribute of the Essence. On the other hand, Avicenna rejects the Ash‘arite tendency to conflate existence and thingness and to regard them as intentionally identical. In fact, Avicenna is directly indebted to the Mu‘tazilites for the distinction he establishes between thingness (*shay‘iyyah*) and existence (*wujūd*) as two irreducible notions. What is more, he is also indebted to them for the view that mental objects are not mere ‘nothings,’ as some Ash‘arite deniers of mental existence would claim, but rather ‘things,’ since they can be contemplated and even cognitively grasped. Hence, from Avicenna’s perspective, the Bahshamites had put their finger on a crucial realization, namely, that objects in the mind must possess an ontological status that is distinct from that of objects in the real world.³⁶⁴ Yet, if the Bahshamites had been perceptive in realizing this, they were on the other hand misguided in the manner they went about addressing this issue. For, again from Avicenna’s perspective, mental objects cannot cogently be said to be nonexistent things, as the Mu‘tazilites contend, since, at the very least, they can be conceived of and, hence, must possess mental existence. As a corollary, the Ash‘arite position that mental objects are neither things nor existents could not be correct, for it did not even recognize the deflated status of ‘a thing’ that the Mu‘tazilite position granted to objects in the mind.

It is at this juncture that the key consideration of realized existence enters the picture. The Mu‘tazilites restrict *wujūd* to the realized, concrete existence of individual atoms and their accidents. For the Bahshamites, realized existence, or rather, ‘the attribute of realized existence’ (*ṣifat al-wujūd*), is an attribute that does not differ among existents. It is predicated univocally of all existent things and applies equally to all the substances and accidents in the exterior world, as well as to the angels and God Himself.³⁶⁵ The upshot of this is that mental objects, by definition, cannot be regarded as existents in any true sense, due to their mental and conceptual status. Rather, they can only be described as things that can be thought and spoken of, without ever assuming the entitative status and fundamental features of real existence. Avicenna, in this case as well, follows the Bahshamite tendency to regard realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, *wujūd ḥāsil*, *wujūd ithbātī*) as only one aspect of a broader ontology. Neither Abū Hāshim and his followers nor Avicenna limit their ontology entirely to the notion of realized existence, but recognize other ontological modes.

364 References to some of the key Mu‘tazilite texts have already been given in previous chapters. For a discussion of knowledge and the class of nonexistent things, as well as the key role the Attribute of the Essence plays in this connection, see Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 108.9–14, 176.16 ff.; Abū Rashid, *Issues*, 31.26 ff., 34.12 ff., 37.11 ff.; idem, *Addition*, 191.7–192.3; Ibn Mattawayh, *Reminder*, vol. 1, 13.23 ff., 14.4–5, 17.4 ff.; Frank, *Al-ma‘dūm*; and Dhanani, *The Physical Theory*, 17 ff.

365 For the attribute of existence and its univocal predication, see Ibn Mattawayh, *The Complete Paraphrase*, 34, 135–136; idem, *Reminder*, vol. 1, 13.12 ff., 15.19–20; Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 175–176; and Frank, *Beings*.

For the former, existence is an attribute that is said of a concrete atom or accident. For the latter, existence is a concomitant that is entailed by quiddity but remains external to it, to the extent that he sometimes describes existence as the attribute (*ṣifah*) of a thing. In so doing, Avicenna comes close to a Bahshamite formulation.³⁶⁶ In spite of this, he rejects the Bahshamite rationale that mental objects, because they are not realized existents in the concrete world, cannot in any way be said to exist. For it is well known that the master regards objects in the mind as mental or intellectual existents and thus extends *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* to these entities as well. Thus, whereas for the Mu'tazilites, 'the thing' that is not 'an existent' is 'a nonexistent' or 'in a state of nonexistence,' but can nevertheless be described and cognized through the Attribute of the Essence, which, in contrast, possesses subsistence and is real (*thābit*), for Avicenna, what does not fall under realized existence is not 'a nonexistent thing.' It is pure quiddity, which possesses its own distinct and special mode of existence in the mind. According to the master, pure quiddity is neither a realized existent, nor a nonexistent entity (*ma'dūm*), nor a state or attribute that has an intermediary status between existence and nonexistence. True, it is to be demarcated from 'the realized' and 'the established' (in concrete existence) in the same way that the thing of the Mu'tazilite can be demarcated from the realized existent. But it possesses its own special mode of existence.

To a large extent, then, the Mu'tazilite reflection on 'the thing' and its relation to both the Attribute of the Essence (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) and the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*) oriented Avicenna's ontological approach. By recognizing that thingness in the mind is 'something' and a valid object of thought that could not, however, be defined in terms of existence, the Mu'tazilites, Avicenna believed, had opened a Pandora's box regarding the way in which existence relates to thingness. For if thingness does not exist in any way, then how is it conceivable? And if it does exist, then in what way is it distinct from realized existence? Indeed, on this point, the Bahshamite position seems coherent: since 'the thing' and 'the existent' are distinct, it would seem that the conception of 'the thing' cannot be identified in any way with existence or 'the existent,' lest these two notions not be distinct after all. But in Avicenna's eyes, the Bahshamite position was self-defeating and undermined by an insoluble paradox: either 'the thing' always exists, but then thingness and realized existence are not truly distinct and separate; or they are separate, but then 'the thing' cannot be conceived of in any way, since what exists neither in concrete reality nor in the mind is not a valid object of conception. Avicenna's solution to this conundrum was not only to recognize mental existence *per se*, but also to ascribe a special mode of existence to pure quiddity or thingness, which is identical to its very intelligibility and conceivability in the mind, and which, as such, is distinct from realized existence. This solution, it should be noted, if it was intended in some ways as a rebuttal of the Bahshamite position, was directly informed by ideas from this school,

366 Avicenna, *Discussions*, 131, section 350.

since it restricts realized existence to only a segment of the ontological spectrum and recognizes a special ontological state that is distinct from both realized existence and nonexistence.

5.1.1 The Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity

These general considerations help to better understand the development of Avicenna's thought regarding the ontological status of mental objects and more specifically of the pure quiddities in the intellect. I would surmise that this development was made possible only as a result of Avicenna's exposure to Bahshamite sources. But in what other and subtle ways was the Bahshamite ontology impactful on the *shaykh al-ra'is*? To explore this issue in more detail I shall focus once more on the parallels between Abū Hāshim's theory of the Attribute of the Essence (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) and Avicenna's theory of quiddity in itself. These two doctrines encapsulate a basic similarity between these thinkers and underline the limited and well-defined scope they attributed to realized existence in their ontological systems. What is more, the ontological implications associated with these two theories are in some regards so close that the question of a textual relation between them naturally arises.

In chapter II, we saw that the Attribute of the Essence is inseparable from the thing-itself (*shay'*), even though it can be conceived of regardless of whether existence or nonexistence are attributed to that thing. This special attribute can be described as irreducible, constant, absolute, unconditioned, and prior to realized existence. Even though Abū Hāshim and Avicenna construe these notions differently, it is remarkable that the latter uses the very same set of notions to describe pure quiddity. For instance, Abū Hāshim's claim that this attribute is 'unconditioned by anything else' (*ghayr mashrūṭah bi-amr siwāhā*) echoes Avicenna's view that pure quiddity is 'without the condition of another thing' (*bi-lā sharṭ shay' ākhar*).³⁶⁷ For our present concerns what is important is that for these two thinkers the state of being conditioned or unconditioned is related to the realization of existence: the Attribute of the Essence as well as pure quiddity are what they are in abstraction from realized existence, which is external and posterior. For the Bahshamites, existence is posterior because it is an attribute (*ṣifah*) that follows the Attribute of the Essence, but is not a requisite for the latter to be intelligible. For Avicenna, existence is posterior logically and essentially, since it is a non-constitutive concomitant (*lāzīm*) of pure quiddity. Hence, in these systems, realized existence is defined as something external, extrinsic, and posterior to essence taken in itself. The consideration of existence is not required to attain the knowledge of thingness, of what a thing is in its core and reality. It represents a condition (*sharṭ*) that is added to the pure conception of thingness.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ For the reference to Abū Hāshim, see Frank, *Beings*, 53.

³⁶⁸ Given their special nature, the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity are a permanent reality (*ḥaqīqah*), since they are what enable us to know the core and quiddity of a thing, regardless of its

In light of this, it appears that the Bahshamite and Avicennian positions are similarly premised on the intrinsic intelligibility of thingness in the mind, although a different ontological status is ascribed to it. If the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity are essentially *prior* to realized existence, it is because they can be conceived of in the mind without taking into account realized extramental particulars. Their intelligibility, irreducible meaning, and reality do not depend on the actual existence of a concrete being and can be immediately grasped by the mind. But here an important difference needs to be emphasized. Since the Bahshamites do not recognize mental existents *per se*, their notion of realized or actual existence extends only to the concrete beings of the exterior world. For Avicenna, in contrast, and as I emphasized in the preceding sections of this book, realized existence applies to the concrete individual beings as well as to complex universal concepts in the mind. So that the priority of pure quiddity over existence is true not only of concrete extramental beings that do not yet exist, but whose pure quiddity is intelligible (such as this heptagonal house or even that individual horse), but also of the universal concepts, which exist in the mind in a mode that is complex and posterior when compared to the state of pure quiddity.³⁶⁹

Avicenna therefore fundamentally agrees with the Bahshamites that thingness has a distinct and irreducible reality and ontological state in the mind. What the Bahshamites call a real or subsistent nonexistent thing (*shay' ma'dūm thābit*), that is, a nonexistent thing that can nevertheless be conceived and spoken of by virtue of its Attribute of the Essence, corresponds in important ways to the pure intelligible quiddities of Avicenna's ontology, which are apprehended by the intellect in a direct and simple manner, regardless of whether they have concrete instantiations in the external world or are the object of universal conceptualization. Just as nonexistent things remain intelligible by virtue of the permanent actuality of the Attribute of the Essence, so quiddity in itself is intelligible even in abstraction from realized beings

mode of existence. As Thiele, Abū Hāshim, 371, puts it: "the 'attribute of the essence' has an eternal and necessary reality." As for Frank, *Beings*, 54, he explains that "Whereas [for Abū Hāshim] all other attributes that a thing may have are conditional upon the actuality of the existence of the thing-itself (*dāt*) of whose being they are states or characteristics, the Attribute of the Essence, since it is unconditioned (*gayru ma'srūta*) is prior to existence." By "prior to existence," Frank means the actual or realized existence of the individual entity or thing. Hence, as Frank adds, "the atom is an atom even when it is nonexistent."

369 Ontological priority is therefore a univocal notion for the Bahshamites and refers solely to the subsistence of the *ma'dūmāt* and *maqūrāt* before they acquire realized existence. But it has a whole range of meanings for Avicenna, since it is an important aspect of *tashkīk al-wujūd* and is itself subject to modulation, as was shown earlier. With regard to quiddity, it can refer either to the priority of the concept of pure quiddity vis-à-vis the complex universal in the mind; or to the priority of quiddity in the mind vis-à-vis individual beings in the concrete world (for instance, in the case of artificial forms); to the priority of pure quiddity as a principle and *ma'nā* in the concrete being; finally, in its strongest metaphysical sense, it refers to the existence of the quidditative forms in the Agent Intellect and the other divine intellects, which precede individual material instantiations.

due to its own irreducible intelligible nature.³⁷⁰ Thus, when some of the Bahshamites refer to the Attribute of the Essence as being “real [or actual] in the states of nonexistence and existence,”³⁷¹ they are stressing the unconditioned, absolute, and special ontological status of this attribute in a manner reminiscent of how Avicenna describes pure quiddity. In this manner, the class of subsistent nonexistent things of the Bahshamites parallels the pure quiddities of Avicenna’s noetics. In spite of their different ontological status, these groups of entities share striking similarities: they can be spoken of, intellected, and their thingness known, and this, even though particulars need not exist actually and be endowed with realized existence in the concrete world. I would contend, therefore, that Avicenna was profoundly influenced by the Bahshamite ontological model in elaborating his theory of mental existence and the place of quiddity within it. The theory of the Attribute of the Essence in particular lies at the crux of this phenomenon, even though the Bahshamite theory of realized existence as an external attribute of essence appears to have left an impression on the master as well, if we are to judge by his terminology and theory of *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*. The Bahshamite approach, which made an entire realm of unrealized entities cognizable to the intellect by virtue of their reality and subsistence, lies behind Avicenna’s theory of pure quiddity as something abstracted from realized existence but possessing its own intelligible being. His theory of pure quiddity, its special ontological mode, and the absolute ontological extension he ascribes to it were all directly inspired by the Bahshamite theory of the Attribute of the Essence and its special ontological mode. Naturally, Avicenna’s outlook and attitude toward these sources amounted more to a process of critical adaptation and creative doctrinal transformation than straightforward borrowing, for there were some important features of Bahshamite ontology that the master simply could not bring himself to adopt.

There is in particular a crucial difference regarding these philosophers’ construal of the special ontological state or mode they posit with regard to the attribute and essence respectively. The followers of Abū Hāshim construe thingness in connection with the Attribute of the Essence and, hence, as something intrinsically devoid of positive existence. This Attribute lies in a state of subsistence or sheer actuality (*thubūt*) and is, strictly speaking, a property that is neither existent nor nonexistent. For

370 In the case of Avicenna’s noetics, this intelligible reality can apply to various classes of entities: first, artificial and fictional things in the mind, which Avicenna regards as quiddities and forms and even as universals, even though they have no actual concrete instantiations in the actual world; and second, future contingents, which, even though they are not subsistent things in the way the Mu’tazilite conceive them, are still abstract entities that can be spoken of and whose quiddities can be apprehended. What is more, and this is the key point, this claim can be extended to all the quiddities of natural things, since Avicenna’s claim is precisely that we can think of these pure quiddities in abstraction from all considerations of existence and regardless of whether there are actual concrete existents corresponding to these quiddities.

371 Frank, *Beings*, 56, note 12.

this reason, it encompasses existents and nonexistents alike. Avicenna in contrast straightforwardly ascribes to pure quiddity a positive mode of existence. This important difference stems from the fact that Avicenna regards mental entities and objects as full-fledged existents, whereas the Mu'tazilite do not uphold a positive notion of mental existence. So the theory of the intelligible mode of existence of pure quiddity that Avicenna develops in the context of his noetics can be regarded as a direct reply to the theory of the intermediary ontological state that the Bahshamites ascribe to the Attribute of the Essence, both theories otherwise fulfilling quasi-identical epistemological functions. As a result, whereas the Bahshamites regard the Attribute of the Essence as being prior *to* existence,³⁷² for Avicenna, on the other hand, pure quiddity in the intellect is prior *in* existence (*fī l-wujūd, bi-l-wujūd*).

It is with regard to the specific issue of mental existence, then, that Avicenna parted company with the Bahshamites and dashed ahead to forge one of the most distinctive and momentous aspects of his philosophy. In spite of this, the philosopher's indebtedness to this theological tradition is visible in the kinds of issues he tackles as well as in the notions and terminology he relies on to elaborate his doctrine. The main impetus for Avicenna's theorization of mental existence and especially for his ontologization of the concept of pure quiddity arose out of a dialectical engagement with Bahshamite epistemology and ontology. This led him to endorse some features of this tradition and adapt and transform others in light of the Greek philosophical legacy and of his own philosophical priorities and interests. This 'Bahshamite connection' represents a key factor in Avicenna's sustained preoccupation with mental existence and of the role of essence or thingness in human knowledge.³⁷³ To conclude, Abū Hāshim and Avicenna regard the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity respectively as irreducible, unconditioned, and prior, even though these notions carry a different meaning in their systems. In addition, the Bahshamite theory of the Attribute of the Essence is based on a distinction between reality or subsistence (*thubūt*) and realized existence in the concrete world (*wujūd*), with the consequence that this attribute can apply to both *shay' mawjūd* and *shay' ma'dūm*. Likewise, Avicenna's ontology of quiddity is based on the distinction between the senses and modes of realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) and proper existence (*wujūd*

372 Frank, *Beings*, 54.

373 Strong evidence to the effect that the Bahshamites are constantly in the background of Avicenna's analysis of quiddity and mental existence appears in *Metaphysics* 1.5, a chapter in which Avicenna refutes two fundamental Mu'tazilite theses: (a) that it is meaningful to speak of a nonexistent thing, where 'the nonexistent,' taken absolutely, would be nonexistent in concrete reality and in the mind, and where the notion of the nonexistent in the mind would have an actual counterpart in concrete reality, i.e., there would be an actual or subsistent 'nonexistent thing' in exterior reality (32.6–11); and (b) that there is an intermediary ontological state between existence and nonexistence (34.11 ff.). The terminological and notional overlap between Avicenna and the Bahshamites requires a separate and in-depth study and would need to encompass the entire Avicennian corpus and especially certain works, which, on my view, betray a potentially strong Bahshamite influence; this is the case notably of *Philosophical Compendium*.

khāṣṣ), only the latter of which applies to pure quiddity. As a result of this basic distinction, Abū Hāshim and Avicenna end up positing an additional and distinct ontological status and mode for the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity respectively. ‘Realized existence’ therefore does not exhaust all the modes of their ontology.

5.1.2 Essential entailment

The manner in which Abū Hāshim and Avicenna conceive of the relation between these various ontological modes is also thought-provoking. More specifically, these thinkers articulate a theory of epistemological and ontological entailment that finds its source in the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity. For the Bahshamites, the various essential attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyyah*) and characteristics or properties (*aḥkām*) can be said to follow from, and be derivative of, the Attribute of the Essence. The prime example in the Bahshamite sources is ‘occupying space,’ which is literally described as the entailed attribute (*ṣifah muqtaḍāt*) of the Attribute of the Essence ‘being an atom.’³⁷⁴ More generally, and by extension, the essential attributes are entailed by the Attribute of the Essence (*muqtaḍāt ‘anhā*).³⁷⁵ On the one hand, these attributes and properties are what make a substance existent in the sense of its having realized, concrete existence and a set of actual properties and characteristics that can be predicated of it. On the other hand, and from a cognitive perspective, they are what make a substance perceivable and an object of human apprehension (*idrāk*). For the Attribute of Essence alone, according to Abū Hāshim, is conceivable, but not perceptible, and it is at any rate not sufficient to make a thing a realized existent. According to the Bahshamites, then, the relation between the foundational status of the Attribute of the Essence and the subsequent essential attributes and characteristics of an existent thing is determined by necessary implication or entailment (*iqtiḍā’, yaqtaḍī*).

In a different context, namely, that of Aristotelian logic, Avicenna also upholds a theory of necessary entailment that he applies to essence and its concomitants. What is striking, however, is that—in line with his ontologization of logic—Avicenna extends this theory to the metaphysical plane in a manner that is reminiscent of the Bahshamite system. For the *shaykh*, pure quiddity, which in itself is just itself and nothing else, possesses a set of concomitants or implicates (*lawāḥiq, lawāzim*) that are said to necessarily derive from it. Like the Attribute of the Essence, pure quiddity can be intellected as such in an abstract way and without these concomitants, but if an instance of this quiddity comes to exist, whether a concrete horse or the universal form horse in the mind, then these implicates or concomitants are necessarily actualized or realized alongside quiddity. They are what make quiddity an actual, complex, realized existent, either concrete or mental. And it is these concomitants also that

374 Thiele, *Häl*, 69.

375 Frank, *Beings*, 58.

make it perceptible to the senses (in the case of the particular concrete being) or conceivable in the mind as a universal (in the case of the universal concepts). Like the Attribute of the Essence, pure quiddity as such, however, is not cognizable by the senses, and can only be apprehended intellectually as an abstract consideration. It is remarkable, therefore, that these thinkers tie essential entailment to the condition of existence. For the Bahshamites, the Attribute of the Essence of a thing necessarily implies certain characteristics and attributes that become actual *upon the existence* of the substance. As Thiele, explains, “the atom’s very being (*kawnuhu jawharan*)—that is, its ‘essential attribute’—necessarily implies (*yaqtaḍī*) that the atom occupies space whenever it exists.”³⁷⁶ Likewise, for Avicenna, quiddity in itself has necessary concomitants that become actual whenever existence is posited as a condition, e.g., an actual human being is a substance that is one, corporeal, and particular whenever it exists in the concrete world. Together with existence, oneness, and multiplicity, particularity and universality necessarily qualify the two contexts of existence that are mental existence and concrete existence: whenever a thing has realized existence, it is necessarily existent (*mawjūd*), one (*wāḥid*), and either particular (*juz’ī*) or universal (*kullī*), etc., which is to say that it exists with its accidents either universally in the mind or individually in the concrete world. In short, the way in which Abū Hāshim’s ontology describes the relation between the Attribute of the Essence and the entailed essential attributes is reminiscent of the way in which Avicenna’s ontology describes the relation between quiddity in itself and its external concomitants. In these systems, the *ṣifāt* and the *lawāzīm* are tied, through a relation of logical and necessary entailment (*iqtiḍā’*, *iltizām*), to a foundational reality (*ḥaqīqah*) that is eminently intelligible and real.³⁷⁷ These implicates only become actualized and realized once a thing acquires realized existence and once existence is posited as a condition (*sharṭ*) of thingness. Moreover, just as the essential attributes are “ontologically distinguished from the Attribute of the Essence”³⁷⁸ according to the Bahshamites, so, for Avicenna, the external concomitants of essence are ontologically distinguished from quiddity in itself.

5.1.3 The attribute of realized existence

This last point regarding the status of realized existence in these systems needs to be investigated further. For the Bahshamites, realized existence is one of the essential attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-dhātīyyah*); it is “the attribute of existence” (*ṣifat al-wujūd*). This means that ‘being existent’ is an attribute (*ṣifah*) or state (*ḥāl*) that follows

³⁷⁶ Thiele, *Ḥāl*, 69.

³⁷⁷ Avicenna shares the technical terms *iqtaḍā* and *muqtadāt* with the Bahshamite theologians to express the notion of essential and necessary entailment. He also occasionally applies it to a theological context to describe the relationship between God and the created beings, as in *Notes*, 11.4–5, section 3.

³⁷⁸ Frank, *Beings*, 58.

the Attribute of the Essence and is (conceptually) posterior to it.³⁷⁹ As Ibn Mattawayh, who flourished in the fifth/eleventh century, and who was therefore a contemporary of Avicenna, explains, the atom's "state of being an atom [*hālatahu bi-kawnihi jawharan*] differs from its state of being existent [*mawjūdan*]. Because there is no link [*ta'alluq*] between these two attributes, it is possible to attribute this description [of the Attribute of the Essence] to what does not have existence."³⁸⁰ Unlike existence, therefore, the Attribute of the Essence is never separated from the essence of a thing. It is both epistemically and ontologically irreducible. In contrast, the attribute of existence, as well as the other essential attributes, such as an atom's occupying space, are all entailed by the thingness of a thing, by the Attribute of the Essence, which represents the foundation or ground (*aṣl*) on which these other attributes can be predicated. The attribute of existence and the various actual characteristics of a thing *in existence* are what make it a conditioned thing, a thing with a certain condition (*sharṭ*) of existence. Recall that the Attribute of the Essence is in itself unconditioned (*ghayr mashrūṭah*), so that a condition is an ontological state that appears together with realized existence (*wujūd*). The actualization of the essential attributes changes the state of the thing from that of being 'unconditioned' (*ghayr mashrūṭ*) to that of being 'conditioned in existence' (*mashrūṭ bi-l-wujūd*).³⁸¹ In that sense, the attribute of existence is also a ground for the realization of the other essential attributes, since they are realized only when existence is realized. As Frank succinctly puts it, "existence (sc., the state of being existent) is the condition (*ṣarṭ*) and a ground (*aṣl*) of the actuality (*ḥuṣūl*) of the essential attributes."³⁸² Furthermore, it is through realized existence that the thing-itself becomes manifest to us through its various special characteristics and accidents, enabling us to distinguish one thing from another.

Avicenna for his part also speaks of the unconditioned mode of pure quiddity and of its epistemological and ontological irreducibility. In addition, he posits a conditioned aspect of quiddity when it is taken together with its concomitants and accidents or, put differently, when it is taken together with 'realized' or 'acquired existence.' Like the Bahshamites, he therefore envisages the states of being conditioned and unconditioned in close connection with realized existence, since what is conditioned positively (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*) is what is qualified by realized existence and what constitutes a complex whole composed of quiddity and its accidents and concomitants (i. e., a concrete individual being or a complex universal concept). For Avicenna, as for Abū Hāshim before him, then, realized existence implies the presence of a set of conditions that are superadded to thingness or to the thing itself: 'states' and 'attributes' for the latter, 'concomitants' and 'accidents' for the former. By exten-

³⁷⁹ For a discussion of the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*), see Abū Rashīd, *Addition*, 195.12; cf. 192.1–2.

³⁸⁰ Frank, *Beings*, 55, 57, note 21.

³⁸¹ Frank, *Beings*, 59, and 80, note 3.

³⁸² Frank, *Beings*, 59.

sion, realized existence is always 'grounded in' a composite or complex whole. It points to a *bundle* of qualities and accidents, which, taken together with essence and thingness, can be said to be realized and unified in existence. It is these external states, attributes, concomitants, and accidents that enable us to perceive and distinguish various things in realized existence (e.g., Zayd from 'Amr). Thingness itself (i.e., the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity) cannot, on these accounts, provide the ground for such a distinction. Just as, for Abū Hāshim, the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*) is one of the essential attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-dhātīyyah*) that are directly entailed by the Attribute of the Essence, so, for Avicenna, realized existence is one of the necessary concomitants (*lawāḥiq, lawāzim*) that is directly entailed by pure quiddity. I believe that this aspect of Avicenna's argumentation was borrowed directly from the Bahshamite works.

According to these Mu'tazilite thinkers, then, it is the Attribute of the Essence that determines to a high degree the way or mode according to which something exists and according to which an attribute is actualized in the world. In this context, the Bahshamites often speak of 'the mode' (*kayfiyyah*) of an attribute and even of 'the mode of existence' (*kayfiyyat al-wujūd*) of a thing.³⁸³ The notion of *kayfiyyah* refers in this context primarily to possibility and necessity as modes of actuality of an attribute. For example, as Thiele notes, for the Mu'tazilites life is necessary in God, but only possible in a human being.³⁸⁴ But since the attributes are grounded in concrete entities and necessitated by the attribute of existence, the notion of *kayfiyyah* can also mean more generally 'a mode of existence.' In that case, it qualifies the existence of an entity as being possible or necessary, without however adding anything or any new attribute to existence itself. In its narrow relation to existence, it can be applied to common things as well as to God. Thus 'Abd al-Jabbār states that God's necessary eternity is a mode of His attribute of existence (*kayfiyyah fī ṣifat al-wujūd*).³⁸⁵ Now, since all attributes are posterior to and entailed by the Attribute of the Essence, it is ultimately the latter that determines the modes of these attributes by determining some as necessary and others as possible; and this, even though existence is required to actualize these attributes. For example, whereas it is necessary for an existent atom to occupy space—an essential attribute entailed by its Attribute of the Essence—it is only possible for blackness to inhere in it as an accident. With regard to the theological example given above, it is God's Attribute of the Essence, 'His being eternal,' which determines His mode of being. Nonetheless, occupying space for an atom and being a unit of blackness arise only in the case of existence and are thus conditioned and 'realized' by the attribute of existence, even though

383 For a discussion of this term and its ontological implications, see Frank, *Beings*, 68–72; idem, *Alma'dūm*, 197.

384 Thiele, *Ḥāl*, 69.

385 Frank, *Beings*, 69, and 87, note 63.

they are entailed by the Attribute of the Essence.³⁸⁶ If possibility and necessity are determined by the Attribute of the Essence and what it entails, they are nonetheless meaningful only with regard to actual and realized existence and the attribute of existence.

Avicenna, probably following this Bahshamite precedent, also refers in his works to the ‘mode of existence’ (*kayfiyyat al-wujūd*) of entities and similarly connects it with the modalities (*jihāt*) of the possible and the necessary.³⁸⁷ And just as this notion is tied with the Attribute of the Essence and essential entailment in Mu‘tazilite ontology, it is in Avicenna’s philosophy connected with quiddity and the essential concomitants and accidents entailed by it. Thus, whereas it is in the nature and essence of a horse or a human being to be merely possible of existence and, when these things do actually exist, always and necessarily to exist in a body and matter, it is God’s very quiddity to be necessary of existence by virtue of Himself. In beings other than God, it should be noted, possibility and necessity do not qualify quiddity *simpliciter*—just as they do not qualify the Attribute of the Essence *simpliciter*—but rather the relation between quiddity and its realized concomitants, including realized existence. For Avicenna, the *jihāt* qualify the way in which quiddity and its concomitants become actual and manifested in existence: they are *necessary* if they are caused to exist by an exterior cause, but only possible in themselves. It is only loosely that the modalities can be said to qualify the very quiddity of a thing, since quiddity in itself and thingness in itself is only that and not envisaged together with existence. It is truly, then, the relationship between *the complex or bundle* of quiddity and its concomitants and the extrinsic efficient cause effecting its existence that can be said to be necessary or possible. So Avicenna, following the Bahshamites, associates the modalities with essence or essential entailment in a manner that connects these notions with the condition of realized existence: thus, a quiddity and its concomitants (*lawāzim*) are possible of existence in themselves but necessary by virtue of a cause that provides realized existence. Put differently, the essential concomi-

386 As Frank, *Beings*, 127, puts it, “the essential attributes arise with the existence of the thing ... but are grounded in the Attribute of the Essence.”

387 *Kayfiyyat al-wujūd* is admittedly an ambiguous expression in Avicenna’s works, since it can refer not only to the modalities (*jihāt*), but also to different senses, modes, or contexts of existence, such as mental and concrete existence, or, according to my interpretation, realized and special existence. One indication of this is the title of *Metaphysics* V.1 (*Fī l-umūr al-‘āmmah wa-kayfiyyat wujūdihā*) and the fact that this chapter explores mental and concrete existence and especially the existence of quiddity and its concomitants in detail, but does not discuss possibility and necessity in any meaningful way. Rather, in this chapter, *kayfiyyah* refers to the difference between concrete and mental existence, and especially to the modes of existence of quiddity in itself and of its concomitants in connection with priority and posteriority, simplicity and complexity, etc. Hence, *kayfiyyat al-wujūd* is not limited to the modalities (*jihāt*) of the possible and the necessary, but encompasses many other modes or aspects that Avicenna associates with *tashkīk al-wujūd*. There is therefore a marked difference between the Bahshamites, for whom existence is univocal, and Avicenna, who upholds a highly sophisticated theory of the modulation of existence.

tants are dependent on an exterior cause—namely, an efficient cause that provides existence—in order to become actual and necessary. Beyond the common use of the expression *kayfiyyat al-wujūd*, there is therefore an undeniable similarity as well in the way these thinkers conceive of it: the Bahshamites and Avicenna both use the modalities to qualify the relationship between essence and its various implicates, on the one hand, and realized existence, on the other.³⁸⁸ Existence is framed in terms of the necessary realization of essential attributes and concomitants that, with regard to their source of entailment (the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity), are only possible. In such systems, the granting of existence is the condition (*shart*) for the realization and manifestation (*huṣūl*, *zuhūr*) of the essential attributes, concomitants, and characteristics of a thing that proceed necessarily from (*iqṭaḍā'*, *iltazama*, *ṣādīrah 'an*) the essence.³⁸⁹ Essential entailment is not merely a conceptual or logical notion, but one subjected to an ontologizing interpretation as well: the Bahshamite descriptions (*awṣāf*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*) predicated of things have corresponding ontological states (*aḥwāl*) and entitative accidents (*ma'ānī*) in the concrete world, just as the Avicennian logical implicates (*lawāzim*) are at the same time metaphysical concomitants (*lawāḥiq*, *lawāzim*) that exist in concrete reality or in the mind.

Nevertheless, in spite of these multifarious parallels, there is also a crucial difference with regard to how realized existence relates to the broader ontology of these thinkers: since the Bahshamites restrict *wujūd* to concrete actual existence, they argue for a univocal application of the attribute of existence to all existent things. Hence, *wujūd* on their mind can be attributed equally to all existent things (*ashyā' mawjūdah*), regardless of whether that thing is an atom, a unit of blackness, or God Himself.³⁹⁰ In contrast, Avicenna posits different senses (*ma'ānī*) and modes (*anḥā'*, *aḥkām*) of existence: for him, to exist abstractly, immaterially, and universally in the mind is not the same as to exist individually and concretely in the world; nor is the existence of God in any way similar to that of a composite, contingent being; nor is the proper existence of quiddity collapsible with realized existence. Consequently,

388 One doubt that underlies much of the modern scholarship on the modalities in Avicenna is whether these apply chiefly to existence or to essence. As Black, *Avicenna*, 17, notes, “because of the very thrust of Avicenna’s distinction between essence and existence in this chapter [*Metaphysics* I.5], it remains unclear whether modality is primarily an existential or a quidditative property for Avicenna.” My position in this book is that the modalities fall on the side of essence and should be regarded primarily as concomitants of quiddity. Cf. Bäck, *Avicenna*, 237–238, for whom the modalities concern the essences of things: “So, Avicenna seems to say, modalities are determined on the level of quiddities in themselves, but modal propositions belong to the level of quiddities existing in intellectu.”

389 For these terms in Bahshamite *kalām*, see Frank, *Al-ma'dūm*, 192. These technical terms are shared by the *mutakallimūn* and Avicenna to express the notion of essential entailment. True, in Avicenna’s philosophy, the root *ṣ-d-r* applies primarily to the emanation of ‘being,’ but since it is existence that manifests the concomitants of quiddity, the idea is fundamentally the same.

390 See Frank, *Beings*, 60, who focuses on the views of ‘Abd al-Jabbār.

the mode of realized existence that the Bahshamite speak of is adequate to describe only the contingent entities that are the atoms and their accidents, and whose counterparts in Avicenna's system are the concomitants and accidents of essence, but not the mode of being of pure quiddity itself. Where the Bahshamites understandably refrain from ascribing being to the Attribute of the Essence, Avicenna taps into the rich Greek tradition of construing existence as a polysemous, ambiguous, modulated, and even equivocal notion, finding in this tradition the conceptual and interpretive tools he needs to develop his ontology of pure quiddity. Hence, over and against the univocal interpretation of existence and its homogenous applicability to all existent things advocated by the Bahshamites, Avicenna maintains an ambiguous or modulated notion of existence based on a diffused construal of this key notion. In the final analysis, although his conception of *kayfiyyat al-wujūd* bears many remarkable parallels with that of the Bahshamites, it is distinct and original in its scope and philosophical application.

There is one additional overlapping feature of the Bahshamite and Avicennian expositions that deserves attention: the attribute of existence is linked in the Bahshamite system to an 'autonomous agent' (*bi-l-fā'il*), which grants existence from the outside. The act of this autonomous agent and the granting of existence it results in are a condition (*shart*) for the actualization of the attributes, even of those that are strictly speaking grounded in the Attribute of the Essence, e.g., occupying space for an atom.³⁹¹ There is an obvious parallel to this doctrine in Avicenna's metaphysics, namely, the efficient cause, which is an autonomous and exterior agent vis-à-vis its effect, and which is responsible for causing the actualization and existence of the various concomitants of quiddity. In this connection, the Mu'tazilites establish a strong correlation between possibility and the Attribute of the Essence. For Abū Hāshim, possibility (*jawāz* or *ṣiḥḥat al-wujūd*) is closely linked to this attribute, which determines how a certain thing comes to exist. As Frank explains, "the thing-itself (*al-dhāt*) in the 'Attribute of Essence' (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) is prior to the actuality of its actual existence," which means, for the Bahshamites, that it is possible of actually existing even when it is in nonexistence. This priority, it should be noted, is truly a possibility of existence inherent to the thing (*ṣiḥḥat al-wujūd fī nafsihi*).³⁹² The Bahshamite doctrine of ontological possibility, it appears, is closely tied to the Attribute of the Essence. Because the latter can be intellected even when the thing to which it corresponds does not exist, it by the same token designates the nonexistent thing as a kind of ontological 'possible.' Fundamentally, the nonexistent thing is 'possible of realized existence' on account of the very fact that it is conceivable and has an Attribute of the Essence.³⁹³ This is why a standard definition of the nonexis-

³⁹¹ Frank, *Beings*, 124–147; Thiele, Hāl, 69.

³⁹² Frank, *Al-ma'dūm*, 203.

³⁹³ It should be stressed, however, that the Bahshamites locate possibility in the agent as well, so that possibility also depends on the power of an agent to effect the existence of an act; the possible or *maqḍūr* is thus defined to some extent by the *qudrah* of the agent. Nevertheless, the possibility of the

tent or *ma'dūm* for the Bahshamites is “the object known that is nonexistent” (*al-ma'lūm alladhī laysa bi-mawjūd*); it is an intelligible object whose existence is known to be possible.³⁹⁴

Avicenna must have been profoundly impressed by these ideas, since he ascribes possibility (*imkān*) to the notion that most closely resembles the Attribute of the Essence in his metaphysics, namely, pure quiddity. Even though pure quiddity is not *intrinsically* characterized by possibility (since possibility does not enter it as a constituent, nor is it part of the essential definition of a thing), it does, however, define its relationship to realized existence and to the efficient cause. This is why, for Avicenna, the same thing can be said to be both ‘possible of existence *in itself*’ and ‘necessary of existence *through another*,’ these two qualifications being co-extensive and convertible, inasmuch as they express a single thing’s relation to realized existence from two different angles.³⁹⁵ What is particularly striking, moreover, is that the Bahshamites and Avicenna correlate intelligibility and conceivability with the possibility of existence: all that can be conceived of is possible of existence, whereas the truly inconceivable and unintelligible, such as a square circle, is not possible of existence, even in the mind, and thus amounts to an epistemological and ontological impossible. The only difference—and it is admittedly an important one—concerns the ontological status of the objects that are deemed possible of existence in the mind: they are ‘nonexistent things’ for the Bahshamites, whereas they are legitimate mental existents for Avicenna. As a corollary, whereas the formula ‘possible of existence’ for the Bahshamites pertains exclusively to the concrete world, for Avicenna, in contrast, it can refer either to existence in the concrete world or in the mind (e.g., fictional and artificial forms).³⁹⁶

In sum, there are five main points that characterize the relationship between the Attribute of the Essence and existence in Bahshamite ontology: (a) essential and necessary entailment (*iqtiḍā'*), which concerns more generally the relationship between the essential attributes and the Attribute of the Essence; (b) the description of existence as a posterior, external, and derivative attribute and state whose mode (*kayfiyyah*) is to some extent determined by the Attribute of the Essence; (c) the postulation of a condition (*sharṭ*) linked to realized existence, which signifies the actualization of the attributes and properties of an existent thing; (d) the linkage between the Attribute of the Essence—applied to both the existent and nonexistent—and the possibility of existence in the concrete; and (e) the postulation of an exterior

maqḍūr precedes the *quḍrah* of the agent; see Frank, *Al-ma'dūm*, 197–198, 200–209. Inasmuch as it is a mere possible for realized existence, a thing is a nonexistent or *ma'dūm*. Naturally, Avicenna rejects this argument and does not locate possibility in the divine agent but only in the nature or essence of a thing.

³⁹⁴ Frank, *Al-ma'dūm*, 189.

³⁹⁵ For the equivalence of these formulas, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 197 ff.

³⁹⁶ It is true that Avicenna does not elaborate on this point in his works, but it is a corollary of his theory of mental existence.

and autonomous agent or cause responsible for the actual concrete existence of a thing. Remarkably, these five points find direct pendants in Avicenna's ontology, even though they are adjusted to his metaphysical framework. For the master, essence entails concomitants and accidents; existence itself is described as a necessary essential concomitant or *lāzim*; it introduces a condition alongside quiddity that determines and actualizes the essential concomitants; quiddity and its concomitants are said to be merely possible with regard to existence and are apprehended as such by the intellect; and quiddity also calls for an exterior, efficient cause for the realized existence of an entity to occur. Beyond these numerous formal, terminological, and doctrinal parallels, it is remarkable that Abū Hāshim and Avicenna have integrated the logical modalities of 'the possible' and 'the necessary' in their ontological schemes and used them to redefine the boundary between thingness and realized existence. This ontological reconfiguration is grounded in essentialist theories, the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity respectively. The conceptual parallels between the Bahshamite distinction *dhāt/ṣifāt*—or more specifically *ṣifat al-dhāt/ṣifāt dhātiyyah*—and the Avicennian distinction *māhiyyah/lawāzim* are remarkable and worthy of investigation.³⁹⁷

Fundamentally, then, the systems of Abū Hāshim and Avicenna are based on what one might describe as an ontological oddity: the real (but neither existent nor nonexistent) state and permanent intelligibility of the Attribute of the Essence in the former case; the special, irreducible, and intelligible mode of existence of pure quiddity in the latter. As far as I can tell, and in spite of all the parallels outlined above, these two theories are idiosyncratic and represent daring philosophical innovations on the part of their authors. Within their respective systems, they allow Abū Hāshim and Avicenna to transcend the limitations associated with a constricted construal of the notion of realized existence and to elaborate a sophisticated and nuanced ontological model based on the notion of essential entailment and on the distinction between thingness and realized existence. Both parties furthermore faced the challenge of defining the mental status of thingness in abstraction from existence. Whereas the Bahshamites remedied to this situation by expanding their ontological categories to recognize 'nonexistent things' and 'states,' as well as by postulating an intermediary status between existence and nonexistence, Avicenna approached this issue from the perspective of the Greek (mostly Aristotelian) ontological tradition, which was solidly grounded in the law of the excluded middle, and which inspired him to reflect on the various senses and modes of existence. Ultimate-

³⁹⁷ Nevertheless, important differences between the Bahshamite theory of the Attribute of the Essence and Avicenna's theory of quiddity remain. For example, the former is an attribute whose external correlates and referents are both existent things and nonexistent things. Moreover, although it is inseparable from the thing-itself, it is not strictly speaking *the* thing-itself. These points explain why the Attribute of the Essence does not in itself exist. In contrast, Avicenna's pure quiddity is not an attribute, but the thing itself as it is conceived of in the mind, which, as such, possesses its own intelligible being.

ly, these thinkers articulated different solutions to a common metaphysical problem focusing on the ontological and epistemological status of mental objects. Remarkably, the doctrines of the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity lie at the core of the Bahshamite and Avicennian epistemology and ontology respectively. They provide a coherent explanation and rationale for the essentialist preoccupations of these thinkers. Finally, these theories also enabled them to solve a similar set of theological problems revolving around God's existence and knowledge, to which their Islamic upbringing and their common interest in theology would have naturally introduced them.

5.1.4 Theological implications

Indeed, the similarities between the Bahshamite notion of the Attribute of the Essence and Avicenna's notion of quiddity extend to their theology as well, and it is to this aspect that I now wish to turn. These thinkers rely on them to explain God's special existence and how it differs from the existence of the other beings.³⁹⁸ According to Abū Hāshim and his disciples, God can be said to possess His own unique and special Attribute of the Essence, which captures His ontological distinctness or property (*khāṣṣiyyah*) and sets Him apart from all the other entities. In this perspective, it is usually God's eternity (*qidam*) that is highlighted, 'His being eternal' (*kawnuhu qadīm*), so that the divine Attribute of the Essence is said to correspond primarily to eternity. However, because God is *eternally existing* and an *eternal existent*, His Attribute of the Essence by extension reflects the eternal existence that only He possesses. In that sense it refers to God's essence as an eternally existent being. In light of this, an alternative formulation is to say that God's Attribute of the Essence is 'His being existent' (*kawnuhu mawjūdān*).³⁹⁹ This in turn explains why, according to some Bahshamite authors, the Attribute of the Essence expresses an identity between God's essence and existence. The Bahshamites identify, uniquely in God, the Attribute of the Essence with (eternal) existence, with the implication that God's Attribute of the Essence is His existence. Unlike other beings, where the attribute of existence is distinct from, and external to, the Attribute of the Essence, God has an essential existence that comes only from Himself. 'Abd al-Jabbār, for example, states that God's "being eternal is identical with [His] existence" (*kawnuhu qadīm nafs al-wujūd*),⁴⁰⁰ while Abū Rashīd explains that God's "being existent is ne-

³⁹⁸ A useful comparative study of the theology of Avicenna and some *mutakallimūn* can be found in Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, 227–243. Wisnovsky's analysis, however, focuses chiefly on the role of the modalities of the possible and necessary in the Ash'arite and Avicennian theologies. It does not address in earnest the issue of Avicenna's engagement with Bahshamite theology.

³⁹⁹ Frank, *Beings*, 67; idem, *al-Ma'dūm*, 197–202.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Summa*, 54.11–16. Since God's Attribute of the Essence is His being eternal, it is also His being eternally *existent*, both of which are identical with His essence. In another passage, the theologian writes: "this difference [between what is eternally existent and what is not eternally exist-

cessitated [or entailed] by this Attribute [of the Essence]” (*kawnuhu mawjūd muqtaḍā li-tilka l-ṣifah*).⁴⁰¹ Hence, what God is in Himself, i.e., ‘His being eternal’ and ‘His being existent,’ is due to His essence and is reflected and referred to by the divine Attribute of the Essence.⁴⁰² This attribute is eternally and constantly actual in God. It also eternally (*abadan*) and unconditionally (*min ghayr sharṭ*) causes the attribute of existence.⁴⁰³ Finally, this unique attribute is what differentiates God’s essence and existence from that of all other things.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, the Bahshamites insist on the fact that God’s existence is necessary by virtue of His very essence. For example, Abū Rashīd al-Nīshāpūrī states that “the Eternal is the existent whose existence is necessary” (*al-qadīm huwa l-mawjūd alladhī yajibu wujūduhu*). This necessity, it turns out, proceeds from God’s very essence. Abū Rashīd adds that the eternally existent, God, is “He whose existence is necessary by virtue of a thing that refers to His essence” (*huwa mā yajibu wujūduhu li-amr yarji’u ilā dhātihī*).⁴⁰⁵ Likewise, Mānkdim Shashdīw states (on behalf of Abū Hāshim) that “what is necessary in God” or “what should necessarily be predicated of God” (*mā yajibu lahu*) are the Attribute of the Essence and the four essential attributes of ‘His being powerful, knowing, living, and existing.’⁴⁰⁶ And ‘Abd al-Jabbār to ask: “Can’t you see that His existence is necessary?” (*yajibu wujūduhu*)⁴⁰⁷; His difference from other beings lies entirely in His having necessary existence (*wa-innamā yastanidu huwa ta’ālā bi-wujūb al-wujūd lahu dūn ghayrihī*).⁴⁰⁸

Here again, one witnesses similarities and differences between the Bahshamites and Avicenna.⁴⁰⁹ As I argued in a preceding section of this book, not only does Avi-

tent] refers to what The Eternal [i.e., God] is in His essence [*mā ‘alayhī l-qadīm fī dhātihī*]” (‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Summa*, 53.26–27). Cf. Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 129, 198–199.

401 Abū Rashīd, *Addition*, 459.17–18.

402 The Bahshamite reflection on this issue can be framed in a syllogistic form: since God’s Attribute of the Essence is eternity or ‘His being eternal,’ and since the latter identifies with ‘His being (eternally) existent,’ then ‘His being (eternally) existent’ is what best defines God’s essence or Attribute of the Essence. It would seem that these thinkers and Avicenna jointly arrived at the conclusion of an identity (or quasi-identity in the Bahshamite case) of essence and existence in God, but through a different reasoning and set of arguments.

403 Abū Rashīd, *Additions*, 195.11–13.

404 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Summa*, 54.19–22.

405 Abū Rashīd, *Additions*, 197.11–17.

406 Mānkdim Shashdīw, *Notes on the Commentary*, 129.14–15.

407 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Summa*, 53.23; cf. 54.24–26.

408 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Summa*, 138.11.

409 Among the main differences are the following: Avicenna does not approach the issue of God’s existence from the angle of God’s eternity, since his objective is to distinguish between the existence of various *eternal* beings (i.e., God and the separate intellects). Avicenna’s approach is accordingly based entirely on how the modalities of the possible and the necessary apply to these various beings and can be used to distinguish between them in terms of the causality of existence and in light of the essence/existence distinction; for an insightful and detailed discussion of this issue, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, chapters II.13 and 14. Moreover, Avicenna’s analysis does not unfold in the

cenna ascribe a quiddity to God, but he identifies this quiddity with God's proper mode of existence and with His necessary existence. On my interpretation, this proper existence is identified uniquely and fully in God with His absolute, actual, and necessary existence. Hence, there is no difference in God between quiddity and existence. What is more, in line with the Bahshamite position, necessity of existence is said to proceed from, and is by virtue of, God's very essence. God alone possesses necessary existence from His essence, whereas all other beings acquire it from an exterior cause. Although the Bahshamites do not employ Avicenna's famous formulation of *wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*, the individual elements that underlie it, namely, (a) that God's existence is necessary, (b) that it is identical with His essence, and (c) that God's essence amounts to a perfect oneness in existence, are all prefigured in the Mu'tazilite accounts. What is more, one finds in these accounts the idea that necessity (*wājibiyyah*) and existence (*wujūd*) proceed from the very quiddity and essence of God (*dhāt, māhiyyah*). To conclude, the parallels between the Bahshamites' and Avicenna's ontological systems are outstanding and suggest that the latter relied heavily on this Mu'tazilite tradition when elaborating his ontology of quiddity and his theology. The table below reflects the findings discussed above and insists on the conceptual and terminological parallels that exist in the works of these thinkers.

Table 2 Comparison of the Bahshamites' and Avicenna's views

Notions and doctrines	Bahshamite 'Attribute of the Essence'	Avicennian 'quiddity in itself'
irreducibility, 'in itselfness'	<i>mā huwa 'alayhi fī dhātihi</i>	<i>min haythu hiya hiya 'alā mā huwa 'alayhi bi-dhātihi</i> ⁴¹⁰ <i>mā huwa bihi huwa</i> ⁴¹¹ etc. (see Appendix 1)
identity and thingness	<i>al-jawhar jawhar kawn al-sawād sawādan shay'iyyah</i>	<i>al-farasiyyah farasiyyah faqaṭ shay'iyyah</i> etc. (see Appendix 1)
unconditionedness	<i>ghayr mashrūṭ (bi-amr siwāhā) min ghayr sharṭ</i>	<i>lā bi-sharṭ (shay' ākhar)</i>
demarcation, specificity	<i>yatamayyazu, ikhtaṣṣa, khāṣṣiyyah</i>	<i>khāṣṣa, wujūd khāṣṣ</i>
essential similarity, commonality	<i>tamāthul, mushārahah</i>	<i>mushārahah, ishtirāk</i>

context of a discussion of the divine attributes, which are central to the Mu'tazilite project. In spite of this, the way these thinkers conceptualize the relation between essence, necessity, and existence in God proceeds from a common concern to posit a necessarily existing eternal being and to avoid positing a multiplicity of principles within it.

⁴¹⁰ Avicenna, *Philosophy for 'Arūḍī*, 35.16.

⁴¹¹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VIII.5, 349.12.

Table 2 Comparison of the Bahshamites' and Avicenna's views (*continued*)

Notions and doctrines	Bahshamite 'Attribute of the Essence'	Avicennian 'quiddity in itself'
essential entailment	<i>iqtiḍā'</i>	<i>luzūm, iltizām, iqtidā'</i>
ontological implicates	<i>muqtaḍāt, al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyyah</i>	<i>muqtaḍāt, al-lawāzīm, al-lawāḥiq</i>
status of realized existence	<i>ṣifat al-wujūd</i>	<i>al-wujūd al-muḥaṣṣal, ṣifah, lāzīm, lāḥiq, amr</i>
condition of existence	<i>mashrūṭ bi-l-wujūd</i>	<i>bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar</i>
ontological modes	<i>kayfiyyat al-wujūd, al-wujūd wa-naḥwuhu</i>	<i>kayfiyyat al-wujūd, naḥw al-wujūd, al-wujūdayn</i>
relation to possibility	<i>jā'iz, thubūt al-jawāz, ṣiḥḥat al-wujūd</i>	<i>imkān al-wujūd</i>
identity with God's existence	<i>kawnuhu qadīm nafs al-wujūd, kawnuhu mawjūd muqtaḍā li-tilka l-ṣifah [al-dhātiyyah]</i>	<i>lā māhiyyata lahu ghayr al-anniyyah</i>
necessity in God	<i>huwa mā yajib wujūduhu li-amr yarji'u ilā dhātihi, al-qadīm huwa l-mawjūd alladhī yajib wujūduhu</i>	<i>huwa wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi</i>

Avicenna, it appears, was profoundly influenced—both positively and negatively—by a set of Bahshamite doctrines: that the *ḥāl* and *ṣifah* of the Attribute of the Essence are real and actual (*thābit*) even when they refer to a nonexistent thing (*shay' ma'dūm*), so that the latter can be said to possess its own ontological status; that this attribute is consequently permanent, irreducible, absolute, unconditioned, and ontologically prior with regard to realized existence; and that existence itself and the various essential attributes that characterize an existent thing are all entailed by the Attribute of the Essence and essentially follow it. Furthermore, the theological idea that the Attribute of the Essence could be extended to God Himself to account for His unique eternal and necessary existence deeply impressed Avicenna, who likewise attributes necessary existence to the divine quiddity and describes it as proceeding from God's very self. With that being said, Avicenna significantly modified the elements he appropriated from Bahshamite ontology and theology and either adapted them to fit his own set of doctrines or discarded them as incompatible with his system. For example, (a) he rejects the theory of an intermediary status between existence and nonexistence and instead proceeds to elaborate on the various senses and modes of existence, one of which he attributes to quiddity; (b) consequently, he also rejects the notion of an intelligible and conceivable 'nonexistent thing' (taken absolutely) and replaces it with the theory of pure quiddity in the mind, which can be intellected even in the absence of concrete instantiations, or more generally of everything that is external to it; and (c) he reinterprets the notion of essential entailment between the Attribute of the Essence and the essential attributes in the con-

text of an Aristotelian logical framework that focuses on the relationship between essence and its various concomitants and accidents.

One of the main problems from Avicenna's perspective was that the Bahshamite theory of the *ḥāl* conflicts with the law of the excluded middle. Avicenna does not recognize an intermediary ontological state or mode between existence and nonexistence. As a result, the idea that the Attribute of the Essence can be intellectually grasped but indicates merely a subsistent state that does not truly exist does not square with Avicenna's ontology and especially his ontologization of mental objects. Given this divergence, the master was obliged to adapt and transform some of these *kalām* views to fit his ontological framework. One key departure was to attribute a distinct, special, but positive mode of existence to pure quiddity in the mind, which accounts for its intelligibility, and which also conforms with Avicenna's tendency to ontologize logical notions and concepts. Hence, although Avicenna, following the Bahshamites, construes the special ontological mode of essence in close connection with intelligibility, intellectuality, and knowledge, he takes the additional step of explicitly defining it as a mode of intelligible existence (*wujūd 'aqī*). Instead of designating it as something real, but neither *mawjūd* nor *ma'dūm*, Avicenna commits himself to the view that pure quiddity exists. This key departure from Bahshamite ontology—sketched in *Metaphysics* I.5—is the starting point for his intricate articulation of the ontology of quiddity as exposed in V.1.⁴¹² In the final analysis, what allows this interpretive leeway in Avicenna's philosophy is a different approach to predication and a different construal of existence. For the Bahshamites, the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*) is predicated univocally of all existent things. On their mind, the notion of *wujūd* refers exhaustively to all things that have realized, concrete existence, i.e., the existence of individual and concrete substances and accidents. The atom, a unit of blackness, and God Himself are all uniformly qualified by the attribute of existence, even though the mode (*kayfiyyah*) of their existence differs.⁴¹³ For Avicenna, in contrast, existence is said 'in many ways' and is intrinsically an ambiguous or modulated term located midway between univocity and equivocity. As he puts it, the notion of *wujūd* is *kathīr al-ma'ānī* and an *ism mushakkik*. Conse-

412 Although some scholars (e.g., Izutsu, *The Fundamental Structure*, 65; Nuseibeh, Al-'Aql al-Qudṣī, 48–49) have made a case for Avicenna's endorsement of a neutral ontological mode on the Bahshamite model focusing on the distinction between the 'subsistence' and 'existence' of entities, there are various reasons why one should not ascribe these theories to Avicenna. First, Avicenna's ontology of pure quiddity unambiguously posits and describes a positive mode of existence and never refers to a neutral or intermediary ontological mode or state of quiddity that would lie between existence and nonexistence; at any rate, there is no terminological evidence for this view in the Avicennian works. Second, Avicenna in *Metaphysics* I.5 expressly addresses and rebuts the Mu'tazilite and (partially) Ash'arite theory of the intermediary states by invoking the law of the excluded middle. Finally, as I show in chapter V, the mode of existence of the pure quiddities in God collapses entirely with the mode of existence of the divine essence, which is pure necessary existence.

413 For the univocity of being and predication in the Bahshamite tradition, see Frank, Al-ma'dūm, 197–198.

quently, *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, which corresponds to the single and univocal sense of existence the Bahshamites recognize, is merely one aspect, mode, or sense of existence according to the *shaykh al-ra'īs*.⁴¹⁴

In general terms, and from an ontological and metaphysical perspective, the later, post-Avicennian era in Islamic intellectual history can be defined largely as an attempt to delineate Abū Hāshim's and Avicenna's positions regarding these issues and to understand how they relate to one another. Nevertheless, if later thinkers grappled directly with Avicenna's works and legacy, their understanding of Abū Hāshim's doctrines was usually mediated through later Bahshamite and Ash'arite sources. In spite of this difference, I would argue that the cluster of philosophical problems (and their related solutions) that these two authors formulated decisively shaped later Islamic philosophy. One outstanding example of a thinker who engaged expressly in this task was Shahrastānī. His works proffer a kind of doctrinal synthesis on many philosophical points articulated by these thinkers, but he also felt compelled in many cases to sieve through their ontological systems in order to separate acceptable ideas from reprehensible ones.⁴¹⁵ More specifically, later philosophers had to address Abū Hāshim's and Avicenna's essentialist approaches and their relegating realized existence to a single facet of their ontological system. Just as Abū Hāshim's theory of the states and conception of the *shay' ma'dūm thābit* proved problematic, so I contend that Avicenna's intricate ontology of pure quiddity proved a quandary, since it could give rise to a variety of cogent, yet ultimately irreconcilable, interpretations. More specifically, the central notions of the priority and irreducibility of quiddity vis-à-vis existence could be subjected to a multiplicity of analyses and interpretations and was anything but conceptually pellucid. The later debate about the univocity and equivocity of being—which ran parallel to that between essence and existence—should be approached and studied in light of these circumstances and of the dialectical legacy of Bahshamite and Avicennian ontology and theology.

414 For Avicenna, therefore, quiddity in itself is integrated within the very fabric of his theory of existence (*wujūd*) and assigned a distinct sense and mode of being. The Avicennian theory of *tashkīk* extends to and encompasses the ontological mode of pure quiddity. This stresses the gap between these thinkers' approaches and the significant degree of adaptation and transformation that the Bahshamites elements underwent in Avicenna's system. In this connection, even though, as I believe, Abū Hāshim's doctrines proved decisive in the development of Avicenna's ontology of pure quiddity, the latter was nonetheless also profoundly influenced by the ontological tradition bequeathed to him by his Greek and Arabic philosophical forebears, whose focus was on the process of disambiguating existence and clarifying its predicative scope and function. In the final analysis, then, it is Avicenna's dialectical engagement with these two ontological strands, the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic and the Bahshamite, which shaped his ontology of pure quiddity and, more generally, his ontological and metaphysical system.

415 See Benevich, *The Metaphysics*; idem, *The Essence-Existence Distinction*.

5.2 Avicenna and Ash'arite ontology

In contrast to his relation to Baṣrian Mu'tazilite doctrine, which is complex, nuanced, and defined by a dialectical process of adaption and rejection, I would contend that Avicenna's opposition to the Ash'arites is in contrast quite blatant and straightforward.⁴¹⁶ This is because the Ash'arites have a more constricted ontology that is fully reducible to the notion of actual, realized existence in the concrete world. These theologians regard 'the existent' exclusively as a concrete and realized being, and existence as a notion intensionally and extensionally identical with thingness. Thus, in their system, 'a thing' (*shay'*) is always 'an existent' (*mawjūd*), and vice versa, whereby these notions refer to an exterior concrete entity and exclude mental objects altogether. These statements are not only co-extensional, they are also intensionally convertible and refer to the same inner reality of the concrete being.⁴¹⁷ Consequently, the essential reality of an existent entity is not pure quiddity or nature or thingness, but rather realized existence. As the theologian Juwaynī (d. 1085 CE) puts it, "the essential reality of an entity is existence; and existence is not a meaning superadded to essence" (*ḥaqīqat al-dhāt al-wujūd wa-laysa l-wujūd ma'nā zā'id 'alā l-dhāt*).⁴¹⁸ In *The Ultimate Steps*, Shahrastānī asserts that "the Ash'arites do not distinguish between existence, subsistence [or actuality], thingness, [concrete] essence, and individual being [*al-wujūd wa-l-thubūt wa-l-shay'iyah wa-l-dhāt wa-l-'ayn*]."⁴¹⁹ The Maturidite thinker Taftāzānī echoes this view in his *Commentary on the Creed of Nasafī*: "in our view, the term *shay'* is identical with the term *mawjūd*, and the terms *thubūt*, *taḥaqquq*, *wujūd* and *kawn* are all synonymous [*mutarādifah*]."⁴²⁰ Hence, there is in their ontological system a perfect overlap between the thing and the concrete existent, between essence and realized existence.

With regard to these aspects of Ash'arite doctrine, Avicenna concurs with the idea that 'the thing' (*al-shay'*) always exists and is a *mawjūd* in concrete reality, but he would nonetheless disagree with them on at least three counts: (a) their collapsing the meaning and intensionality of 'the thing' and 'the existent'; (b) their restricting the meaning and mode of existence to 'realized' or 'established concrete existence' alone; and (c), as a corollary, their denial that mental objects are valid

416 The similarities between Avicenna and the Ash'arites that scholars have been keen to stress stem mostly from the perceived commonality in the way they regard 'the thing' as co-extensional with 'the existent'; see, for example, Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*. My interpretation of Avicenna's ontology leads to a different assessment of how it relates to the pre-Avicennian Ash'arite ontology and places the emphasis more squarely on the Bahshamite connection.

417 For the Ash'arites, *al-shay'* and *al-mawjūd* point to what has actuality and is established and realized in concrete existence (*al-thābit*) and 'what is' in a straightforward sense (*al-kā'in*); see Frank, *The Ash'arite Ontology*, 165, 170–171.

418 Juwaynī, *Summa*, 129.18 ff.

419 Shahrastānī, *The Ultimate Steps*, 151.1–2.

420 Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Creed of Nasafī*, 10.1–2. Maturidite theology and ontology are in general close to those of the Ash'arite tradition.

existents. Avicenna objects to these doctrines, *not* because he recognizes the ontological validity or reality of nonexistent things—we saw above that he rejects this Mu‘tazilite view—but rather because his conception of existence is broader than that of the Ash‘arites and Maturidites and recognizes various ontological modes and senses that do not figure in their ontology, one of which belongs to mental objects specifically. Indeed, the Ash‘arites’ reluctance to recognize mental existents and their insistence on predicating existence exclusively of concrete and extramental entities is far too limiting for Avicenna. First, on the master’s mind, the Ash‘arites are mistaken in not recognizing the obvious conceptual distinctness between thingness and existence and ‘the thing’ and ‘the existent,’ which refer to different notions in the mind. Second, they sever the link between conceptuality, intelligibility, and existence, given that for Avicenna what can be conceived of and apprehended intellectually must possess mental existence. Finally, they are misguided in constricting *wujūd* to realized existence alone and in applying this concept univocally to all things. For this approach cannot account for the many differences in the modes and senses of existence, and it cannot accommodate the special existence of God and of the simple and pure mental concepts.

The later Ash‘arite appropriation of the Mu‘tazilite theory of the states should be briefly addressed, because it played an important role in the way in which this tradition interpreted Avicenna’s doctrine of quiddity. In effect, some Ash‘arite thinkers who endorsed the theory of the states proceeded to describe the Avicennian pure or absolute quiddity by means of this theory. Rāzī and Jurjānī, for example, mention in their works that pure quiddity is ‘neither existent nor nonexistent’ (*lā mawjūd wa-lā ma‘dūm*), with the implication that it is a kind of state (*ḥāl*) that possesses a neutral or intermediary ontological status located midway between existence and nonexistence.⁴²¹ This trend is criticized quite pointedly by Shahrastānī, who explains in *The Ultimate Steps* that the Bahshamite states (*aḥwāl*) can be reduced to ‘mental considerations’ or ‘aspects’ (*i‘tibārāt*), which, however, do not designate an alternative ontological status. The technical term *i‘tibārāt*, it should be recalled, is the one Avicenna himself uses in *Introduction* I.2 to differentiate between the various aspects of essence. Shahrastānī then proceeds to outline the Avicennian threefold distinction of essence, with the obvious implication that, for this author, these aspects are purely intellectual distinctions that have no corresponding ontological states in the concrete world.⁴²²

421 This idea that quiddity is neither existent nor nonexistent is an important elaboration on the Avicennian doctrine, which should be ascribed to the Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite circles that received and interpreted Avicenna’s philosophy. It is to be connected with the doctrine of the state (*ḥāl*), which according to its Bahshamite and Ash‘arite upholders, is neither existent nor nonexistent and thus possesses its own ontological status. Avicenna of course rejects this, as is clear from *Metaphysics* I.5, 34.11 ff., which rebuts the argument of an intermediary ontological status.

422 Shahrastānī, *The Ultimate Steps*, 133–134, 139, 147–148.

All in all, I would surmise that Avicenna's assessment of the major *kalām* ontologies of his day was informed to a large extent by what they had to say—as well as by what they did not say—concerning the issue of mental existence. One decisive consideration for the Persian philosopher was how mental objects and quiddities exist in the intellect, and on this plane, neither the Mu'tazilite nor the Ash'arite approach was satisfactory. If Avicenna had qualms with the Mu'tazilite doctrine of subsistent nonexistent things and with the claim that the Attribute of the Essence—otherwise an interesting theory for his purposes—held an intermediary status between existence and nonexistence, he on the other hand objected to the Ash'arite and Maturidite tendency to conflate these notions and limit ontology strictly to concrete, realized existence, which left no room for the intelligible existents. In other words, neither the Bahshamite nor the Ash'arite ontological model could satisfactorily accommodate pure quiddity as a distinct intelligible being, either because it recognized the special ontological status of mental objects (through the Attribute of the Essence), but made them to correspond to neutral attributes and states, or because it simply did not assign them any positive ontological status at all in the first place. This helps to explain Avicenna's decision to distance himself from these intellectual traditions and to devise a sophisticated theory of mental existence based on the relationship between quiddity and its mental concomitants.

6 The later reception of Avicenna's ontology of quiddity: some preliminary notes

Much of the later history concerning the reception of Avicenna's ontology of quiddity is characterized by the deflationary and at times even dismissive attitude that later thinkers showed toward the master's theory of quiddity and its special existence. This is definitely the case of Suhrawardī, Rāzī, and Shahrastānī, who all had qualms with various aspects of Avicenna's legacy, and who decided either to ignore or to refute this theory. But it is interesting to note that some thinkers, such as Ṭūsī, who generally defend Avicenna's metaphysics, also resort to the notions of special existence and essential being in their own works. Ṭūsī in fact not only endorses, but elaborates on, this Avicennian concept and its theological ramifications. In his *Commentary on Pointers*, he glosses the notion of special existence in close relation to quiddity and divine essential being. Ṭūsī contrasts *al-wujūdayn*, the two modes or aspects of 'realized concrete and mental existence,' which he attributes to all the effects proceeding from God, with God's special existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), by explaining that God is the only quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and reality (*ḥaqīqah*) to have essential being. From the outset, then, Ṭūsī capitalizes on the distinction Avicenna had made between the two modes of realized and special existence in order to further his theological agenda. He explicitly stresses the idea that God cannot be subsumed under the category of realized existence and gives central place to the notion of spe-

cial existence in his theology.⁴²³ Hence, in God, essence and special existence are one and the same thing. This view flies in the face of an alternative theological model championed notably by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, according to which essence and realized existence remain distinct even in the case of God.

In another section of the same work, Ṭūsī again distinguishes between special existence, which he applies exclusively or primarily to God, and absolute or general existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), which he applies to all other things.⁴²⁴ Now, for Ṭūsī, general or absolute existence is a notion that corresponds roughly to Avicenna's notion of realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*). It is just another appellation for the complex, realized, and conditioned existence that applies to all contingent beings. In this connection, Ṭūsī further explicates that general existence follows and is a concomitant of special existence (*lāzim li-dhalika l-wujūd*), which is another way of saying that realized existence follows the divine quiddity or reality. Ṭūsī's position can be viewed as echoing Avicenna's claim that realized existence is posterior to essential existence. Hence, as in Avicenna, there is a remarkable overlap between the notions of essential reality (*ḥaqīqah*), quiddity (*māhiyyah*), and special existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) in Ṭūsī's philosophy.⁴²⁵ And for these two thinkers God's quiddity is His special existence. Special existence is inherent and identical with the divine reality and quiddity. Nevertheless, Ṭūsī, in contrast to Avicenna, exploits this equivalence to make what is primarily a theological claim, or at any rate he seems to restrict this notion to his theology. Whatever the case may be, Ṭūsī's construal of special existence is solidly grounded in Avicenna's works and adapted to fit the theological focus of his approach to philosophy.

In spite of its doctrinal and historical significance, however, Ṭūsī's appropriation and theological interpretation of the Avicennian concept of proper existence appears to have been somewhat exceptional. By far the more general trend seems to have been either to ignore or to challenge Avicenna's ontology of quiddity as formulated in *The Cure*. In this connection, one of the central concerns of many later (and mostly Ash'arite) thinkers was to forcefully entrench the idea that essence does not precede existence and so to refute what (on their view) was either a flaw in the Avicennian system or a misguided interpretation of it. According to these thinkers, it is moot or even incorrect to claim the priority of essence over existence, either because essence and existence are intensionally and extensionally identical (the Ash'arite position) or because there is only a single ontic principle of reality (light for Suhrawardī, existence for Mullā Ṣadrā, etc.). Either way, there is absolutely no sense according to which this can be true. Nevertheless, there are reasons to think that this critical approach to the reception of Avicenna's ontology was partly based on a misunderstanding of his theory of quiddity—or, alternatively, on a decision to ig-

423 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 1, 202.17–19.

424 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 461.12ff.

425 For Ṭūsī, as for Avicenna, *ḥaqīqah* is another word that is used to refer to pure quiddity.

nore the more subtle elements that inform it. For Avicenna never intended to argue that pure quiddity possesses its own actual, established existence in the concrete world, to which another actual, established existence would occur and be necessary for the concrete individual to come to existence. The master likewise never asserts the *temporal* primacy or priority of essence vis-à-vis realized existence. This, in effect, would entail a redundancy of the states or modes of realized existence. Finally, Avicenna does not validate the autonomous and separate existence of pure quiddity in the concrete world on the model of the Platonic Forms. In the works of his middle (*The Cure* and *Pointers*) and late (*Notes*, *Discussions*) periods, he is keen to stress that quiddity is not prior to (realized) existence in the concrete world, and that it does not precede the existent thing *qua* realized existent.⁴²⁶

But Avicenna's point is more subtle and also more ambiguous, since it implies that qualifications and intradistinctions be applied to the notions of existence and priority, which, in his system, and alongside other crucial notions, are modulated (*mushakkikah*). Now, as I argued, realized existence is only one sense and mode of *wujūd*, and it only applies to the realized concomitants of quiddity. 'Realized existence' is just another way of designating the state of the contingent, caused, and composite existent regarded as a substantial whole or bundle. It presupposes the realization of quiddity and its various external concomitants. It is this mode of existence pertaining to the substantial whole regarded as a complex thing that can be said to be essentially and ontologically (but not temporally) posterior vis-à-vis quiddity. But this statement of essential priority then calls for additional clarifications. In a strong sense, it refers to the ontological and essential priority of quiddity *qua* irreducible metaphysical constant in the human and divine intellects and, hence, to the priority of the intelligible aspect of quiddity over its concrete aspect. In a weaker sense, it refers to the mereological priority of quiddity as a principle *in* complex beings. This latter sense means not that quiddity pre-exists the caused existent in concrete reality or in time, but rather that it precedes it as an internal principle in the way that (to use Avicenna's words) the simple precedes the composite, or that forms precedes matter, and in the way that the constituents of essence logically precede the essential accidents and concomitants. It should be noted that this mereological priority applies to complex concrete beings as well as complex concepts in the mind. In brief, Avicenna's position is premised on the epistemological and ontological priority of the special existence of quiddity over the realized existence of the complex beings.

These theories and distinctions appear to have engendered much disagreement. I surmise that the seeds of confusion and discontentment had already bloomed during Avicenna's own lifetime and within his very circle. One remarkable observation

426 I surmise that the repetition of this argument in late works such as *Discussions* can be explained by the need to clarify this important point, which may have perplexed some of Avicenna's followers, who could have been tempted to regard quiddity as existing as a real, realized thing prior to its concrete actualization with its accidents and concomitants.

concerning Avicenna's theories of quiddity in itself and proper existence is that they are articulated most clearly and cogently in two of the most important chapters of his corpus, namely, chapters I.5 and V.1 of *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*. It is in these relatively condensed chapters of *Metaphysics* that one finds Avicenna's most committal stance on the existence of pure quiddity. Now, *Metaphysics* of *The Cure* is universally regarded as the apex of Avicenna's philosophical output, and for good reasons.⁴²⁷ This work encapsulates his mature and, arguably, his most sophisticated and important philosophical doctrines. Moreover, much of its substance was adapted, condensed, and in some cases elaborated upon in the very last works of the Avicennian corpus: either those penned by the master himself (*Pointers*) or those compiled by his immediate circle (*Notes*, *Discussions*). It is largely in this ultimate and revised textual form that Avicenna's thought was bequeathed to later generations of Muslim thinkers.

In spite of the relative doctrinal continuum that emerges from Avicenna's various works, one notices that the ontology of pure quiddity as articulated in *The Cure* assumes an unparalleled and somewhat unique place in the master's corpus. Furthermore, this feature of his system appears to have been significantly downplayed in the texts that close the Avicennian corpus, namely, *Discussions* and *Notes*. These two works betray a persistent effort to emphasize the priority of realized existence over quiddity in the extramental world, as well as God's causal role and creative agency.⁴²⁸ In effect, *Discussions* and *Notes* return on numerous occasions to the topic of the priority of existence over essence in the concrete world and assert in somewhat dogmatic fashion the impossibility for quiddity to act as a cause of realized existence *in concreto*. It is true that this point had already been acknowledged in *Metaphysics* and was later repeated in *Pointers*. Yet the regularity and insistence with which the compilers of *Discussions* and *Notes* dwell on it are remarkable and in need of an explanation.

One tentative explanation is that Avicenna's theory of the ontology of pure quiddity in *Metaphysics* had already proved problematic to some of his disciples. More specifically, some followers may have been under the impression that Avicenna had intimated that quiddity was in itself endowed with realized existence and, hence, competed with the efficient cause as an ontic principle in the concrete world. In other words, he could be interpreted as saying that quiddity could itself be a cause of realized existence before the action of the efficient cause. Although Avicenna's epistemological remarks concerning the essential and logical priority of quiddity in the intellect could be readily grasped and accepted, the ontological implications of his views on essence seemed more puzzling. In particular, his claims concerning the mereological and immanent existence of pure quiddity in concrete

⁴²⁷ I am talking about Avicenna's extant corpus here. One can only speculate what his lost works contained by way of philosophical innovations.

⁴²⁸ It is accordingly not a surprise if these works have relatively little to say about mental existence and essence in the intellect, notions which forms the crux of Avicenna's ontology of quiddity.

beings, as well as the relation of that theory to hylomorphism, were more difficult to apprehend. Accordingly, it may have been challenging for some of his followers to embrace the view of the ontological priority of quiddity in this extramental context, given Avicenna's parallel assertions concerning the priority of realized existence and efficient causality in the concrete world. It is this state of affairs, I believe, which either prompted Avicenna to disambiguate this point in the material that has come down to us in the form of *Discussions* and *Notes*, or which led some of his close collaborators to orient his doctrine in this direction and stress this aspect of his teaching. This would explain not only the unusually large number of sections in those works dealing with the priority of the efficient cause over quiddity in the concrete world, but also the absence of a protracted discussion of the ontology of pure quiddity and of mental existence, at least when compared to that in *Metaphysics*. This hypothesis acquires additional relevance when one remembers that these two works are better regarded as 'school' productions emanating from the master's circle, and, hence, as 'Avicennizing' works, rather than as fully 'authentic' treatises penned by the master himself. This allows for the possibility that some of Avicenna's disciples wished to reorient the master's doctrines in specific directions that suited their own philosophical agenda.

But it is not only in Avicenna's immediate circle that one notices such a doctrinal tension. The various interpreters who engaged with his legacy in the centuries following his death also testify to the difficult reception of his theory of quiddity. One important case for our purposes is Suhrawardī, who writes the following in his *Philosophy of Illumination*:

It is erroneous to try to prove that existence is superadded in concrete things by arguing that if something were not conjoined to the quiddity by a cause, the quiddity would remain in nonexistence. The one who makes this argument posits a quiddity and then joins existence to it, so his opponent can argue that this concrete quiddity is itself from the efficient cause [i.e., that this quiddity also possesses existence that is distinct from the existence it acquires].

Suhrawardī in this passage implicitly criticizes Avicenna and his disciples for upholding the reality of essence and existence as principles in the concrete world, and he also addresses some of the implications of this view.⁴²⁹ He objects notably

⁴²⁹ Wisnovsky, *Essence and Existence*, has recently argued that this Suhrawardīan critique was aimed chiefly at later Avicennizing thinkers—especially Ash'arite Avicennizing thinkers such as Rāzī—rather than at Avicenna himself. Although this hypothesis is plausible, I am more inclined to think that Suhrawardī intended his critique to apply *both* to Avicenna *and* to his later followers. Much of Wisnovsky's analysis in this regard relies on the premise that the idea that existence is 'added to' (*zā'id 'alā*) quiddity in reality is a Rāzīan innovation on, and a departure from, Avicenna's doctrine. This would imply that it was not seen by later thinkers (at least by Suhrawardī) as being truly Avicennian in spirit. On my view, this is not a decisive indicator to conclude that Suhrawardī was not also levelling his critique at Avicenna. The formula *zā'id 'alā* appears in *Notes*, and what Avicenna otherwise says about the relationship between quiddity and its external concomitants makes his position quite consistent on this point (see section III.5, which discusses various key passages).

to the Avicennian habit of regarding existence as a metaphysical concomitant of quiddity, since the moment one posits a quiddity in the concrete world, one must assume that it possesses some kind of existence or reality in itself and, hence, that it is also to be tied to an efficient cause, which would imply a redundancy of states of existence. This is why the master of illumination regards the Avicennian notions of quiddity and existence as purely mental concepts with no actual counterparts in the concrete world. Suhrawardī then pursues his critique:

The followers of the Peripatetics [viz., Avicenna and his followers] argue that we can think of a human being [*al-insān*] without existence, but we cannot think of it without a relation to animalness. Yet, the relation of animalness to humanness means nothing except its [animalness] being existent in it [*fīhi*, the human being], either in the mind or in concrete reality. Thus, they posit two [modes of] existence [or, literally, ‘two existences,’ *al-wujūdāyn*] in the relation of animalness to humanness: one belonging to the animalness which is in it [*fīhi*] [the human being]; and the other, that which is entailed by the existence of humanness inasmuch as a thing comes to exist in it [*mā yalzamu min wujūd al-insāniyyah ḥattā yūjad fīhā shayʿ*]. Indeed, some of the followers of the Peripatetics base their whole system of metaphysics upon existence [*wujūd*].⁴³⁰

Suhrawardī begins this passage by referring to the well-known Avicennian claim that we can conceive of an essence (here ‘humanness’) in abstraction from existence. In a particularly significant move, he then identifies two distinct modes of existence, which, he contends, Avicenna and the Avicennians ascribe to this essence. Now, Suhrawardī’s argument is not entirely spelled out in this passage, which contains some obscure parts, particularly the clause “that which is entailed by the existence of hu-

Indeed, this formula is applied to other concomitants of essence in the Avicennian works (for universality, see Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 65.18–19; 66.7–11; *Salvation*, 536.11; for oneness, see *Metaphysics of The Cure*, V.1, 204.12). Moreover, one should not forget that the master also describes existence as an external concomitant (*lāzim*, *lāḥiḳ*), attribute (*ṣifah*), and even, albeit more rarely, as something accidental (*ʿarīḳ*) vis-à-vis essence. So the view that existence can be regarded as something external and ‘added to’ essence certainly finds traction in Avicenna’s works. It might not be as outlandish as it seems also to apply it to Avicenna’s theory of concrete existence. In that case, the idea would be not that existence is added to an already existent and fully independent essence in the concrete; but rather, that essence and existence remain distinct and irreducible principles in the composite substance, thereby mirroring their distinction in the mind. Admittedly, though, this is an obscure feature of Avicenna’s doctrine, which has baffled scholars. But the important point here is whether Suhrawardī himself thought that Avicenna upheld such a view, which I think is likely, given that he was keen to criticize Avicenna directly in his works and to emphasize his departure from the master’s teachings. At any rate, I am not primarily concerned with this passage, but with the one that immediately follows, and whose critical thrust, I would surmise, can be extended to encompass Avicenna himself, inasmuch as it is based on a distinction between essence and existence, and inasmuch as Suhrawardī refers to his opponents generally as “the followers of the Peripatetics.”

430 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 46.19–47.6, translation revised. Note that the terminology focusing on ‘the thing itself’ (*ḥayawāniyyah*, *insāniyyah*) and the mereological notions underpinning this passage (animalness as existing in (*fī*) the concrete human) are fully consistent with Avicenna’s language and method.

manness inasmuch as a thing comes to exist in it.” As a result, Suhrawardī’s argument may be interpreted in two different ways. The first is to say that one mode of existence is internal to essence and belongs to quiddity (animalness and humanness), while the other mode of existence is external and pertains to the various attributes and concomitants that follow quiddity. In other words, one pertains to quiddity in itself, or to the way in which the constitutive parts of quiddity relate to one another, while the other mode pertains to the extramental accidents and concomitants of quiddity, to what follows or is entailed by (*yalzamu*) the actual existence of this quiddity. This interpretation is supported by the term *lazima* that appears in that passage. The second way to make sense of the argument is to ascribe the two modes of existence mentioned by Suhrawardī to the different constitutive elements of essence. According to this alternative interpretation, animalness would exist in the human being, and then the things that are entailed by humanness, such as ‘being rational’ (*nātiq*), would also have their own proper existence in the human being, which would be distinct from that of animalness. In other words, genus and differentia would have a distinct existence in the realized human being.⁴³¹

This ambiguity notwithstanding, what is significant in this passage is Suhrawardī’s belief that Avicenna and the Avicennians ascribe various modes or aspects of existence to essence or to essence and its concomitants. The master of illumination refers to these two modes of existence by using the Avicennian term *al-wujūdayn*, which for Avicenna usually means mental and concrete existence, but which Suhrawardī here employs to designate the various levels of existence involved in the realization of essence. What is of interest here is not so much the fact that this line of reasoning represents a philosophical fallacy for Suhrawardī, which he uses in his polemic against the Avicennians. Rather, it is that Suhrawardī expressly ascribes two modes of existence to Avicenna and the Avicennians, which correspond either to the modes of ‘proper existence’ and ‘realized existence’ that were discussed previously (i.e., the existence of pure quiddity and of its external concomitants), or to the way in which different pure essences (animalness, humanness, rationality) can be said to exist in the realized substance. Either way, Suhrawardī clearly believes that the Avicennians ascribe a sense or mode of existence to pure quiddity in the exterior world. In order to reinforce this point, the master of illumination even specifies a few lines below that, according to these thinkers, one of the senses of existence can be said of “the reality and essence” (*al-ḥaqīqah wa-l-dhāt*).⁴³² It is therefore remarkable that in the midst of his polemical argumentation Suhrawardī recognizes the Avi-

431 Support for this second interpretation can be found in Suhrawardī’s work entitled *The Paths and Havens* (*Kitāb al-Mashāri’ wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*), vol. 1, 365–376, where he contests that the genus and differentia of a thing can have a distinct existence in reality. The argument deployed there appears to be closely related to the one quoted above, but it is elaborated with more care. I am grateful to Mateus Dominguez da Silva for bringing this passage to my attention and for an enriching discussion regarding its contents.

432 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 479–11.

cennian doctrine of the special ontological mode of pure quiddity, albeit not perhaps in the exact same way Avicenna himself intended it.

Yet, one notices that Suhrawardī shuns the technical vocabulary Avicenna had devised (such as the senses of proper and realized existence), and he seems to have either ignored or misunderstood the fact that for Avicenna, proper existence is a special and distinct mode of existence, and hence not on a par with realized existence and efficient causality. Perhaps for polemical reasons, Suhrawardī imperfectly conveys the Avicennian doctrine: whereas Avicenna had propounded two distinct modes and senses of existence, Suhrawardī describes them equally by means of the generic terms *wujūd* and *al-wujūdāyn*, with the apparent implication that he regards them as two states of realized existence that should be placed on a par with one another. This in turn explains why Suhrawardī considers these states to be redundant and this entire philosophical position to be fallacious. At any rate, Suhrawardī perceptively realized that Avicenna had ascribed existence to quiddity in itself, and this is in itself an important point worth stressing. But he also misrepresents Avicenna's intent to distinguish clearly between different ontological modes. As a result, his account conveys a rather schematic and modified picture of Avicenna's ontology.

This passage from *Philosophy of Illumination* potentially crystallizes the kind of confusion between realized and special existence I alluded to above. Unfortunately, Suhrawardī's interpretation set the pace for—and also perhaps historically influenced—later similar interpretations of Avicenna's ontology. Like Suhrawardī, these authors correctly intuited that Avicenna had ascribed existence to pure quiddity. But they then had to struggle with the intractable implications of a redundancy of states of existence, as well as with the issue of the ontological priority of quiddity in a 'strong' or 'concrete' sense, that is, its presumed realized and actual existence in the concrete world before the acquisition of existence through the efficient cause. Thus, we witness Ṭūsī in his *Commentary on Pointers* rebuking Rāzī for construing Avicenna precisely in this fashion, whereby the essences have a reality or actuality (*thubūt*) in *concreto* prior to their existence.⁴³³ But this view was as unacceptable to Avicenna as it was to Ṭūsī and others, and the *shaykh al-ra'is* never intended these kinds of theories in the first place. In this regard, there is a link, I would surmise, between the picture one finds in *Discussions* and *Notes* regarding the simplified relationship between quiddity and existence in the concrete world and the polemical interpretations Suhrawardī and others made of this doctrine. It is almost as if these two works had foreshadowed the kind of discontentment and confusion that could potentially arise from Avicenna's ontology of quiddity and sought to anticipate some of its repercussions by simplifying the master's doctrines. One therefore perceives a certain—and in some ways unfortunate—development from the culmination of Avicenna's theory of quiddity in *Metaphysics*, to the later works *Discussions* and *Notes* that reflect an implicit uneasiness with this doctrine, to, finally, the works of

433 Ṭūsī, *Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 462.24–463.1.

later authors like Suhrawardī, Rāzī, and Averroes who polemically engage with and either willingly or accidentally misrepresent the master's views. The doctrinal details and subtle argumentation that are articulated in *Metaphysics* and reflect Avicenna's mature doctrine of quiddity in itself appear to have found a limited and skeptical reception in the works of his later interpreters. The main lesson they would retain—one also propounded by Avicenna himself—concerned the primacy of realized existence and the efficient cause in the concrete world, but this happened to the detriment of a proper understanding of the master's views on the ontology of pure quiddity. It also placed an undue emphasis on one aspect of the multifaceted relationship between essence and existence he had articulated. This approach thus led to an oversimplified theorization of how pure quiddity relates to concrete existents, which on the other hand accommodated the Ash'arite perspective. In brief, it would seem that Avicenna's immediate followers and later critics downplayed the importance of the notion of pure quiddity in interpreting his metaphysical system. In that sense, they took their lead from the late works issuing from Avicenna's circle (*Notes, Discussions*) rather than from the key passages of *The Cure* itself.⁴³⁴

This exegetical trend aimed at establishing the primacy of realized existence finds its culmination in the works of one of the greatest exponents of 'the foundationality of existence,' the outstanding Persian philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī. We are fortunate in this regard to possess his commentary on *Metaphysics* I.5, which yields insight into how he read and interpreted Avicenna and adapted the master's doctrines to suit his own philosophical agenda.⁴³⁵ What is remarkable in Mullā Ṣadrā's exegesis of I.5 is that he provides an interpretation of Avicenna's theory of quiddity that broadly conforms to the primacy of existence in his own system. In line with most of his predecessors in the Persian tradition, he accepts Avicenna's distinction between quiddity and existence in the mind and emphasizes its purely con-

434 This process of simplification of Avicenna's philosophical doctrines is also apparent in Ghazālī's *Doctrines of the Philosophers*. On the one hand, Ghazālī in this work completely omits to discuss the ontology of quiddity in itself and related notions such as proper existence and final causality. He emphasizes the idea that quiddity cannot exist without realized existence and is therefore posterior to existence (85, 89). On the other hand, he provides a schematic and slightly distorted picture of the relationship between essence and existence, describing existence as a mere accident added to essence (85, 89). This process of simplification is also apparent in the works of Avicenna's immediate followers, as in Bahmanyār's *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, which provides little valuable insight into Avicenna's conception of pure quiddity; but then again, Bahmanyār was not a "faithful disciple" (see Janssens, Bahmanyār). These developments might have been triggered by didactic and pedagogical considerations, in which Avicenna's complicated theories of ontological modulation and quiddity held no real place. But it may in addition have been shaped by polemical considerations, or at any rate disagreements regarding this aspect of his philosophical legacy. Finally, it could be due to the fact that the post-Avicennian tradition based itself (sometimes primarily, and for reasons that are not altogether clear) on other works of Avicenna's corpus, such as *Pointers* and, significantly, *Notes and Discussions*, rather than directly on the central books of *Metaphysics of The Cure*.

435 The relevant section for my analysis is found in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Commentary on Metaphysics* I.5, 144–185.

ceptual and mental nature. For Mullā Ṣadrā, this distinction is purely conceptual (*dhihnī, i'tibārī*), and both essence and existence are concepts (sing., *mafḥūm*) in the mind.⁴³⁶ Nevertheless, even on this purely conceptual plane, existence enjoys priority over essence, because it is an absolutely primary and intuitively grasped concept.⁴³⁷ As for extramental existence, there is no real distinction between existence and essence, and essence merely serves to designate the specific or specified existence of an entity. Accordingly, the expressions “specific existents” (*al-wujūdāt al-khāṣṣah*), “specified things or entities” (*al-umūr al-makhṣūṣah*), and “specified quiddities” (*al-māhiyyāt al-makhṣūṣah*) are all interchangeable and refer to the specific existence of individual and concrete entities. In brief, they all refer to existence, not to quiddity or essence. As a corollary, the notion of modulation (*tashkīk*) in Mullā Ṣadrā's system serves to describe the various ontological aspects and nuances attached to these specific concrete existents and bears no connection whatsoever to quiddity or essential being.⁴³⁸

In this regard, one particularly interesting feature of Mullā Ṣadrā's exegesis focuses on the expression *wujūd khāṣṣ*, which Avicenna had used to designate quiddity explicitly in *Metaphysics* I.5 in contradistinction to realized existence. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, however, *wujūd khāṣṣ* or proper existence merely refers to the individual realized existence of a specific entity in the concrete world. As such, it designates the “specific existents” or *al-wujūdāt al-khāṣṣah* mentioned above, and thus serves to qualify and classify the kind of realized existence that can be predicated of different individual things. Quiddity, in contrast, is universal and thus purely mental, and is classified and studied by means of a set of notions (genus, differentia, etc.) that pertain to it only in the mind. In view of this, Mullā Ṣadrā concludes that “the distinction between existence and thingness is among the things concerning which the master [*al-shaykh*, viz., Avicenna] occupied himself in his exposition, but for which there is no real need [*lā ḥājata fīhi*].”⁴³⁹ This assertion may seem surprising at first glance, given that Mullā Ṣadrā to some extent endorses the conceptual distinction between essence and existence. However, it should be related to, and read in light of, his belief that, in the exterior world, essence and existence do not amount to a real distinction and that existence is the only fundamental and true principle of reality. One witnesses here a marked departure from the philosophical status and role Avicenna had granted quiddity and, more specifically, from the way in which the master had intended *wujūd khāṣṣ*. For on Mullā Ṣadrā's account, proper existence cannot even be understood as referring to the nature or intelligible being of quiddity in the mind. Rather, it serves to qualify and strengthen his doctrine of the founda-

436 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Commentary on Metaphysics* I.5, 153 and 155.

437 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Commentary on Metaphysics* I.5, 145 and 147.

438 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Commentary on Metaphysics* I.5, 153.

439 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Commentary on Metaphysics* I.5, 153.

tionality of existence and his theory of ontological modulation in the concrete world.⁴⁴⁰

7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed analysis of the theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), of its various aspects and features, as well as of how this theory relates to the various senses (*ma'ānī*) of being Avicenna recognizes in his works. The terminology of being Avicenna deploys in order to discuss quiddity in itself, combined with the analysis of his theory of ontological modulation and especially the notion of priority, as well as the relation of his doctrines to the Bahshamites and Ibn 'Adī, make it extremely difficult to avoid the conclusion that the *shaykh al-ra'īs* ascribed a positive and distinct ontological status to quiddity in itself. Nevertheless, this does not imply that quiddity exists separately and autonomously in the concrete world on the model of a Platonic form. The latter is a doctrine that Avicenna adamantly and consistently rejects in his works. Nor can quiddity in itself be said to possess a neutral ontological status and to reside in a state between existence and nonexistence along the lines of the Bahshamite theory of the attributes. Rather, pure quiddity possesses a unique and special mode of existence that does not fall under the category of realized and established existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, *wujūd ithbātī*, *al-wujūdayn*). Although most of Avicenna's comments regarding the special ontology of quiddity appear in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics*, other relevant elements need to be collected from a variety of sources and analyzed in a systematic manner for the contours of his position to emerge with more clarity.

In order to briefly recapitulate the various results reached in this chapter, let us resort to the set of distinctions that was outlined in the introduction between 'context,' 'aspect,' and 'mode' of existence. Thus far, the analysis has focused primarily on *two ontological contexts*, the context of concrete extramental existence and the context of intellectual and intramental existence. With regard to the latter, it was shown that quiddity can be regarded according to *two different aspects*, which, as

440 In fact, Mullā Ṣadrā explicitly contrasts proper existence and quiddity in a very un-Avicennian way. The complete relevant passage reads as follows: “The distinction between existence and thingness is among the things concerning which the master [*al-shaykh*, viz., Avicenna] occupied himself in his exposition, but for which there is no real need [*lā ḥājata fīhi*]. This is because the individual entities in existence are simple beings [*afrād al-wujūd huwwiyyāt basiṭah*] devoid of genera and differentiae, nor are they universal essential or accidental concepts, as opposed to the divisions of thingness [in the mind], as was made clear earlier. Just as the distinction obtains between the quiddity of triangle [in the mind] and the proper existence [of triangle in the concrete], so the distinction obtains between absolute quiddity [in the mind] and absolute existence.” As can be observed, the Persian philosopher here contrasts expressly quiddity with special existence, and he also connects the latter with the realized existence of individual entities in the concrete. This marks a significant departure from the intent of *Metaphysics* I.5.

we saw in this chapter, also amount to two different modes, if its relation to the complex substance is taken into account: ‘in itself’ as a distinct intelligible object and as a ‘part’ of the complex universal concept. In contrast, quiddity in the concrete world is only ever considered as inhering *in* composite, contingent beings, since Avicenna vigorously rebuts Platonic metaphysics and the theory of the Forms. Nevertheless, the crucial point that was highlighted in the analysis is that regardless of these various contexts and aspects, pure quiddity possesses only a *single and unique mode of existence*. This is because pure quiddity is in itself unconditioned, irreducible, and intelligible, and is therefore an ontological constant. That is to say, regardless of whether it is conceived of distinctly and in itself in the mind or is posited as a part of a larger, composite whole, its mode of existence remains the same. In fact, quiddity’s ontological ubiquity hinges on its ontological irreducibility and constancy.

Following Greek and Bahshamite sources, Avicenna describes this mode of existence alternately as simple (*basīṭ*), ‘in itself’ and irreducible (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*), unconditioned (*lā bi-sharṭ shay’*), divine (*ilāhī*), absolute (*muṭlaq*), and prior in existence (*mutaqaddim fī l-wujūd*). It also corresponds to what Avicenna describes as special or proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), which means something along the lines of existing *qua* this quiddity or by virtue of the way it is in itself. Remarkably, many of these terms and notions appear in the Bahshamite sources, where they are used to describe the Attribute of the Essence. This *kalām* precedent likely represents one of the main sources consulted by Avicenna to elaborate his doctrine. Yet, in *Metaphysics* I.5 Avicenna also qualifies special existence as one of the meanings of existence (*ma’ānī l-wujūd*), which is in line with his tendency to regard existence as an ambiguous or modulated term and notion (*ism mushakkik*), thereby marking his departure from Mu‘tazilite ontology, which defines existence as a univocal notion. Avicenna relies on the distinction between two ontological modes (proper existence and realized existence) to articulate an intricate theory of essential entailment and derivation and, ultimately, his *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* logico-metaphysical model (for the Bahshamites, essential entailment is achieved on the basis of their distinction between the Attribute of the Essence (*ṣifat al-dhāt*), on the one hand, and the essential attributes and especially the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*), on the other). He thus follows the Bahshamites in grounding his theory of essential entailment in an ontological framework that goes beyond the mere notion of ‘realized’ existence, or existence regarded as an external attribute of thingness. But this process is significantly complexified in Avicenna’s ontology because of the recognition, and the stark differentiation between, intellectual existence and concrete existence as well as his theory of ontological modulation.

In this connection, it is *because* pure quiddity is fundamentally unconditioned, undetermined, and irreducible that it can be intellectually apprehended either as a distinct intelligible or as part of a complex whole. It is this fundamental ontological ‘indifference’ of pure quiddity to realized and conditioned existence that allows it to be present in these different contexts and under these different aspects. Put differently, it is because pure quiddity is intrinsically unconditioned (*bi-lā sharṭ*) that it can be

regarded either as positively-conditioned (*bi-shart*) or negatively-conditioned (*bi-shart lā*). In this regard, it should be stressed that these logical and epistemic conditions or considerations refer to the various *contexts* and *aspects* of quiddity (and by implication to its relation to the concomitants and accidents), but not to its ontological *mode*, which cuts across these various distinctions and stands as a metaphysical constant. These results necessarily call for a reconfiguration of Avicenna's ontology, since the 'standard' ontological category of 'realized' or 'acquired' existence does not apply to pure quiddity and turns out to be only one of several modes that characterize Avicenna's theory of *wujūd*. Neither God nor pure essence can be adequately described by it. It is only by extension, and through an improper manner of speech, that quiddity can be said to possess realized existence, i.e., when it is taken with its material or mental concomitants and regarded as an *ontological cluster or complex*. This is when 'the thing' and 'the existent' coincide, as *per* Avicenna's comments in *Metaphysics* I.5.

Nevertheless, this 'traditional' or 'standard' ontological framework, which has often been made the fulcrum of modern analyses, appears too primitive to accommodate the ontological exception that pure quiddity represents in Avicenna's philosophical system, just as it appears inadequate to account for the other ontological exception that is the First Cause. Just as the notion of 'realized' or 'acquired' existence, which also translates into existence taken as an external concomitant of essence, cannot apply to the First Cause, so it does not fit in an ontology of quiddity considered purely *in itself*. Consequently, it appears necessary to posit a special ontological mode for pure quiddity and yet another for God. In this context, if the modality of 'pure necessity' or 'necessity in itself' proved useful for describing the First's existence, which is 'necessary of existence in itself' (*wājib al-wujūd bi-nafsihi* or *bi-dhātihī*), it was moot in the case of quiddity, which, when taken strictly in itself, excludes the modalities. If the notion of realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) and the modalities (*jihāt*) are unhelpful in this case, it is precisely because they are directly connected in Avicenna's general ontology: something has realized existence because it is 'possible in itself' and 'necessary through its cause'; and, *vice versa*, its being 'possible in itself' and 'necessary by another' means that it 'acquires' existence from the outside and becomes 'realized' as a result of it. Interestingly, then, God and pure quiddity appear to possess the only two modes of existence that evade the standard application of the modalities in Avicenna's ontology: whereas God is the *only* being that is necessary of existence in itself (and, hence, an ontological exception in this regard), none of the modalities can be applied to pure essence, since, strictly speaking, they are concomitants that are posterior to quiddity and are therefore external to it.

The previous comments raise two thorny questions, the first of which has been frequently invoked by scholars to undermine the theory of *esse essentiae* in the Islamic and Christian traditions: is quiddity in itself, in its special mode of existence, not already to be regarded as a compound of essence and existence? In other words, can it not be argued that there is an existence that attaches to quiddity before its in-

stantiation either as a mental or concrete realized existent, with the result that existence would be predicated of it twice, or that existence would be superadded to existence? The second objection runs as follows: does the fact that we can have a conception of pure quiddity in our mind, that we can actually contemplate pure quiddity, not indicate that it need have ‘realized’ existence, at the very least in our intellect? Regarding the latter question, one notable result of the analysis that was carried out previously was the necessity to recognize two modes of intellectual existence in Avicenna: one mode for the complex universals, and one mode for pure quiddity. Only the former would coincide with realized existence and bear its marks (multiplicity, complexity, contingency, causedness, etc.). The latter corresponds to the proper existence of quiddity in the intellect, which is its ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ existential mode. Pure quiddity appears in this light as a kind of unique transcendental concept or object in the intellect that is devoid of all the concomitants attached with complex and positively-conditioned mental universal existence.

I can see only two truly compelling approaches to the first conundrum: either one must deny any real existence to quiddity in the exterior world and regard the essence/existence distinction as a purely conceptual one; or one must postulate two different senses and modes of existence, so that there is no redundancy and infinite regress of actual, realized existence. The first approach was historically articulated by a line of thinkers who are most often associated with the *ishrāqī* tradition in Islam. Starting with Suhrawardī, the Illuminationists contested the real existence of quiddity in concrete beings and argued that existence and quiddity are purely mental notions (*i’tibārāt*) that find no counterpart in reality. As a result, they regarded the essence/existence distinction in things as a purely conceptual one. Significantly, however, these same thinkers ascribed to ‘the Avicennians,’ and, it is likely, to Avicenna himself, the theory of a *real distinction* and proceeded to criticize it under a variety of angles. According to them, it failed especially on two counts: first, the reification of essence and the tendency to view it as a real principle or something foundational (*aṣli*); and second, the redundancy of existence, which was ascribed to both essence and the complete, realized substance, or, alternatively, the idea of an infinite regress of existence, whereby each thing exists by an existence that in turn requires existence, and so on. But the bold claim that essence in no way exists in the real world is not a tenable position for Avicenna, who devotes much energy to explaining how it can be said to exist.

This brings us to the second position sketched above. There can be little doubt that Avicenna was keenly aware of these ontological pitfalls regarding quiddity in the concrete world. He repeatedly reminds his readers that essence does not pre-exist in the concrete world and does not precede existence in the way that, say, a Platonic form precedes its individual instantiations as a separate existent. However, Avicenna does elaborate a theory of the ontological distinctness and priority of quiddity *in* concrete things, whereby quiddity or nature is a mereological principle that is essentially and ontologically (albeit not temporally) prior to the composite substantial whole. It is also prior according to a second, stronger sense that will be fleshed out in chapter

V, namely, because the quiddities or natures dwell in the Agent Intellect and in God's mind, so that they are essentially and intellectually prior to the concrete instantiations and the individuals (albeit not to the species as such, which are eternal in Avicenna's cosmology). Fundamentally, and in all cases, then, the ontological priority of pure quiddity has to do with its intelligible being: it is prior in a strong sense *qua* form in the intellect, and in a weaker sense as a principle in concrete things (in the way in which the part precedes the whole and, perhaps, in which the soul, *qua* formal and final cause and immaterial principle, can be said to be prior to the body). Special existence, as it has been defined previously, is therefore not something superadded and extrinsic to quiddity. It is the very reality of quiddity itself, in the same way that, in God, divine existence is identical with the divine essence. As Avicenna explains in *Metaphysics* I.5, "the reality [quiddity] a thing happens to have is, as it were, its proper existence" (Text 29). No external condition qualifies quiddity in addition to its own nature, which provides a thing with its ontological reality and distinctness. Because it possesses special existence, and because special existence is intrinsic to the nature of quiddity, as opposed to attaching to it as an external concomitant, quiddity in itself remains simple and unconditioned in its mode of existence in a manner comparable to the way in which essence and existence are one and the same thing in God, or in the way in which God's quiddity is existence. In contrast, the existence that can be mentally separated from quiddity is a metaphysical concomitant or attribute and a logical predicate. According to the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* paradigm Avicenna champions, it is essentially posterior and extraneous to quiddity and not constitutive of it. This mode of existence ultimately implies the sum of the mental or concrete concomitants and attributes that attach to quiddity from the outside. It has nothing to do with the intrinsic, special existence of essence taken in itself. On this point as well, Avicenna found one of his main sources of inspiration in earlier and contemporary Bahshamite works, especially these thinkers' theory of the necessary entailment of the essential attributes from the Attribute of the Essence.

The theory of the special existence of quiddity in itself and the fact that its description bears striking parallels to God's special mode of existence suggests that Avicenna conceptualized these two metaphysical cases in close relation to one another. One may go further and surmise that it is because quiddity's origin and reality lie *within* the divine essence itself that it can be said to share certain qualities with God. According to this hypothesis, pure quiddity would have a mode of existence proper to it, unique, and different from the realized existence of the composite and contingent beings, precisely *because* it would derive from Him. Hence, the peculiar features Avicenna ascribes to nature and pure quiddity in his metaphysics could be interpreted in light of his theology. This would explain why he sometimes applies the same technical notions exclusively to God and pure quiddity, such as the nega-

tive condition of *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*.⁴⁴¹ This intriguing consideration leads us to the last section of this book, which explores the connection between quiddity in itself, God, and divine causality.

⁴⁴¹ As noticed by Menn, Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, 158, Avicenna applies the clause *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar* to God in addition to pure quiddity. Menn, however, denies pure quiddity any special existence. But Porro, *Universaux*, 40–46, and Rashed, *Ibn 'Adī*, 146, insist on the parallel between *wujūd khāṣṣ* and *wujūd ilāhī* in Avicenna's philosophy and connect quiddity in itself with God's existence.

Chapter V: The Divine Origin of Pure Quiddity

1 The existence of the pure quiddities in God

In the foregoing chapters, I argued that the pure quiddities possess a special mode of existence characterized by simplicity, irreducibility, and priority. With regard to the issue of their localization, I concluded that they can be said to exist in the human mind and in the concrete world. On the one hand, they underlie the complex concrete and mental existents and constitute an ontological principle of these existents. On the other hand, they also exist as distinct entities and pure or transcendental objects of thought in the human mind. Pure quiddity is consequently an epistemic and ontological constant, a principle found in every composite being, whether mental or concrete. It is a logical or epistemic absolute to which various conditions can be attached through mental operations and reflection, but it also signals a distinct ontological mode or state that belongs to it purely ‘in itself.’ Yet, while pure quiddity exists in those entities according to an unconditioned and indeterminate mode, it can also be considered in each case with conditions and qualifications that apply to it, thereby changing the way in which we perceive its relation to its external concomitants and to realized existence. In this connection, it was shown that Avicenna articulates a theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) that can accommodate an essential mode of existence restricted to God and to the pure quiddities, as well as a contingent and realized mode of existence pertaining to the quidditative concomitants and accidents. In this section, the former aspect will be explored further through the lens of the relation between divine knowledge, divine causality, and quiddity in itself.

1.1 The pure quiddities and divine knowledge and intellection

Having addressed the problem of the special ontological status of quiddity in itself, I now turn to the corollary issue of whether the pure quiddities can be located elsewhere than in the human mind and in the concrete beings. More specifically, I intend to investigate the question whether Avicenna also situates these pure quiddities in the mind of God and in the separate intellects. Modern scholars have tended to discuss the quiddities in connection either with God’s mind or with the human mind, but few attempts have been made to connect these two domains. Thus, the challenge becomes not only to explain how the essences relate to God, but also—if they do somehow exist in God—what relationship obtains between their divine and human states, and what is the nature of the causality bridging these two spheres. In this connection, the issue of how quiddity in itself comes to exist in the human mind also calls for some clarification. Tackling these questions requires a consideration not

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only of what God knows, but of how God creates things, including, possibly, the pure quiddities. It should be noted that these problematics—whether God contemplates the quiddities, how they exist in His essence, and how they come to exist in the contingent world—are of direct importance for our understanding of the reception of Avicenna’s philosophy in the later Arabic philosophical tradition, and thus constitute an important part of the history of Avicennism. For it is likely that later theories that ascribe a distinct class of objects to God’s intellection (whether meanings/*ma‘ānī*, essences/*māhiyyāt*, things/*ashyā’*, or even fixed entities/*a‘yān thābitah*) owe a debt to Avicenna’s theorization of this theological problem, and this regardless of the kind of ontological status that is attributed to these objects.¹

The view according to which the essences can be located in the divine mind is an old one in the literature on Avicenna, even though it does not by any means amount to a consensus. Already in the first half of the twentieth century, Goichon addressed this hypothesis in her monograph on Avicenna. She pointedly asked whether the objects thought by the First Cause have their own *māhiyyah*, since, according to Avicenna, intelligibles, *qua* universal mental existents, possess their own quiddity or *māhiyyah*.² Goichon concluded that Avicenna does indeed locate the quiddities in the divine mind. However, she opined that although Avicenna managed to solve the ensuing problem of the multiplicity of God’s epistemic objects convincingly, he failed to solve the other corollary problem of the ontological multiplicity these objects entailed in His essence.³ The issue was subsequently picked up and discussed by a number of more recent studies on Avicenna, such as those by Bäck, Rashed, Porro, and Black, who also one way or another locate the quiddities directly in the divine mind.⁴ Before exploring this issue in more depth, it is important to acknowl-

1 For recent discussions of divine knowledge in the works of later authors that take into account the Avicennian heritage, see Domingues da Silva, *La métaphysique*, for Suhrawardī; and Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*, especially 284–287, for the seventeenth-century thinker Kūrānī.

2 Goichon, *La distinction*, 32.

3 Goichon, *La distinction*, 89.

4 Let us briefly sum up the recent scholarship on this issue. In his article on essence in Avicenna, Bäck hypothesized the existence of the pure essences in the divine mind. To be precise, Bäck ascribes to Avicenna the view that ‘the pure possibles’ exist in the mind of the Necessary of Existence; see Avicenna’s *Conception*, 236; idem, *Avicenna on Existence*, 364–365 (I discuss the relation between quiddity and possibility below). For Porro, *Universaux*, there is a divine intellectual existence of the quiddities, although he is not clear in which ‘divine’ intellect the quiddities should be located. Nevertheless, according to Porro, 38–39, 44, there would be two modes of intellectual existence, divine and human, since, for Avicenna, as later for Henry of Ghent, essences exist originally in the divine intellect and only subsequently can be said to exist in the human intellect. Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī, also allows for this possibility in an explicit way. As Rashed explains, for Ibn ‘Adī, the pure essences have existence, and they are identified with forms in the divine intellect (142); and Ibn ‘Adī’s *wujūd dhātī* corresponds to Avicenna’s *wujūd khāṣṣ*, in that both are a kind of *wujūd ilāhī* (146). In addition, as underlined by Rashed (157, note 94), Avicenna in *Epistle on the Vain Intelligibles* suggests that the forms (*ṣuwar*) emanate from God’s intellect to the human intellect, although the human soul will preserve only the true forms after death, not the fictional forms. But in this connection, it is interesting

edge a terminological difficulty. It concerns what Avicenna construes as ‘intellectual’ or ‘mental’ existence. As mentioned above, there are historical precedents in the medieval and modern literature for describing the pure quiddities as intelligible existents in God. While this view might ultimately prove to be correct in the case of Avicenna, it should be noted that when the master speaks of quiddity in itself in connection with the intellect, he is usually referring to them *qua* objects of human, not divine, intellection. This is definitely the case for the majority of the key passages that appear in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*. Furthermore, when the master speaks more specifically of ‘mental’ or ‘intellectual existents’ in a psychological or metaphysical context, he is again usually focusing on the concepts in the human mind. Avicenna’s terminology offers a first vindication of this fact: consider the expressions existence ‘in the intellect’ (*fī l-‘aql*), ‘in the mind’ (*fī l-dhihn*), ‘in the soul’ (*fī l-nafs*), and ‘in the estimation’ (*fī l-awhām*), which all appear frequently in the Avicennian sources. The last three expressions refer to the human soul, since neither God nor the separate intellects have a soul, a mind, or an estimative faculty. Rather, they have pure intellects (sing., *‘aql*). As for the reference to existence ‘in the intellect,’ it is admittedly more ambiguous, since it could, on sheer terminological grounds, be construed as applying to God and the separate intellects in addition to the human intellects. However, the contexts in which these expressions appear make it clear that in most cases Avicenna is describing the human mind and its psychological operations. Hence, it is undeniable that the bulk of the evidence in Avicenna’s works pertaining to quiddity and its intellectual existence (whether in *Introduction* I.2, I.12 or *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1–2) has the human soul as its focus and not the divine intellects.

In view of this fact, the various hints Avicenna provides concerning the *localization* of the quiddities in themselves as being ‘in the mind’ or ‘in the intellect’ are to be connected with human thought first and foremost and only secondarily with divine noetics. The only explicit connection Avicenna makes between the pure quiddities and God in the whole of *Metaphysics* I.5 and V.1 is his mention of their “divine existence” and their being related to the “divine providence” (*ināyah*) (V.1, 205.1–2), two admittedly obscure statements that require serious unpacking and which, in any case, shed little light on the *mode* in which these quiddities could be said to exist in God Himself—if at all. The upshot of this is that there would seem to be little textual ground for regarding the divine mode or existence of the pure quiddities as a kind of intellectual existence proper, especially if human noetics is taken as a default explanatory model. This makes sense, of course, given that what Avicenna routinely

that Avicenna appears to intimate that the vain forms also emanate from God, as long as the imaginative faculty is active. This would seem to lend some weight to the view that even the fictional quiddities somehow exist in God. At any rate, this piece of evidence should be handled with caution, given that no similar statement can be found in Avicenna’s major philosophical works. It is, moreover, noteworthy that in this treatise Avicenna connects the fictional forms with the imaginative faculty and not with the intellect proper.

defines as a ‘mental existent’ concerns a composite or cluster made up of quiddity in itself together with its various mental concomitants, and, hence, a synthesis of intentions (*ma‘ānī*) whose coalescing takes place in the human mind. These universals are complex existents. As such, they are understandably confined to the human mind and cannot be regarded as valid objects of divine intellection, since they would introduce a kind of accidental multiplicity in the divine *nous*. Hence, if the quiddities exist in God or in a divine intellect, it is clear that they cannot exist in the same intellectual state or mode in which they exist as universals in the human mind; that is, ‘on the condition of something else’ (*bi-sharṭ shay’ ākhar*), as being predicated of many things, and as intentionally complex objects. Rather, if ever they exist in the divine mind, they would exist in themselves *qua* quidditative meanings and special objects enjoying a kind of abstracted existence, in a mode comparable to that of pure quiddity in the human mind (which excludes mental concomitants). Since Avicenna goes to great lengths to distinguish the consideration of pure quiddity from that of universality and of the universal concept in the human mind, it would seem, *a fortiori*, that the same would apply in the case of God. In brief, God—and by extension the separate intellects—cannot possibly intellect the universals as these are defined in human psychology.⁵

Compounding this terminological ambiguity is a set of delicate conceptual problems associated with the topic of divine knowledge. First, there is the famous and ‘classic’ problem of divine multiplicity. If one posits that the quiddities exist in God’s mind as distinct objects of knowledge, then the theory of the oneness and simplicity of the divine knowledge and essence would collapse or, at the very least,

5 One perceives here the limitations of the Avicennian terminology and its underlying ambiguity. For the term ‘intellectual’ (*‘aqlī*) conveys different meanings when applied to divine and human noetics, and, in the latter case, I would argue, between different aspects of universal intellectual existence (the complex mental universal vs. the essential universality of pure quiddity). These various cases need to be systematically clarified. One additional consideration concerns the distinction between discursive vs. non-discursive thought. For insightful reflection on this topic, see Adamson, *Non-Discursive Thought*. But Avicenna is keen also to remind us that if we can conventionally describe God’s activity as intellectual and the divine being as an intellect, these descriptions should not be taken literally and in any case bear no resemblance to human thought and intellection. The notion of a *divine intellectual existence* is therefore problematic, insofar as Avicenna’s description of God as an intellect (*‘aql*) is itself not always intended as a literal or positive description of the divine reality, but as an apophatic tactic intended to express God’s immateriality. Following Fārābī’s lead (Walzer, *On the Perfect State*, 71–77) Avicenna expounds on God’s ‘negative attributes’ in *Metaphysics* VIII.7, and he even argues that the term ‘intellect’ can be construed strictly negatively as meaning immateriality (368.1–2). But these points notwithstanding, the main issue at stake here centers on how pure quiddity relates to its mental concomitants—including universality—and how this applies to divine intellection. Even if the pure quiddities may in a sense be located in God, can they be said to dwell there as *universal* mental objects on a par with those located in the human mind? Here again, there may be a gap between a conventional discourse on divine knowledge and a technical or analytical one. Conventionally, we may speak of a divine intellect, of divine intellection, and of God knowing ‘universals,’ but to what extent does Avicenna actually uphold these views literally?

would be seriously compromised. Likewise, if they are considered as existents or as existing in any strong sense, the claim of the perfectly unitary existence of God would be invalidated. Since God is shown to be one, simple, and unique, positing other existents alongside or within Him would render Him multiple and complex and would thereby undermine the doctrine of *tawhīd*. This problem, which runs through the late-antique Neoplatonic and medieval Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, assumes a distinct form in the context of Avicenna's metaphysics and theology, given his strong advocacy of absolute divine oneness and simplicity.⁶ In addition to this 'classic' theological problem related to multiplicity, there is another issue that is more properly 'Avicennian' and that has to my knowledge not been accounted for by the modern scholars who, following Goichon, tentatively locate the quiddities in the divine mind. Put succinctly, the question is what kind of quiddities God knows, and what kind of universality is attached to these quiddities. If 'regular' or 'standard' mental universals are identified as the objects of God's knowledge, then, on Avicenna's account, this would mean that God apprehends not only the pure quiddities but also mental concomitants such as universality and oneness, which are external to the essence as such. This, of course, would lead to the emergence of a certain intelligible multiplicity in the divine essence, and we would then revert back to the first problem highlighted above. The alternative is to identify these divine objects with the pure quiddities. But here a new problem arises, because Avicenna insists that God's knowledge is universal. The master is explicit with regard to the fact that God's knowledge consists in a *universal* (*kullī*) kind of knowledge. He frequently states in his works that God knows things "in a universal way" (*min wajh kullī* or *'alā nahw kullī*),⁷ and he also sometimes claims more committedly that God apprehends universal things (*umūr kullīyyah*) or the universals (*al-kullīyāt*).⁸ Consequently, it would seem that the quiddities in themselves could not provide the basis for this universal kind of knowledge, since as such they are not universals and exist in abstraction from the attribute of universality. To claim that pure quiddity, when considered by the divine essence, would amount to a universal or form the

6 Scholars who locate the pure quiddities in the divine mind have to address these points. See Goichon, *La distinction*, 85–90; Porro, *Universaux*, does not address this crucial point in his discussion of mental existence in Avicenna. Nevertheless, he seems to locate the quiddities in the separate intellects or at the very least in the Agent Intellect. This point is less critical, albeit also not fully addressed, in Rashed, *Ibn 'Adī*. Rashed's hypothesis of the neutral ontological status of the quiddities in themselves to some extent exonerates him of having to tackle these issues: *qua* neutral entities, the quiddities could be said to exist in the divine mind without, however, interfering with, or being super-added to, the divine essence. However, the hypothesis of neutral existence is in itself problematic, as I underlined earlier. If any ontological mode is to be ascribed to quiddity, it is not a neutral one, but a positive intelligible one.

7 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 595–599; *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.6, 359.12–13; 360.12; 361.8; cf. *Notes*, 3–11, section 1.

8 See Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 48.6–18, where he explains that the divine world has knowledge of universals as well as particulars in a universal way; cf. *Salvation*, 595–599.

basis for universal knowledge in God's intellect, or even that it could be considered in a universal way—and this when Avicenna describes universality as an external concomitant of pure quiddity that occurs to it in the human mind—is an interpretive stretch that appears unwarranted on Avicenna's part and in some of the modern studies dealing with this issue. Upholders of the view that God knows the pure quiddities would therefore have to account for how God's knowledge of these quiddities can be simultaneously described as 'universal.' Indeed, on this line of reasoning a discrepancy or paradox seems to arise between the simple and irreducible existence of the pure quiddities in God, and God's knowledge of these quiddities *qua* complex and conditioned universals. Put differently, given that Avicenna defines the universal chiefly or primarily as an object in the human mind and that it is by nature composite and synthetic—it is also 'after multiplicity' according to the threefold scheme outlined in *Introduction* I.12—on what grounds can Avicenna ascribe universal knowledge to God?

Finally, there is the issue of the correspondence between the pure quiddities as they are present in the divine essence and as they occur in the human mind. As I mentioned earlier, Avicenna is quite keen on locating the pure quiddities in the human mind. In fact, virtually all of his comments in *Introduction* and *Metaphysics* concerning the pure quiddities define them as logical considerations and as intellectual existents in the human mind, and not specifically as objects of the divine mind. As a result, the method adopted in this study began with an inquiry of the pure quiddities in the human mind. This suggests that intellection of the pure quiddities is not the exclusive privilege of the divine beings, but that it is, at the very least, common to divine and human intellects. This in turn raises the thorny questions of how the quiddities come to be in the human mind and what exactly is the causal relationship between their divine and human states. In view of the foregoing, the move to situate the pure quiddities in God and to make them valid objects of the divine intellection runs into major interpretive difficulties and calls for detailed examination. These points notwithstanding, there appears to be ample evidence indicating that Avicenna locates the pure quiddities in the divine mind. What makes the study of this issue intricate, however, is the rich and variegated vocabulary he relies on to approach this theological topic, in particular to describe the objects of God's knowledge. What follows is an attempt to tackle the aforementioned terminological and doctrinal difficulties and to show the coherence and consistency of Avicenna's theory of quiddity in its theological context or dimension.

Avicenna relies on a wide array of technical terms to describe the objects of divine knowledge, whose relation to pure quiddity requires elucidation. The most common terms he uses in his works are 'meanings' or 'ideas' (*ma'āni*), 'intelligibles' (*ma'qūlāt*), 'forms' (*ṣuwar*), 'concomitants' (*lawāzim*), and 'things' (*ashyā*).⁹ When

⁹ It should be pointed out that whereas the first four terms are technical, the last one, 'things' (*ashyā*), is often used in a theological context in a non-technical sense and to refer broadly to the

discussing God's intellection in *The Cure*, *Salvation*, and *Pointers*, which are his major extant philosophical works, Avicenna frequently refers to the meanings, things, forms, and intelligibles lying at the core of divine intellection. In *Metaphysics* of *The Cure*, he affirms that God knows "things" (*ashyā'*) by intellecting them all at once.¹⁰ In his *Commentary on Book Lambda*, he states that "God's self-intellection is an intellection of the whole (*al-kull*)," and that when God intellects Himself, He also intellects things as "a concomitant [*lāzim*]" of His essence.¹¹ A similar point is reiterated in *Philosophy for 'Arūḍī*, where God's intelligibles are described in terms of "concomitants."¹² In *Notes*, one learns that "God thinks the forms [*ṣuwar*] as a simple [thing] and together, not in differentiated orders," and that "He does not intellect them as something external to Him (*min khārij*)."¹³ In fact, this work contains numerous and detailed descriptions of God's objects of knowledge, which rely on a rich array of technical terms, notably *ma'qūlāt*, *ṣuwar*, *ashyā'*, and *lawāzīm*.¹⁴ One should also consider the following striking passage from *On the Soul* of *The Cure*:

Text 44: We say that the quidditative meanings of all past, present, and future things that come to be in the world [*ma'ānī jamī' al-umūr al-kā'inah*] exist in the knowledge of the Creator and the intellectual angels under a certain aspect [*mawjūdah fī 'ilm al-bārī' wa-l-malā'ikah al-'aqliyyah min jihah*] and exist in the celestial heavenly souls under [another] aspect. We will elucidate these two aspects [*al-jihatān*] in another place.¹⁵

In *Pointers*, Avicenna further explains that the intelligible forms (*al-ṣuwar al-'aqliyyah*) pre-exist in God's knowledge before they are actualized in the concrete world.¹⁶ Now, one can infer from these examples that the master uses the Arabic words *ma'ānī*, *lawāzīm*, *ma'qūlāt*, *ṣuwar*, and *ashyā'* interchangeably when discussing the objects of divine knowledge and intellection.¹⁷ Many of these terms also ap-

objects of divine knowledge. This usage contrasts with the more technical meaning of thing as quiddity, which appears in Avicenna's discussion of the primary notions in *The Metaphysics*.

¹⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7, 363.1.

¹¹ Avicenna, *Commentary on Book Lambda*, 71.261–266; for information on this work, see Janssens, Avicenne.

¹² Avicenna, *Philosophy for 'Arūḍī*, 161.1.

¹³ Avicenna, *Notes*, 352.7, section 627.

¹⁴ Avicenna, *Notes*, 350–351, section 625; 352, sections 626 and 627; 572, section 1000.

¹⁵ Avicenna, *On the Soul of The Cure*, IV.2, 178.14–17.

¹⁶ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol.3–4, 706.7–707.5

¹⁷ Note that this problem extends to the other separate intellects as well. Although they are not perfectly or absolutely simple and one, like the First Cause, they are nonetheless simple intellectual existents. Hence, positing a plurality of intelligibles within them would pose a problem in that it would undermine their simple nature. In this connection, it is important to stress that Avicenna's arguments to establish the intelligible multiplicity of the separate intellects does not rely primarily on their contemplation of the quiddities or the forms of things, but rather on the distinctions between self-intellection and intellection of the First, and between the modes of the possible and the necessary (i.e., knowing themselves as possible with regard to their essence and necessary with regard to their rela-

pear in the context of his psychology and more specifically in connection with his discussion of quiddity as an object of the human intellect.¹⁸ Regardless of the term that is used, the key point Avicenna puts forth is that these objects are not outside of the divine essence, but contained within it. These objects are not external to God, but internal to Him, since His intellection is fundamentally an intellection of His essence. In his *Commentary on Book Lambda*, Avicenna praises Themistius for glossing God's intellection of Himself as an intellection of "the intelligible world all at once" (*al-‘ālam al-‘aqli daf‘atan*).¹⁹ Moreover, Avicenna's qualification that God and the separate intellects know these things "before their existence in multiplicity" indicates that they are known as the result of an internal and reflexive intellectual act that essentially precedes the causation of contingent beings. So Avicenna in his various works firmly defends the theological position according to which God knows all things/meanings/quiddities/forms by knowing His essence. At the same time, he strives to avoid the two pitfalls consisting in the views that God knows *only* His essence (to the exclusion of other things), and that He knows things as objects *external* to His essence.²⁰

Now, there can be little doubt that the terms *ma‘ānī*, *ṣuwar*, *ma‘qūlāt*, and *ashyā‘* ultimately serve to designate the quiddities as objects of the divine intellection. As was shown on various occasions, Avicenna often employs the term *ma‘ānī* as a synonym of *māhiyyah*, and the other terms *ma‘qūlāt*, *ṣuwar*, and *ashyā‘* also bear a close relation to it. The term *ma‘ānī* in particular plays a key role in Avicenna's theory of quiddity and appears in his psychological, logical, and metaphysical writings. In these various instances, it designates primarily the quidditative meanings that are apprehended by an intellect, whether human or divine. It is not surprising therefore that this technical term would also refer to quiddity in a theological context and contribute to describing the objects of the divine intellection. The only term mentioned above that poses a real interpretive problem is *lawāzīm*. For, according to the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model, the concomitants are external to the quiddities themselves or—according to another interpretation—to the quiddity that is God. So if God intellects the *lawāzīm* (however construed), it would seem that a certain externality and multiplicity would affect His intellection. Moreover, it is not immediately clear what

tion to the First). In fact, as in the case of the First, Avicenna seems to believe that the separate intellects apprehend all the quiddities, but that this intellectual act does not yield plurality.

18 It is striking in this connection that Avicenna resorts to a similar terminology, notably the term *ma‘ānī*, to describe the quiddities in themselves as these are apprehended by God and the separate intellects and as they are known in the human soul. Avicenna also frequently uses the term *i‘tibār* when talking about the intellection of the separate intellects, as when he refers to the intellection of the First Effect, which thinks the First Cause and its own essence. These are two distinct objects of thought and intelligibles (*ma‘qūl*), which also correspond to two different considerations (*i‘tibārāt*) in that intellect. Cf. the previous analysis of *i‘tibār* in Ṭūsī and other thinkers.

19 Avicenna, *Commentary on Book Lambda*, 57.135–136.

20 That Avicenna was aware of the first pitfall as a possible interpretation of Aristotle's Book Lambda 9 is shown in his *Commentary on Book Lambda*, 71.261–262.

this term refers to, since it covers a wide range of objects. These points require scrutiny and are picked up in a later section.

If the objects in God's mind are broadly identified with the quiddities, then one may proceed to ask the following pointed questions: does God know the pure quiddities or the universal quiddities? That is to say, are the divine intellectual objects described in the various passages above to be identified with the quiddities in themselves or with the universals that Avicenna defines in the context of his psychological and metaphysical works? Similarly, are the forms posited in the Agent Intellect the universals or the pure essences? The traditional approach to these questions consists in assuming that the objects contemplated by God and/or the Agent Intellect must be the universals, because (a) Avicenna refers explicitly to God's knowledge of *universals* or His *universal* knowledge, and because (b) there are, on the standard account, only two modes of existence of quiddity, intellectual and universal, on the one hand, and concrete and particular, on the other. But true and certain knowledge according to Avicenna consists in apprehending the universal forms abstracted from matter. Consequently, and by process of elimination, pure quiddity can be said to exist in the divine intellect only in a universal mode. In a recent study devoted to quiddity in Avicenna, Benevich has argued precisely along those lines and claimed that the pure quiddities cannot be situated in the Agent Intellect, and by extension, in all of the other divine intellects, since Avicenna recognizes only one class of mental existents, the universals. Accordingly, Benevich construes the expression 'divine existence' that appears in *Metaphysics* (V.1, 205.1–2) along mereological lines and as referring only to the existence of pure quiddity as an irreducible part of the universals in the human mind, and not to the existence of pure quiddities as distinct objects in the divine intellects. According to Benevich, there cannot for the same reason be a state of pure quiddity that is distinct from the universal in the human mind. In brief, on his view, intellectual existence is always universal in nature. He therefore restricts the objects present in the Agent Intellect and in the human mind to the universals alone.²¹ However, this approach, based as it is on the premise that there are only two spheres of existence in Avicenna, the mental and the concrete, is problematic on numerous counts. To begin with, it does not account for a considerable volume of textual evidence that was surveyed in the previous chapters of this book. But

21 See Benevich, Die 'göttliche Existenz,' 113–115. Benevich argues that only universals exist in the Agent Intellect and in the human mind, since on his view mental existence for Avicenna is necessarily *universal* existence (note that Benevich does not account for the difference between the objects of human and divine knowledge and how both can equally be called 'universals'). But as the present study has shown, universality is an ambiguous or modulated notion for Avicenna, which he uses in different ways in his works, so that additional qualifications are called for to adequately explain these differences. Clearly, God's, the Agent Intellect's, and a human being's intellection cannot be 'universal' in exactly the same way. Furthermore, it appears that the relationship between the universal and pure quiddity in the mind was the subject of an intense debate in the postclassical tradition—and one that unfolded within the larger problematic of mental existence—with thinkers defending different positions on the issue.

more pointedly in the present context, ascribing universals to the divine intellects only compounds the problem at hand. For Avicenna, the universal—as it is defined in the context of human psychology—is a synthetic, composite, and logically derivative concept that implies mental concomitants, accidents, and intentions being added to the core quidditative meaning. This means that the universals, although they can be regarded as simple concepts according to one consideration, can be envisaged according to another consideration as composite or complex entities. As Benevich himself reckons, Avicenna develops a mereological theory whereby pure quiddity exists irreducibly *in* this universal entity, without ever losing its simplicity and identity. But positing such complex universal entities in the context of divine intellection is problematic, since it would entail a kind of accidental multiplicity. On the very definition of universality *qua* mental concomitant that Avicenna provides in his works, quiddity *qua* universal object would exist in these superlunary intellects with the same accidents and concomitants with which they exist in human discursive thought. In other words, if one locates the universals in God and/or in the Agent Intellect, then this would mean that the same complex intellectual entities would exist in human minds and in those simple beings. Furthermore, it was argued in chapter II that Avicenna vindicates the human ability to intellect quiddity in itself and that, as such, it represents a distinct and simple form and concept in the mind. Given this conclusion, it would be odd if the separate intellects—whose perfections and degree of nobleness exceed by far those of the human intellects—were incapable of such an intellectual act. Rather, it would seem, *a fortiori*, that these intellects should know the pure quiddities. In view of these points, it is not surprising that some scholars have preferred to identify the objects of the divine knowledge with the pure quiddities rather than with the mental universals.

In what follows I contend that, according to Avicenna, God's knowledge encompasses, strictly speaking, only the pure quiddities and not the universals as these are typically described in the master's psychology and epistemology. Concurring with Marwan Rashed on this point, I think it is preferable to resort to the special, irreducible, and absolute ontological mode of pure quiddity as a means of explaining how the quiddities could exist in God (and perhaps also in the Agent Intellect), if one is to solve the enduring problems that have plagued the interpretation of Avicenna's theology. This interpretive option allows one to address the rich textual evidence describing the divine intellectual objects, while at the same time bypassing some of the major difficulties that the traditional interpretation of the universals engenders. Undeniably, it is this non-universal and simple ontological mode of pure quiddity that best suits the divine world. This interpretation, which flows naturally from the analysis articulated in the previous chapters of this book, seems further supported by specific passages drawn from the Avicennian corpus. One quite relevant piece of evidence to this effect can be gleaned from *Notes*. It was already mentioned in chapter II (Text 4), and I cite here only the most relevant segment:

The intelligible that is intellectuated by the First with regard to this individual [existent] is this very intelligible form, which is absolute humanness [*nafs al-šūrah al-ma'qūlah wa-huwa l-insāniyyah al-muṭlaqah*], that is, not a certain individualized humanness [combined] with accidents and concomitants that can be sensed and pointed to.²²

In these lines Avicenna quite literally ascribes knowledge of the pure quiddities to God. The First knows and intellectuates the pure quiddities of things—in this particular case, the pure quiddity ‘humanness’—as opposed to quiddity combined with its external concomitants and accidents. The kind of quiddity God knows is completely abstract (*mujarrad*, a term Avicenna uses earlier in the passage to describe pure quiddity) and absolute (*muṭlaqah*), and, consequently, also prior to any sort of multiplicity. It is, in other words, a kind of knowledge that is prior to the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* complex.²³

To this excerpt one may collate another passage from *Introduction* in which Avicenna describes the mode in which the divine beings come to know the natures and quiddities of things. The context in which this passage appears is particularly significant and leaves no doubt as to the kinds of objects that constitute God’s knowledge. Prior to the passage in question, Avicenna had discussed the “natures” (sing. *ṭabī‘ah*) that exist in concrete individuals and also form the basis for the intelligibles in the divine mind. These natures are tantamount to the true realities (sing. *ḥaqīqah*) of things and the quiddities in themselves (sing. *al-māhiyyah min ḥaythu hiya hiya*). Having explained how human beings can extract these natures from the particulars and, hence, from the world of sensible multiplicity that surrounds them, Avicenna proceeds to clarify their relationship to the divine intellects, which know them *before* they are embedded in material individuals. God and “the angels”—that is, the separate intellects—know the truths or quiddities of the natural things by apprehending them directly and in a mode that precedes their existence in multiplicity. This implies that these forms and the conception of the natures/pure quiddities in the intellect can either precede (in the case of God) or follow (in the case of human beings) the existence of the concrete particulars. This passage merits our full attention and should be cited in its entirety:

²² Avicenna, *Notes*, 43, section 25.

²³ This passage from *Notes* is echoed in the earlier work *Salvation*, 594.6–10, where Avicenna explains (with regard to God’s knowledge) that if the corruptible things (*al-fāsīdāt*) are intellectuated with regard to their abstract or pure quiddities (in ‘*uqūlat bi-l-māhiyyah al-mujarradah*), then this would entail no change in the divine essence, since they would not be intellectuated *qua* corruptible things. It is clear that the argument in these two texts is fundamentally the same. Its thrust is that God knows the pure quiddities of all things, and that by knowing these pure quiddities, he can also know all of their concomitants, without this knowledge entailing change or deficiency in the divine essence. As I explained in chapter II, and as Text 3, Text 4, and Text 6 also indicate, the expression *māhiyyah mujarradah* usually refers in Avicenna’s works to quiddity in itself in the intellect.

Text 45: Sometimes the intelligible form [*al-ṣūrah al-ma'qūlah*] is in some manner a cause for the occurrence of the form that exists in external reality [*al-ṣūrah al-mawjūdah fī l-a'yān*]; sometimes the form in external reality is in some manner a cause of the intelligible form, that is, [the latter] occurs in the mind after it has existed in external reality. Now, because the relation of all existing things to God and the angels is [the same as] the relation of [human] artifacts to the productive soul, that which is in God's and the angels' knowledge of the true nature [*ḥaqīqah*] of what is known and apprehended of natural things exists prior to multiplicity [*qabl al-kathrah*]. Each one of these intelligibles is a single and simple meaning [*ma'nā wāḥid*]; only subsequently is the existence proper to multiplicity realized [*yaḥṣulu l-wujūd*] in those meanings [*ma'ānī*]. [The existence] then occurs in reality, but does not unite with [them] in any manner whatsoever, for in external things there is no one common thing, but only dispersion. They [the meanings] then become once more intelligible to us after their actualization in multiplicity [thanks to abstraction]. As for the manner of their being prior to multiplicity—whether they are objects of knowledge of one [divine] essence that does or does not become multiple because of them, or whether they are self-subsistent exemplars—[these are questions that] our present investigation will not deal with. For these [issues] there is another theoretical discipline.²⁴

Avicenna makes several important points in this passage that should be contextualized in terms of the late-antique Neoplatonic background and *kalām* discussions about God's knowledge. More specifically, they pertain to the theological question of whether God's knowledge relates to things inside or outside His essence, the latter option potentially conjuring the theory of the Platonic forms, if these external objects are identified with separately existing essences or forms. Moreover, Avicenna's argumentation is also informed by efforts to address the various ontological questions pertaining to the universals that Porphyry formulated in *Eisagoge*. This is indicated notably by the set of notions 'before,' 'in,' and 'after multiplicity,' which reflects and builds on a long Neoplatonic tradition.²⁵ Analyzed in this light, this passage of *Introduction* is highly relevant for my purposes, but requires cautious unpacking due to its compressed style. Notice to begin with the terminology Avicenna deploys

²⁴ Avicenna, *Introduction*, I.12, 69.7–18; translation by Marmura, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals, 50, revised. This passage is discussed in Black, Avicenna, 11. My interpretation of the text concurs broadly with her analysis, but Black does not make clear whether she identifies the objects of the divine knowledge with the pure quiddities specifically. Nevertheless, her claim that "Avicenna recognizes that *those quiddities which become universals in our minds* have a prior existence in the pure intellects of God and the separate intelligences" (my emphasis) strongly suggests that she does.

²⁵ Avicenna's position that the forms exist in the divine intellect is of course inscribed in a long and variegated Greek philosophical tradition. For our purposes, it is the doctrines of the Middle- and Neoplatonists that concern us here. These thinkers held that the universals or forms exist in a divine mind—identified with the Demiurge or the Intellectual Principle—before multiplicity and matter. The fact that Avicenna mentions the threefold scheme 'before, in, and after multiplicity' that appears at the beginning of *Introduction* I.12 and that he himself relies on this theoretical template indicate that his approach should be regarded as a continuation of the Neoplatonic reflection on this topic. For these thinkers, the expressions 'before matter' or 'before multiplicity' refer to the existence of the universals in the divine world. Some of the main proponents of this view included Simplicius, Proclus, and Ammonius. Simplicius in particular dwells on this point in several passages of his commentary on *Categories*, such as 82.35–83.20 (in *CAG*).

to describe the objects of the divine knowledge. These objects are defined as forms (*ṣuwar*), true natures (*ṭabā'i*), true realities (sing. *ḥaqīqah*), intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*), and meanings (*ma'ānī*). These are the very same words that were previously encountered in Avicenna's theological descriptions in *Metaphysics*, and, more generally, in his psychological disquisitions on pure quiddity. In this theological or divine context, they serve the additional purpose of stressing the intelligible nature of these objects. Hence, one notices a considerable terminological overlap between this passage and the various other texts in which Avicenna discusses the ontological state of pure quiddity, leaving little doubt that the objects under consideration here in connection with God's knowledge are the pure natures and essences of things. This hypothesis seems further substantiated by the pointed remark that each one of the intelligibles in the divine intellects is a single and simple quidditative meaning (*ma'nā wāḥid*) and true nature (*ḥaqīqah*), which acquires multiplicity only after its instantiation in concrete reality.

One additional aim of the passage is to distinguish human and divine intellection, and more specifically the manner in which these intellects grasp the pure quiddities. While the divine intellects—here explicitly identified as God's intellect and the separate intellects—know the pure quiddities before, and in abstraction from, their instantiation in concrete beings and, hence, in multiplicity, the human intellects apprehend the natures only after these have been embodied in concrete individuals and abstracted by the mind. The posteriority of the human cognitive process relative to the exterior existence of these natures is not surprising, given Avicenna's views on the role of abstraction in our knowledge of the pure quiddities, a topic covered in the previous chapter. In most cases, human beings must perform a process of abstraction in order to cognize the quiddities of things, a requisite that makes human cognition posterior to the existence of natures in multiplicity and in matter. By implication, while the knowledge possessed by the superlunary intellects is immediate, non-discursive, and permanent or eternal (in the sense that their knowledge is constant and unchanging), the human apprehension of the pure quiddities is the result of a discursive and gradual process involving the various external and internal senses, as well as the various faculties of the intellect having to do with concept formation. In spite of these differences, Avicenna exploits the well-known ancient Greek analogy between the forms in the soul of the craftsman and the forms in the intellect of God in order to stress their essential and ontological priority over matter and multiplicity. The analogy between builder and Creator reappears in a passage of *Notes*, whose main intent is to show that God's self-knowledge is the cause of the existence of the forms in the world.²⁶

Avicenna's argument—and especially the distinction he draws between a divine, non-discursive intellection that precedes matter and multiplicity, and a human, discursive intellection that follows matter and multiplicity—is, in his system, directly re-

²⁶ Avicenna, *Notes*, 580, section 1008.

lated to the issue of the ontological status of pure quiddity. The divine intellect operates before matter and multiplicity precisely because it can apprehend quiddity in itself in its pure and simple state, whereas the human intellect must extract it from concrete beings in the first stage and initiate a logical thought process to produce a universal out of it in the second stage. Even the human apprehension of pure quiddity, which, on my reconstruction of the evidence, is substantiated in Avicenna's works, can hardly be called prior to multiplicity, given the embeddedness of human beings in the world of matter and of particulars, even though it does establish a privileged connection between the human intellect and its divine counterpart. Hence, if it is true that Avicenna's approach is broadly indebted to late-antique discussions on the universals and common things, it is nonetheless adapted to a specifically Avicennian metaphysical context focusing on the status of pure quiddity. One crucial point in this regard is that Avicenna's argument hinges not on the nature of the objects contemplated by the divine and human intellects, but on the ways or modes through which these objects come to be contemplated. In other words, it is not so much an argument about *what* is thought, as opposed to *how* it is thought. The objects contemplated by God, the separate intellects, and human beings are the same, viz., the natures and pure quiddities, but it is the cognitive mode that differs in each case. Recall that pure essence is only itself and nothing else, and that it is intellected 'with the condition that nothing else be added to it,' so that there cannot be different kinds of pure quiddities according to Avicenna. Rather, the pure quiddities that human beings apprehend are fundamentally the same as those known by the superlunary intellects, but in the case of human psychology they are acquired and known through a psychological process that does not apply to these immaterial beings. The thrust of Text 45, therefore, deals with the mode of intellection of the pure quiddities, in addition to the issue of their localization. Avicenna does refer to the latter problem toward the end of the excerpt, but without resolving it, since, as he explains, it should constitute the focus of another discipline, namely, metaphysics and theology. Notice, however, that he puts forth two main possibilities when it comes to addressing this issue: either (a) these quiddities amount to forms or "self-subsisting exemplars" that exist autonomously; or (b) they are contained and intellected by a divine intellect, which, as a result, (b1) becomes multiple or (b2) preserves its fundamental unity. Hypothesis (a) may be discarded at once, since it is obviously an allusion to the theory of the Platonic forms, which Avicenna rejects. One can deduce, therefore, that Avicenna aligns himself with hypothesis (b), which, it should be stressed, entails the existence of the pure quiddities in God *qua* intelligible objects, albeit in a way that does not interfere with God's absolute unity. This makes the pure quiddities in God's mind 'prior' to their actualization in concrete substances. This process of elimination provides further corroboration to the effect that Avicenna locates the pure quiddities in the divine mind, even though the issue of whether these quiddities entail multiplicity in God still needs to be addressed in earnest; I tackle this point below. Hence, although this passage provides solid evidence to the effect that God and the separate intellects know the pure quid-

dities and natures, in comparing and contrasting human and divine intellection it also makes the equally important point that these natures are the same in the case of human and divine knowledge. They differ only with regard to the mode of their acquisition and to how they relate to the concrete existents, a state Avicenna refers to as existence ‘in multiplicity’ or ‘in matter.’ What is more, there can be little doubt that the divine knowledge of the pure quiddities that is described in this passage, which is prior, simple, non-discursive, unchanging, and disconnected from matter, corresponds to the “divine existence” of quiddity that Avicenna mentions in *Metaphysics* (V.1, 205.1–2). For this “divine existence,” as it is defined in the latter passage, is also “prior” and “simple,” and it is explicitly ascribed to pure quiddity. This is what “divine” means in a generic sense, although it is also used more precisely in this passage of *Introduction* to signify God’s reflexive knowledge of the quiddities. It is also “divine” in that it points to God’s simple, immediate, and unchanging knowledge of the pure quiddities.

The most compelling hypothesis, then—supported as it is by a wealth of textual evidence drawn from Avicenna’s logical and metaphysical works and by a process of elimination of the kinds of objects God can know—is that God knows the quiddities of things and that only the pure quiddities can constitute suitable objects of this divine knowledge, not the universals of human thought. In other words, the things (*ashyā’*), intelligibles (*ma’qūlāt*), meanings (*ma’ānī*), and forms (*ṣuwar*) contemplated by the divine intellect are none other than the true natures and pure quiddities of things. When Avicenna refers to God’s knowledge and to His thinking intelligibles, things, realities, forms, and meanings, he most likely means the pure essences. All of these terms are interchangeable with essence or quiddity, and they are also technical terms used to identify quiddity in itself in those passages of Avicenna’s works that deal expressly with this topic. Attributing the mental universals—as these are defined in texts such as *Introduction* I.12 and *Metaphysics* V.1–2—rather than the pure quiddities to God is a thesis that ultimately appears untenable. The hypothesis put forward here can in turn help to explain what would otherwise remain a problematic feature of Avicenna’s theological argumentation, namely, his apparent claim that God knows possible things. Avicenna makes this statement in a passage of *Metaphysics* VIII.7 that has been partly responsible for fueling the controversy among scholars concerning the existence of possible things in God:²⁷

Text 46: Its [the First’s] apprehension of [Itself], inasmuch as it is of such [a nature], necessitates its apprehension of ‘the other’ [*al-ākhar*], even if it does not [yet] exist [contingently]. Hence, the Lordly Knower knows [both] realized and possible existence [*al-wujūd al-hāṣil wa-l-mumkin*]. His

²⁷ See notably Zedler, *Why are the Possibles Possible*; eadem, *Saint Thomas and Avicenna*; and the response in Lizzini, *A Mysterious Order*.

essence would have a relation to [the intelligibles] inasmuch as they are intellectually apprehended, not inasmuch as they have existence in external reality.²⁸

One should *not* read this excerpt as literally attributing to God a knowledge of ‘possibles’ or ‘possible things’ (*mumkināt*), where these possibles would somehow exist in the divine essence. Rather, on my interpretation, Avicenna is intimating that by knowing the pure quiddities of things as being identical with His essence, God knows these quiddities as both possible of existence and as actually existing in the world. As I explain below, Avicenna regards possibility as a concomitant of quiddity, so that it is external and posterior to the pure quidditative meaning apprehended as such. What this means is that the states of ‘being possible’ and ‘being actual’ relate to the ontological mode that characterizes caused, contingent, and composite beings. They both refer to *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, ‘acquired’ or ‘realized existence,’ which is external to essence as such. Put differently, they relate exclusively to the caused existents, to quiddities taken with their accidents and concomitants, and not to the pure quiddities in God, which in themselves are qualified not by acquired or realized existence, but only by essential being or their ‘proper existence’ (*wujūd khāṣṣ*), and, more specifically in this case, by God’s own special and essential existence. In itself, possibility is a modal consideration and aspect of *tashkīk al-wujūd* that has nothing to do with pure quiddity and is meaningful only *in relation to* actual and caused existence, or existence taken as an external concomitant. Accordingly, in the Avicennian model, every caused entity is both possible in itself and necessary by virtue of another. But God’s apprehension focuses exclusively on the pure quiddities that underlie these existents without being affected by these modal considerations.²⁹

These considerations enable us to securely locate the pure quiddities in God’s mind, while at the same hinting at a new solution to a set of old theological problems, which will be examined in more detail below. In addition to agreeing with Goichon and Rashed, my interpretation in effect rehabilitates a traditional position in the history of Avicennism, which had been expounded in particular by the medieval Latin Scholastics and commentators on Avicenna.³⁰ According to my analysis, the

28 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7, 364.12–15, translation by Marmura in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics*, 293, slightly revised.

29 This appears to be the most satisfactory explanation of the above passage. The alternatives, i.e., claiming either that God knows the possibles directly as such or that He does not apprehend the pure quiddities at all, create major interpretive problems. The former proposition entails multiplicity and possibility in the divine essence. The latter fails to explain how God can know ‘the other,’ that is, all other entities, without this knowledge being affected by possibility. The solution proposed here addresses these difficulties, since pure quiddity is a simple essential meaning that by definition excludes any modal considerations and concomitants.

30 Goichon, *La distinction*, especially 211, 222, 276–284. Although Goichon locates the quiddities in God, she does not systematically distinguish between their different aspects (pure quiddities, universals, etc.). Rashed, Ibn ‘Adī, on the other hand, makes the specific claim that it is the pure quiddities that should be located in the divine mind. I follow his lead and propose additional arguments.

pure quiddities exist as objects in the divine intellect in addition to their existing as distinct mental forms in the human mind and as an intelligible part in concrete and universal existents. This means that the pure quiddities have three *contexts* of existence: in the human mind, in concrete, extramental beings, and in the divine intellect. Regardless of the context, however, pure quiddity possesses a single, special, and absolute mode of existence. The foregoing discussion nevertheless raises three obdurate questions: first, why the pure quiddities, since they somehow exist in God, do not introduce multiplicity in His essence or being; second, why they should not introduce also possibility in the divine essence itself; and third, how they can be said to amount to what Avicenna describes as a kind of ‘universal’ knowledge, while not being universals proper. Indeed, scholars have repeatedly referred to Avicenna’s doctrine of God’s knowledge of universals or of His knowing ‘in a universal way.’ But what exactly does this mean? These three problems are addressed in detail below.

1.2 The problem of the multiplicity of the quiddities in God

It is clear that anyone who posits quiddities in the divine intellect must address at some stage or other the issue of intelligible multiplicity. In her classic work on Avicenna, Goichon ascribes knowledge of the quiddities to God, although she does not elaborate on the important question of whether these divine quiddities are the quiddities in themselves or universal quiddities similar to the ones found in the human mind. In addition, Goichon was perplexed by the implications that such a view entailed. In her eyes, Avicenna’s theology was fraught with an irremediable flaw, namely, that by situating the quiddities in God, he had allowed an apparent multiplicity to creep into the divine being—a multiplicity regarded either in terms of God’s knowledge or existence or both.³¹ Rashed, for his part, tried to solve this problem by describing the pure quiddities in God as lying beyond existence, or between existence and nonexistence and, hence, as possessing a neutral ontological status. As such, these neutral objects would not entail multiplicity, since they are not *sensu stricto* existents (*mawjūdāt*).³² By building on these accounts, I will articulate a fresh expla-

³¹ Goichon, *La distinction*, 85–90. In Goichon’s defense, it should be recognized that this difficulty arises regardless of whether one postulates universal quiddities, pure quiddities, or any other objects of thought in God. Yet, for a work entirely devoted to Avicenna’s metaphysics, Goichon provides surprisingly little information about the relationship between pure quiddity and the universals, as well as how these two notions relate to existence; this is a key shortcoming of her framework, and a gap that was later filled by Marmura’s studies. As I argue here, Avicenna’s approach to the question of divine unity and multiplicity should be studied in connection with his theory of pure quiddity. Goichon’s failure to highlight this connection accounts for her perplexity and dissatisfaction with this aspect of Avicenna’s theology, although it was also informed to some degree by her ‘Thomistic’ bias and scholastic formation; in Goichon’s eyes, Thomas had succeeded theologially where Avicenna had faltered.

³² I have already shared in the Introduction what I believe are the main difficulties with this view.

nation of how Avicenna may have envisaged the existence of the quiddities in the divine intellect. In this section, the main challenge is to understand how the pure quiddities can be said to constitute the objects of the divine knowledge and yet not result in any kind of multiplicity in the divine essence.

But before tackling this issue, it should be noted that Avicenna himself broaches this conundrum in several places in his corpus. In *Metaphysics of The Cure* VIII.6–7, two chapters devoted (among other things) to the issue of how the intelligibles relate to the divine essence, Avicenna raises the question of how we can ascribe various objects of knowledge to God while avoiding introducing multiplicity within the divine essence.³³ He lists different possible approaches to this problem: either the objects of God’s knowledge are “possible concomitants of His essence”; or they exist separately like the Platonic Forms; or they exist in other intellects and souls. But Avicenna regards these options as unpalatable, because each one entails its own difficulties and shortcomings. This is either because they introduce a relationship of possibility between God and these entities or because they conflict with other postulates of his philosophy (such as the impossibility for the Platonic Forms to exist). This theological question is then echoed in the passage of *Introduction* discussed above (Text 45), where Avicenna asks whether positing the quiddities in God as opposed to endorsing the Platonic forms leads one to a position of divine multiplicity. The master further discusses the problem of multiplicity in connection with the divine intelligibles in *Pointers*, where he asks (on behalf of a disciple): “If the intelligibles do not unite with the knower and with one another, as you [Avicenna] have mentioned, and if, in addition, we assume that the Necessary Existent intellects all things, then He is not in truth one, but there is here a multiplicity.”³⁴

These passages show that Avicenna was eminently aware of the problems of where to locate the divine intelligibles and, if they are posited to exist in God, of some of the main consequences that arise from this theological move. Moreover, he was presumably cognizant of some of the historical solutions formulated by his predecessors, especially the Neoplatonists, even though he does not mention any thinker explicitly by name. In this regard, it appears that Avicenna was not satisfied with two philosophical formulations already put forth to address this problem: first, locating the quiddities outside of God entirely, as some Platonists had; and second, locating them within God in a manner that would entail multiplicity, or making them co-existents alongside God’s essence, as was the case with the theology of many *mutakallimūn*. The remaining option, and the one that appears to have been endorsed by Avicenna himself, is to regard the quiddities as somehow existing in God, but not in a mode distinct from His essence, lest there should result a plurality within the divine being. At first glance, this proposition might strike us as paradoxical, since by upholding it Avicenna appears to make two irreconcilable claims: first,

³³ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7, 365.14 ff.

³⁴ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 712.4–714.1.

he rejects the idea that God can know things by apprehending them externally as entities distinct from His own essence (see VIII.6–7). This can be called the thesis of ‘internality.’ Second, and at the same time, Avicenna argues that the intelligibles, inasmuch as they correspond to things and concomitants caused by God, do not co-exist with the divine essence and are somehow *posterior* to God’s thinking His essence. This means that God’s intellection and knowledge must be absolutely reflexive and focus on His essence alone. This is the thesis of ‘exclusivity.’ According to these two claims, the pure quiddities would be neither outside of God nor in God in any real sense; neither internal nor external to His self-knowledge.

So how do the pure quiddities *qua* divine intelligibles fit in this picture? That is to say, what place do they have in this internalist and exclusivist account of divine knowledge? How can the intelligibles be essentially *posterior* to the divine essence and at the same time not exist *outside* of the divine essence or merely *alongside* It? I shall argue that the answer to these questions lies in the special nature of pure quiddity. It also calls for a clarification of what Avicenna means by ‘posterior’ in this context. Having rejected the possibility that the quiddities can exist in God *qua* parts (*ajzā*) or as an assemblage (*jumlah*)—a position that would entail compositeness and multiplicity (*kathrah*) and, hence, undermine the perfect oneness and simplicity of the divine essence—Avicenna argues that God knows all things by knowing Himself. This argument is reiterated many times in the Avicennian corpus. Since the divine intelligibles are not external to the divine essence, the implication is clearly that they are somehow identical with It and indistinguishable from It. In other words, God’s knowing His essence is identical with His knowing the pure quiddities, which later derive from his essence as concomitants as a result of His self-intellection. From an analytical viewpoint, the divine intellection may therefore be said to consist of two distinct stages. First, there is a ‘stage’ or ‘moment’ in the divine intellection when God’s knowledge of His essence is absolutely identical to His knowledge of the pure quiddities.³⁵ In *Pointers*, Avicenna writes: “The First’s apprehension of [all] things is *from* His essence and *in* His essence” (*idrāk al-awwal li-l-ashyā’ min dhātihī fī dhātihī*).³⁶ At this stage, the reality and existence of these intelligibles or forms are identical with God’s being. This point is made clear also in a passage of *Notes*:

Text 47: Everything that proceeds from the Necessary of Existence proceeds only through the mediation of His intellection of it. The very existence of the intelligible forms [*al-ṣuwar al-ma‘qūlah*] with regard to Him [*lahu*]³⁷ is identical with His intellection of them [*‘aqliyyatihi lahā*].

³⁵ In spite of the terminology employed, the following explanation is not intended as a temporal one. God is above time and, hence, no movement or chronological development can be attributed to Him or His actions.

³⁶ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 710.3.

³⁷ It is difficult to provide a satisfactory translation of the expression *lahu* in this context, since linguistically it introduces a relation between God and something else. However, since nothing, strictly speaking, is exterior to God’s intellection, i.e., since God’s intellection is purely internal and reflex-

There is no distinction between these two states [*al-ḥālayn*] and no hierarchy between one and the other, lest His intellection of them be distinct from their existence from Him. Rather, His intellection of them is not different from their very existence from Him. Hence, inasmuch as they are existent, they are intelligible; and inasmuch as they are intelligible, they are existent.³⁸

In this primal stage, then, there is no distinction between God's intellection of the forms or quiddities and their unitary existence in God. They are perfectly identical with the divine thought. Since God, strictly speaking, does not think or intellect anything outside of His essence, the necessary implication is that these forms and quiddities are one with the divine essence Itself. It is this perfect noetical unity and identity between thinker (‘*āqil*) and object of thought (*ma‘qūl*) that warrants describing the ontological status of the pure quiddities as a kind of “divine existence” (*wujūd ilāhī*), as Avicenna does in *Metaphysics* V.1.

Following this stage of perfect identity between the quiddities and God, between God's self-intellection and His intellection of the intelligibles, there is a second ‘stage’ or ‘moment’ that marks a certain conceptual distantiation from the divine essence. This is when God's self-knowledge results in the subsequent or ‘posterior’ existence of the pure quiddities and where the intelligibles are therefore describable in their own terms. At this point, God's self-knowledge has also become a knowledge of the pure quiddities as they exist in themselves. In a certain sense, these intelligibles may be said to be posterior to the divine essence the very instant that they are regarded as concomitants (*lawāzim*) of the divine intellection.³⁹ From a cosmological perspective, this second stage coincides with the causation of the First Effect and of all the intelligible forms—the *ṣuwar ma‘qūlah* mentioned in Text 47 above—in the First Effect, which is Itself a separate intellect thinking the pure intelligibles and quiddities. At this stage, conceptual distinctions and differences start to appear: in the intellection that the First Effect has of itself and of the First Cause, and between the various quiddities as distinct intelligibles in the intellect of the First Effect.

ive, even though it encompasses all things, one option is to render *lahu* simply as “in Him” or “in His essence,” which, although it is not literal, would not be erroneous.

38 Avicenna, *Notes*, 114.8–115.2, section 147.

39 The general parallels between this aspect of Avicenna's theology and Neoplatonic—especially Plotinian—noetics are perspicuous. This connection is all the more justified given that Arabic thinkers applied some of the Neoplatonic theories that reached them in the Arabic translations and adaptations of Plotinus to God rather than to the Intellectual Principle described in *Enneads*, thereby following a trend that is already visible in those translations. This tendency consisted in shifting the focus of some passages of *Enneads* from the Intellectual Principle to God, perhaps in an attempt to provide a seamless reading of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic theology. Thus, many of the things Plotinus says about the Intellectual Principle, such as his descriptions of the various moments or stages characterizing the relationship of the intelligibles to the divine intellect, can be applied to Avicenna's theology. Perhaps even more striking in this regard are the parallels between Avicenna and Duns Scotus, in whose theology different ‘moments’ or ‘stages’ can also be identified to describe God's intellection and its demiurgic consequences, which correspond in striking ways to the Avicennian model delineated in this study. On this issue, see Porro, Universaux, and idem, Henry of Ghent.

In this context, Avicenna sometimes speaks of a relation (*iḍāfah*) between God and the intelligibles. This serves to stress the posteriority of the quiddities vis-à-vis His essence considered strictly in Itself, in spite of the fact that they themselves exist on an intelligible plane and in the divine being. As Avicenna puts it, “His essence has a relation [*iḍāfah*] to the intelligibles inasmuch as they are intelligible [*ma‘qūlah*], not inasmuch as they possess concrete existence.”⁴⁰ This statement further emphasizes the idea that the pure quiddities exist in God *qua* intelligibles before they acquire external concrete and composite existence, although there is a sense in which they can be spoken of as being subsequent to the divine essence itself. Nevertheless, from God’s perspective the intelligibles as such remain within the divine essence and are indistinguishable from It. It is only human discursive reasoning and language that can artificially differentiate between these stages or moments in the divine intellection, which remain a single reality within God. The propositions ‘God’s thinking His essence’ and ‘God’s thinking the pure quiddities and intelligibles’ are interchangeable, even though they reflect a sequentiality that is ingrained in the very process of human discursive thought and that is metaphorically applied to the First. One can find a passage that aptly and compactly summarizes these points in Avicenna’s late work entitled *Pointers*:

Text 48: Since He [God] intellects Himself through His essence [*bi-dhātihī*], then it follows—His being an intellect in permanence through His essence and on account of His essence [*bi-dhātihī wa-li-dhātihī*]*—*that He intellects multiplicity [*al-kathrah*]. [However,] multiplicity appears as a posterior concomitant [*lāzimah muta’akhhirah*], which does not enter [His] essence and does not constitute It.⁴¹

This passage alludes to the multiplicity consisting of the intelligibles and pure quiddities that eventually come to be actualized as concrete existents in the world. These quiddities and intelligibles are, in a first stage, identical with the divine essence and, in a second stage, conceivable as concomitants emerging from the divine essence. Avicenna identifies and discusses these stages from the perspective of human ratiocinative thought, but it is clear that there is no actual temporality, sequentiality, or multiplicity in the intellectual activity of God. Nor can any meaningful temporal dis-

⁴⁰ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7, 364.14–15. See Acar, *Talking about God*, 173 ff.

⁴¹ Avicenna, *Pointers*, vol. 3–4, 714.3–715.1. This passage is to be compared to a similar statement in *Notes*, 523.1–4, where one finds the remarkable claim that “relational multiplicity [*takaththuran iḍāfiyyan*] is the only kind [of multiplicity] to exist in God, but it does not entail multiplicity of His quiddity or His true reality.” This statement may appear at first glance un-Avicennian and could be regarded as a spurious addition by a later exegete or compiler of *Notes*. However, it raises the interesting point that if the pure quiddities exist in the divine essence according to ‘the prior and posterior,’ then a relational multiplicity between these meanings may arise, even if no substantial, entitative, or ontological multiplicity can be posited. There is therefore a way to account for its meaning that does not subvert Avicenna’s theological position. Moreover, it bears a striking resemblance to the passage in *Pointers* discussed above, which argues that God, in a sense, does intellect multiplicity.

inction be established between God's knowledge of these quiddities *qua* intelligibles and *qua* concrete existents.⁴²

At this point, and in order to shed additional light on the issue of how the pure quiddities can be said to exist in the divine essence without entailing multiplicity, one needs to return to the previous section on the proper existence of quiddity and examine how it applies to the case of God. Indeed, the challenge is to understand how this divine intellective act that is inclusive of the pure quiddities can take place without resulting in the unitary divine essence being affected by it. Now, it is clear that Avicenna would not want to argue that the *ma'ānī* comprised by God's knowledge amount to distinct intellectual existents in the divine essence in the way in which these entities are distinct in the human mind and establish a relation between the intellect and the object of intellection. For this would undermine God's oneness on ontological and cognitive grounds. If these objects were truly numerically distinct, they would cause a multiplicity of things to exist within the divine essence and would imply that God be both self-caused and composite, which is untenable. Rather, when discussing exactly how these *ma'ānī* and intelligibles relate to the divine essence and how they come to exist, Avicenna explains that God's thinking them is identical with His own essence. Now, the only entities in his metaphysical system that can fulfil these criteria are the quiddities in themselves, because they are not conditioned and numerically determined. Recall in this connection that quiddity in itself is neither one nor multiple, neither actual nor potential, and fundamentally unconditioned, so that its existence in God would entail neither multiplicity nor contingency. In itself, pure essence does not possess any of the concomitants and attributes that produce multiplicity and compositeness. Hence, its mode of existence *in* God would be perfectly identical with the divine existence itself. Like the Necessary of Existence, it would possess a simple, constant, and essential mode of existence that excludes external concomitants. In fact, it may be argued that it possesses this ontological mode *because* it dwells in the divine essence and is identical to it. Hence, the *ma'ānī* Avicenna mentions in a theological context, insofar as they are regarded as objects of the divine intellection, are not to be identified

⁴² Avicenna's conceptualization of this issue shares many obvious parallels with the debate about the divine attributes in Islam. Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, Hanbalites, and Maturidites clashed on the issue of exactly how the attributes relate to God's essence, formulating many competing theories in the process. Avicenna's position is of course closer to Mu'tazilite doctrine according to which the attributes are identical with the divine essence and do not constitute autonomous or co-existing entities. The Mu'tazilites consequently situate the debate at the level of speech and grammatical attribution and address the question of how human language relates to the divine reality. As Wolfson would have it, this problem can be described as a philosophical avatar or reformulation of a fundamental question inherited from Plato, namely, how multiplicity relates to oneness and how a single being can be said to be both one and multiple. Avicenna's approach is nevertheless proper to him in that it resorts to the theory of the pure quiddities, while the theologians locate the debate at the level of the divine attributes. In either case, however, the same conundrum about how unity relates multiplicity still applies.

with the conditioned and complex universal existents dwelling in the human mind. Rather, the divine essence and thought comprise all the pure quiddities in a unitary and simple existential mode.⁴³ The fact that the pure quiddities possess an undetermined, non-numerical, and unconditioned ontological mode enables one to posit their existence in God, where they would be indistinguishable from His essence. This absence of numerical determinism is a crucial feature that helps explain how the quiddities may dwell within the divine essence without causing multiplicity. In brief, making the pure quiddities the objects of the divine intellection leaves Avicenna's core tenet of divine oneness and simplicity unscathed.

The previous contention should be further evaluated in light of Avicenna's belief that intelligible multiplicity is constituted not by essence or quiddity *per se*, but by the concomitants (*lawāzīm*) that attach to it. As the master explains in *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, "multiplicity in the supernal world consists not in parts of the essence, but in concomitants of the essence."⁴⁴ This point is also developed in *Notes*: it is the *lawāzīm* that lead to the appearance of multiplicity (*kathrah*) in the separate intellects and in all the effects proceeding from God.⁴⁵ Fundamentally, it is the presence of *lawāzīm* in the First Effect (at the very least in the form of its three-fold intellection) that sets it apart from God's perfect unity. But since the pure quiddities as such possess no concomitants, accidents, or properties, they do not generate any multiplicity in the divine essence. It is only when they are caused to exist *qua* caused and contingent things that they acquire their corresponding concomitants. Thus, the quidditative meanings (*ma'ānī*) are divine in that their essential and simple existential mode coincides with the divine essence, and in that their truth (*ḥaqq*)—or each quiddity itself considered *qua ḥaqīqah*—find their originative source in the Absolute Truth (*al-ḥaqq* and *al-ḥaqīqah al-muṭlaqah*) of the divine essence. Avicenna's position here is reminiscent of the way in which the Mu'tazilites considered the divine attributes to be indistinguishable from the divine essence. Furthermore, it is also comparable to the way in which some of the late-antique Neoplatonists talk about the forms in the Intellectual-Principle. In some sections of *Enneads*, such as III.9 and V.9, Plotinus (d. 270 CE) argues that the intelligibles are present in the Intellectual-Principle in a unitary way. The later Neoplatonist Syrianus (d. 437 CE) also conceives of the relation between the forms and this divine being as one that does not entail multiplicity or deficiency in its intellect. In his commentary on *Metaphysics*, the Greek philosopher explains that the divine intellect is full of the forms; that it creates whatever it intellects; that the forms "are not different in it and in its essence, but complete its being and bring to everything the productive, paradigmatic,

⁴³ This interpretation establishes an interesting parallel between the Avicennian conception of how the pure quiddities relate to the divine essence and the Mu'tazilite conception of how the divine attributes relate to the divine essence.

⁴⁴ Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 58.6–9; cf. *Notes*, 112.18–20.

⁴⁵ Avicenna, *Notes*, 276, section 469; 282, section 481; 491–492, section 901.

and final cause.”⁴⁶ Syrianus’s Neoplatonic division of the causes notwithstanding, he regards the forms as being contained in, yet undifferentiated, in the divine being. The theses of a plurality of forms (*ṣuwar*) existing in the supernal intellectual principles and of multiplicity-in-unity are also salient features of the Proclus arabus material.⁴⁷ It is precisely this tradition of undifferentiated forms and essences in the divine intellect(s) that, on my reading, Avicenna is articulating in his works, and in a manner that makes the quiddities describable in terms of a special and divine ontological mode. As Avicenna puts it in *Notes*, “the reason [or cause, *sabab*] for the existence of each thing is [God’s] knowledge of it and the fact that it is impressed in His essence [*wa-irtisāmuhi fī dhātīhi*].”⁴⁸ In like manner, he states elsewhere that “the forms of the existents are impressed in the essence of the Creator [*murtasimah fī dhāt al-bāri*’], for they are the objects of His knowledge, and it is His knowledge of them that is the cause of their existence.”⁴⁹ I would surmise that the idea that the quiddities of things are “impressed” in God’s essence and yet somehow identical with It is to be traced to these Neoplatonic noetical theories, although they are thoroughly adapted to Avicenna’s cosmological and theological model. It is in this Avicennian garb that the theory that God knows the forms or quiddities of things may have percolated to late classical and postclassical authors.⁵⁰

There is another aspect of the problem that should be taken into account, and which harks back yet again to the conditions (*shurūṭ*) Avicenna applies to quiddity. As Stephen Menn aptly noticed, there is another important case in Avicenna’s philosophy (in addition to quiddity) where the negative clause *bi-sharṭ lā shay’ ākhar* is used, namely, to refer to God’s special existence.⁵¹ In *Metaphysics of The Cure*, Avicenna argues that God’s necessary existence is *bi-sharṭ lā shay’*. What he means by this is that God’s existence is devoid of anything extraneous to it and can only be conceived ‘on the condition of nothing else.’ God’s special existence is therefore conceivable only when it is negatively conditioned, when all other things are negated of

⁴⁶ Syrianus, *Commentary on Metaphysics*, 106.26–107.1; Sorabji, *The Philosophy*, vol. 3, 146.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Proclus arabus, *The Book of Pure Good*, propositions 4, 6, 7, and 9.

⁴⁸ Avicenna, *Notes*, 53.10, section 35.

⁴⁹ Avicenna, *Notes*, 220, section 348. It is significant that Avicenna also relies on the root *r-s-m* to describe the way in which the primary notions are “impressed” on the human mind in *Metaphysics* I.5: they are “impressed in the soul in a primary manner” (*tartasimu fī l-nafs irtisāman awwaliyyan*).

⁵⁰ For example, Bahmanyār, *The Book of Validated Knowledge*, 576.2, states that God knows “the forms of known things together with their multiplicity according to a simple mode” (*wa-ṣuwar tilka l-ma’lūmāt ma’a kathratihā ‘indahu ‘alā wajh basiṭ*). He adds (576.5) that God’s objects of thought are “identical with His existence” (*huwa nafs wujūdihi*). According to Frank, *Creation*, 38, 63, Ghazālī perceives a certain ontological continuum between the forms that are in God, those that are in concrete beings, and those that are in the human mind. This is why, according to Frank, Ghazālī defends not creation *ex nihilo*, but creation *ex possibili*. The latter formula is of course unacceptable to Avicenna, but the theory that the forms are in God seems traceable to his works. In fact, I surmise that the widespread view in the later *hikmah* and *kalām* traditions that God knows all the forms and essences of things was due partly to Avicenna’s theological legacy.

⁵¹ Menn, Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*, 158.

it in the mind. This approach accords with the streak of negative theology that underpins the works of many Arabic philosophers, from Kindī and Fārābī to Avicenna, and which occupies an important place in the master's theology.⁵² The crucial point here is that the only two objects that are negatively conditioned in Avicenna's metaphysics are God and quiddity in itself (more specifically, quiddity in itself when it is conceived of in the human intellect). This cannot be a mere coincidence. In light of the previous analysis of quiddity proffered in this study, it may point to a crucial interconnection between these two metaphysical doctrines. More specifically, it could indicate that the pure quiddities and the divine essence in some sense possess an identical mode of existence, which, from the perspective of the human intellect thinking about it, is completely abstract and negatively conditioned. For only the pure quiddities and God's quiddity are *bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar*. This can be explained by the fact that, in God, they are one and identical, according to the model of undifferentiated forms exposed above. This point would thus strengthen the view that the pure quiddities, *qua* objects of God's knowledge, can be said somehow to exist in God, in a manner indistinguishable from His essence, and without any multiplicity or contingency arising. In brief, Avicenna's description of God and the pure quiddities as things that are negatively conditioned imply that they could be one and the same thing considered under a particular intelligible aspect.

In retrospect, it is striking that two of the terms Avicenna employs the most frequently to describe the objects of God's intellection, namely, *ma'ānī* and *lawāzīm*, are also used to describe the quidditative meanings and their various aspects in a logical and epistemological context. These two terms figure prominently in Avicenna's discussions of logic and human epistemology as well as in his theology and theory of divine knowledge. *Ma'nā* is a generic term Avicenna employs to describe the quidditative meaning itself, as well as the internal or constitutive elements that compose it and, finally, to the concomitants that are entailed by it. As for the term *lawāzīm*, it designates the external concomitants, i.e., things that are non-constitutive and, hence, extrinsic to quiddity, but follow it necessarily. In the context of Avicenna's cosmology and theology, the term *lawāzīm* usually refers to the actual beings that, *qua* caused and contingent entities, proceed from God as a result of His intellection. In that sense, for instance, the First Effect, i.e., the first separate intellect caused by God, is a *lāzīm*. This implies that all the caused entities are *lawāzīm* with regard to the *māhiyyah* of God. As such, they are necessitated or entailed by His es-

52 This explains Ṭūsī's claim (*Commentary on Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 461.12–23) to the effect that the human intellect cannot know the divine truth (*ḥaqīqah*), which Ṭūsī identifies with God's special existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*). This would amount to knowing God's quiddity. According to this philosopher, "absolute existence" (*wujūd muṭlaq*) or "common existence" (*wujūd 'āmm*) is a concomitant of, and follows, God's special existence. The last two expressions presumably correspond to the realized or acquired existence in Avicenna's system. Given Ṭūsī's recognition of these various ontological modes, and his general adherence to the Avicennian position on quiddity, it is not surprising that he does not regard *wujūd* as univocal (462.8–11).

sence (*muqtaḍā dhātihi*).⁵³ Because the term *lawāzim* more generally refers to the various external concomitants of each quiddity (not just God's essence), one can also speak of the *lawāzim* of the essence of the First Effect, of the first celestial orb, of horseness, etc. So there are various levels of discourse at play here: *qua* effects of God, the caused entities are *lawāzim* relative to His essence; but *qua* essences themselves, they also have their own *lawāzim*. So Avicenna's application of the terms *ma'ānī* and *lawāzim* is complex and dictated by subtle considerations of emphasis and perspective. At any rate, the fact that the quidditative meanings can be located in God; that they are objects of the divine knowledge; and that it is God ultimately who is causally responsible for the essential relationships of their constituents, for their existence in reality, as well as for the realization of their external concomitants, makes this terminological connection even stronger. Whereas the term *ma'ānī* stresses the relation of the essences to God's essence and connects them with God's own originative *ma'nā*, the term *lawāzim* underpins their status as effects of God. Here the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model is constructively applied to a theological context in order to explain divine causation and God's relation to the world.

The foregoing enables us to tentatively tackle the arduous question of how these quiddities can be epistemically differentiated if they all possess a single and undifferentiated mode of existence that is furthermore identical with the divine essence. For one may legitimately ask: does God know each one of these quiddities distinctly and individually, and, if so, does this not entail an epistemic or cognitive multiplicity in His knowledge? According to Avicenna, it is quite apparent that God knows all of the quiddities, although He knows them by intellecting His own essence. Since the pure quiddities are identical with God's essence, He knows them merely through reflexive contemplation. In other words, by knowing His *ma'nā*, God knows all the *ma'ānī* at once. This means that His knowledge of all the quiddities is unitary and essentially identical with His self-knowledge, while at the same time embracing them in their diversity. Here a certain notion of multiplicity-in-unity emerges from the analysis, which, yet again, seems a distant echo of Neoplatonic noetical theories. Inasmuch as they are the *ma'ānī* of a single, absolute *ma'nā*, the quiddities are known in a unitary way. But God's self-intellection immediately leads to their being *lawāzim* vis-à-vis this same essence. Identifying these two 'moments' or 'stages' in the reflexive divine noesis can help toward a resolution of this intricate issue in Avicenna. Yet, of all the difficult aspects Avicenna broaches in connection with God's knowledge, the threat of a residual epistemic or cognitive multiplicity is palpable and remains unsuccessfully integrated in his account. To conclude: given that Avicenna uses the term *ma'nā* to describe quiddity in itself, there can be little doubt that the *ma'ānī* he speaks of in the context of God's knowledge correspond to the quidditative meanings. There is another good reason to believe this,

53 Avicenna, *Notes*, 11.4–7, section 3. As we saw previously, the master shares the term *muqtaḍā* and its sense of necessary entailment and causation with his Mu'tazilite counterparts.

in addition to the terminological evidence: these pure quiddities possess a rarefied and non-numerical nature that allows them to exist in God without entailing multiplicity. In contrast, ascribing complex universal forms, rather than the pure quiddities, to God's thought would not fulfil these criteria and lead to serious interpretive difficulties.

1.3 The problem of the universality of the quiddities in God

The foregoing remarks have shed light on the 'divine' localization of the pure quiddities. They also explained how their being in God does not entail any intelligible multiplicity—the quiddities identify with God's essential existence and are themselves devoid of accidents and concomitants; they are neither one nor many, nor contingent, complex, or composite. Nevertheless, the analysis has still not dispelled the other two conceptual difficulties outlined at the outset of the inquiry, the first regarding the universality of the objects in God's mind, the second regarding their status as 'possible' things. Let us start with the first issue. Avicenna's claim that God knows all things, including the particulars, in a universal way has baffled scholars and given rise to a diversity of interpretations in the specialized literature.⁵⁴ For my purposes, the problem concerns how God's knowledge may be said to be *universal* in spite of being a knowledge of the pure quiddities and therefore not of the universals as Avicenna typically defines them in his logical and metaphysical works. It should be clear by now that, according to Avicenna, God cannot intellect the very same universal concepts that we as humans intellect, because the universal concept is, on Avicenna's definition, a compound of a core quidditative meaning or nature together with various mental accidents and concomitants that attach to it externally, among which are universality, oneness, multiplicity, and actuality. Hence, according to the master, universal mental existence is always accompanied by an intelligible multiplicity that is caused by a set of concomitants. As a result, the universal is synthetic, composite or complex, and contingent. Moreover, when compared to pure quiddity, it is a concept that is essentially and ontologically posterior.

There is an additional problem with ascribing universals to God. On Avicenna's account, universals result at least partially from a process of abstraction of the forms of concrete beings, and, hence, from the apprehension of particular instances corresponding to that universal. This process of abstraction, even though it may not be single-handedly responsible for generating the final state of the universal in the mind,⁵⁵ presupposes an abstractive process that focuses on the concrete entities.

⁵⁴ Here are some notable attempts at explaining Avicenna's theory of divine knowledge: Marmura, *Some Aspects*; Nuseibeh, *Avicenna: Providence*; Acar, *Talking about God*; idem, *Reconsidering*; Zghal, *La connaissance des singuliers*.

⁵⁵ I refer the reader to the previous discussion concerning abstraction and emanation in Avicenna's epistemology and to the pertinent bibliographic references.

This means that the universals arise in the human intellect *after*—taken even in a rudimentary temporal sense—the sense perception of individual things has taken place and the various levels of abstraction have been effected. As Avicenna explains in *Introduction* I.12 by resorting to a threefold scheme he inherited from late antiquity, human beings acquire the universals only after their contemplation of the quiddities (or universals) *in matter* or *in multiplicity*. This is why the mental or logical universals come *after* matter or multiplicity. But God precedes these concrete individual things in the way that a cause precedes its effects, so it is clear that such universals and such a universal knowledge cannot be ascribed to the divine being. Here the analogy between human and divine universal knowledge falls apart.

Paradoxically, though, Avicenna insists that God knows things in a universal way. It is understandable that he would wish to defend such a claim. After all, true science and knowledge must, on his view, be based on the cognition of universals. It is the universals that correspond to the abstract definitions and the very essence of things and answer the question ‘what is it?’ (*mā huwa*). Moreover, were God to know the particulars *qua* particulars, then change, motion, or potentiality would inevitably enter the divine essence. These points seem valid enough. Yet, if we surmise that God knows only the pure, irreducible, and unchanging quiddities, then why does Avicenna claim that this divine knowledge is universal, if it does not include an intentionality or attribute of universality, as in the case of human thought? Avicenna’s position regarding this point is difficult to delineate with precision. Nevertheless, and according to my interpretation, it likely rests on the implicit recognition of various aspects or senses of universality, i. e., regarding universality as a kind of modulated notion. One approach, envisaged previously in chapters II and III, is to regard the pure quiddities as a special kind of universals, that is, as pure natures possessing an intrinsic and essential kind of universality. In their case, universality would not be an external mental concomitant added to them, but a property of their very intelligible reality. This approach, at any rate, finds support in Avicenna’s threefold classification of the universals in *Introduction* I.12. Even on this assumption, however, it is important to understand exactly what the philosopher means by “knowing in a universal way” (*min wajh kullī*), the formula on which he most often relies to qualify God’s special knowledge of things. Evidence taken from *Notes* enables us to sketch a solution to this problem. There one learns that ‘universal knowledge’ consists (a) of what can be predicated of many things,⁵⁶ and (b) of what constitutes knowledge of the reasons and causes of something.⁵⁷ The first point corresponds to the standard definition of universality Avicenna provides in his logical works and was discussed in detail in chapter II, so it can be set aside for the time being. The second point is more interesting for the present issue, because it introdu-

⁵⁶ Avicenna, *Notes*, 43.7–8, section 25.

⁵⁷ Avicenna, *Notes*, 52.5–6, section, 33; 334, section 595, among other passages. The argument according to which God’s knowledge is universal because it includes the *asbāb* and *‘ilal* of all things returns frequently in *Notes*.

ces an element of causality, which seems particularly relevant in the case of God's knowledge. If universal knowledge is a kind of knowledge that includes the reasons or principles (*asbāb*) and causes (*'ilal*) of things, then it could be easily applied to the apprehension of pure quiddity. For, as was shown previously, there is such a thing as quidditative or essential causality for Avicenna, which is closely tied to the notions of the formal and final causes. What is more, since quiddity in itself represents a constitutive ontological principle of the universals in the mind and of the extramental beings, its essential causality is one that would extend to *all* existents or things in the world, to all the *mawjūdāt*, irrespective of their specific nature. Essence is a constant and irreducible meaning and principle of all contingently existing things, which makes these things what they are. It would seem, therefore, to qualify as something universal—at the very least in God's mind—according to the sense articulated in *Notes*. On Avicenna's own account, then, there is an aspect according to which quiddity in itself *qua* quidditative meaning or *ma'nā* could render God's knowledge universal in the sense of Its being a knowledge of the reasons and causality underlying all the contingent things.⁵⁸

Moreover, the quidditative meaning can also be said to participate substantially in the causative process that results in the actual existence of concrete and mental existents, insofar as these existents may be defined in terms of a core quidditative meaning to which various external concomitants, attributes, and accidents have been superadded through causality, making the final product a composite, contingent, and causally dependent entity. The quidditative meaning represents the core around which concomitants combine to individualize or particularize it. This is true even of mental universals relative to pure quiddity, and it explains how the same universal concept (e.g., universal triangle) can be thought by different minds at the same time. It is perhaps in light of these considerations that one should interpret Avicenna's claim in *Notes* that the particular (*al-juz'ī*) is entailed by (*lazima 'an*) and is a concomitant of (*lāzim*) the universal, a claim he relies on to justify God's omniscience.⁵⁹ But in this case, it is the quidditative meaning as an essential universal, and not the composite universal concept (which is numerically many, since it exists in various human minds), which is intended in this passage. Hence, there is a sense according to which knowledge of pure quiddity is a causal kind of knowledge with regard to the mental and extramental existents, since knowing the quidditative

⁵⁸ One passage in *Notes* (39–40, section 20) seems to lend further weight to this hypothesis: Avicenna contrasts there the human way of knowing things, which is through, or by virtue of, their concrete existence (*min jihah wujūdihi*), to God's way of knowing things, which is through their reasons or principles (*min jihah asbābihi*). But if what God knows about things is not their existence *per se*, then it must be first and foremost their essence and thingness, which could very well be what is intended here by *asbāb* (account, explanation, etc.). One, however, does not exclude the other: by knowing their thingness, God would also know their existence, inasmuch as existence is a concomitant of thingness.

⁵⁹ Avicenna, *Notes*, 53, section 34.

meanings of these things would in a sense represent knowledge of the cause of these things. This applies to human beings, but it would be true *a fortiori* of God. By knowing the pure quiddities, the divine intellect would, by the same token, know all of the particularizing, concomitant, and even accidental features of realized beings, since these things are all derivative of the essence. God's knowledge and omniscience, then, would be predicated on the Avicennian law of essential entailment.

Approached from this angle, there is a strong case to be made to the effect that God's mode of knowing 'in a universal way,' as Avicenna puts it, has as its main object quiddity in itself, even if the latter is not, strictly speaking, universal in the same way as the universals that make up the contents of human thought. In the case of God, His knowing all things would be premised on His intellection of the irreducible quidditative meanings (*ma'ānī*) of all things and their true natures (*ṭabī'ah*), which are not only essentially universal (according to a qualified or modulated meaning of universality), but which would also indirectly include all of the concomitants of quiddity. It is this special unitary divine intellection of all the pure quiddities and their intricate web of essential entailment that legitimates the view that God knows not only the universals, but also the particular existents in a universal way. Moreover, knowing the essential and necessary concomitants of things would imply a knowledge of causal relations between things. For the external concomitants of quiddity are caused to exist by an agent. For instance, it is an exterior cause that determines the essence 'horseness' to be one, existent, particular, etc. This means that God knows the entire concatenation of causes and effects pertaining to essences and their external concomitants.

This line of interpretation could in turn help alleviate another vexed point of Avicennian doctrine, namely, why the master sometimes appears to defend the view that God is cognizant not only of universals, but also *of particulars*. In most cases, Avicenna contends that God knows particulars in a universal way, which implies that God does not know particulars *qua* particulars. In *Salvation*, for example, the master quite typically states that God knows "particular things inasmuch as they are universal" (*al-umūr al-juz'iyyah min ḥaythu hiya kullīyyah*).⁶⁰ However, in *Notes*, Avicenna—or one of his disciples—quite committedly describes the divine knowledge as one of particulars *qua* particulars, or at least one that encompasses the details and minutiae of things in addition to their universal features.⁶¹ One can also make a case for this interpretation by drawing on evidence from Avicenna's other works, such as his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*.⁶² Moreover, one should not overlook the fact that in

⁶⁰ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 595.11–12.

⁶¹ Such an apparently un-Avicennian view is found notably in *Notes*, 272.8–9: God intellects "perishable things inasmuch as they are perishable [*al-ashyā' al-fāsīdah annahā fāsīdah*] ... and temporal things and time [*al-ashyā' al-zamānīyyah wa-l-zamān*]." Cf. 18, section 3; 42.3ff., section 24.

⁶² Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 48.6–18, where he explains that in the supernal intellectual world, knowledge of universals and particulars is simultaneous and occurs without tem-

Metaphysics of The Cure, Avicenna claims that God knows “individual things” (sing. *shay’ shakhṣ*), and he also alludes to Qur’an 10:61 to the effect that “not even the weight of an atom in the heavens and the earth escapes Him.”⁶³ Regardless of the questions of how ‘Avicennian’ such a view appears to be at first sight, and whether Avicenna intended this Qur’anic quote literally or only metaphorically,⁶⁴ this assertion is definitely germane to those other passages where Avicenna appears to endorse God’s knowledge of particular things. The belief in a divine omniscience that would include the particulars should also be connected with the issue of God’s knowledge of future contingents, which is another aspect of the problem to which Avicenna sometimes alludes. At one point in *Metaphysics*, he mentions that God has knowledge of both “realized and possible existence” (*al-wujūd al-ḥāṣil wa-l-mumkin*),⁶⁵ which seems to necessarily include the knowledge of possible particular things before they become actualized. It is undeniable that these passages pose a serious interpretive challenge and that they cannot be easily or straightforwardly reconciled with the idea of universal knowledge. Moreover, even if one brings them within the fold of a more mainstream interpretation that emphasizes the universal knowledge of God, understanding exactly what Avicenna means by a universal knowledge of particulars remains puzzling.

The interpretation of pure quiddity defended in this study enables us to address this conundrum and to propose a new solution that resolves the problem of the universality of God’s knowledge. The hypothesis that God knows the pure quiddities of all things has two important implications. First, and on a mereological interpretation, it would mean that God knows the pure quiddities *in* universal and particular things and that He knows them as the main formal, essential, and substantial principle of these things. Since every entity—whether an individual hylomorphic being, a

poral sequentiality. In this same text, however, and as in *The Cure*, Avicenna appears to regard knowledge of particulars as a kind of universal knowledge, without elaborating on the reason.

63 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.6, 359.13–14. The verse Q10:61 reads (trans. Yusuf Ali): “Nor is hidden from thy Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven.” Similar committal statements regarding God’s knowledge of particular and individual things can be found in *Notes*, 272–273, section 463; 446, section 820.

64 Avicenna could not have failed to realize that many theologians would have construed this statement literally. Even with regard to his own doctrines, he must have been aware of the ease with which it could have been misinterpreted by his followers, for the Qur’anic passage seeks to establish God’s omniscience and His knowledge of even minute particulars; such as ‘this mustard seed,’ and not mustards seeds in general or the universal mustard seed. So that, if it was truly Avicenna’s intention to use this quotation to support his view of God’s *universal* knowledge of the particulars, the effect may have proven counter-productive when it comes to the reception of his works. Conversely, if it was merely an effort on Avicenna’s part to philosophize the Islamic scripture, his attempt strikes us as equally lukewarm and unconvincing. The problem with the textual evidence is in fact dual, since Avicenna maintains that God knows in a universal way *and* that He knows particular things (i.e., both propositions have to be explained). As explained above, I believe that anchoring the solution in Avicenna’s theory of pure quiddity is the most convincing way of addressing this dual difficulty.

65 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7, 364.13–14.

separate intellect, or an intelligible concept in the human mind—is provided its essential reality (*ḥaqīqah*) by virtue of pure quiddity, God’s knowing the pure quiddities would entail His knowing the inner meaning and principle (*ma‘nā*) of these things. Pure quiddity or nature underlies all concrete existents and is ontologically irreducible. So by knowing the quidditative natures of all the existents in the world, and, hence, by knowing what is irreducible, constitutive, and permanent in them, God’s knowledge could truly be said to be ‘of all things’ or ‘all-encompassing.’ It would include the particular beings and the universal ideas, all of which have pure quiddity as their basis and true reality. It should be noted that Yaḥyā b. ‘Adī appears to have articulated such an account in some of his treatises, which, in this case as well, anticipates some of the striking features of Avicenna’s argumentation. Yaḥyā argues that because universals are parts of the definitions of particular things, knowledge of universals can account for a type of knowledge that includes the particulars as well.⁶⁶ What is more, Yaḥyā quite explicitly ascribes knowledge of particulars to God in addition to knowledge of all the forms (*ṣuwar*) and intelligibles (*ma‘qūlāt*) in a manner reminiscent of Avicenna’s own views. According to Yaḥyā, God, by contemplating His own essence, apprehends all the forms and essences of things, which are foundationally imprinted or informed in Him and only subsequently come to exist in the exterior world. Ibn ‘Adī even mentions the example of the eclipse in one of his treatises, which later becomes Avicenna’s stock example to discuss God’s universal knowledge of particulars.⁶⁷

Second, the hypothesis that God knows the pure quiddities of universal and particular things would suggest that He also knows the full external entailment of these quiddities, i.e., the realization of all the subsequent concomitants (*lawāzim*) that necessarily flow from and attach to these quiddities in existence. This is what Avicenna in *Salvation* refers to as the essential attributes (*ṣifāt*) of things.⁶⁸ We saw above that the term *lawāzim* is ambiguous, because it can refer to the caused beings (in their relation to God’s *māhiyyah*) or, alternatively, to the external concomitants of these caused beings. At this juncture, I would like to propose that the hypothesis that knowledge of the pure quiddities entails knowledge of the concomitants of the pure quiddities (even though the former may be conceived of without the latter) has deep implications for Avicenna’s theology, for it helps explain how God can be said to know essential concomitants and even, perhaps, derivative accidents, in addition to the pure essences themselves. In other words, by knowing humanness or human in itself, God would also know all the concomitants and attributes that essentially attach to it, such as realized existence, oneness, multiplicity, universality, particularity, corporeality etc., which follow the pure quiddity humanness when it becomes realized as a composite substance in the mind or in the concrete world.

⁶⁶ See Périér, *Yaḥyā*, 97–98, 140–142, with explicit references to the manuscripts.

⁶⁷ Périér, *Yaḥyā*, 142.

⁶⁸ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 595.12.

This implies a kind of knowledge that focuses not only on the thing *per se*, on pure essence, but also on the realization of its concomitants, as well as on the reasons (*asbāb*) and causes (*ʿilal*) responsible for their realization. These reasons and causes, it should be recalled, participate in the definition of universal knowledge that Avicenna provides in *Notes*. There can be little doubt that they should be tied with quiddity, with a thing's essential principle, and thus also with its foundational reason or *sabab*, which makes it what it is and grants it its inner reality. By extension, essence *qua* principle, cause, and reason would also lead to a knowledge of the concomitants, due to the law of entailment that tightly binds them. As Avicenna explains in *Notes*: “essence is not constituted by the concomitant; rather, essence necessitates and entails it. Thus, [essence] is the cause [of the concomitant], whose existence depends solely upon it” (*lā tataqawwamu l-dhāt bi-l-lāzim bal al-dhāt tūjibu l-lāzim wa-taqtadīhi fa-hiya ʿillatuhu wa-bihā wujūduhu*).⁶⁹ The main point here is that knowledge of the pure quiddities can be said to entail to a certain extent knowledge of the essential concomitants, and this on account of the causality linking the two together. This idea is strengthened by another passage of *Notes*: “what intellects something in its essence also inevitably intellects its concomitants” (*mā yaʿqilu shayʿ bi-l-ḥaqīqah fa-innahu yaʿqilu—lā ghayr—lawāzimahu*).⁷⁰ It is even possible that, if this notion of *luzūm* is amplified to include not only the essential concomitants, but also the accidental concomitants, then there could be a sense according to which knowledge of the pure quiddities could encompass the latter things as well. This point, however, remains uncertain.⁷¹ At any rate, the basic idea here is that by knowing the pure quiddities, God would know all the essential concomitants that are entailed by it. God would know not just the *māhiyyah*, but rather the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* complex. It is, I believe, in light of these remarks that we should interpret Avicenna's claims that God knows the particular eclipse not with regard to its existence (*wujūd*), but with regard to its essential reason (*sabab*), and that there is, after all, such a thing as the intelligible (*maʿqūl*) of the particular thing (*al-juzʿī*), if that particular thing is known by way of its essential reasons and causes.⁷²

69 Avicenna, *Notes*, 362, section 641.

70 Avicenna, *Notes*, 576.12, section 1000. The master is alluding to divine intellection in this passage, and so the term *lawāzim* refers primarily to the caused beings as effects from God. But what is enunciated here would seem to amount to a cognitive rule, which can be applied to the divine and human knowledge of the concomitants of the quiddities.

71 This might be pushing the interpretation too far, though. In *Notes*, Avicenna repeats on various occasions that God knows the particulars in a universal way, but he also cautions that God does not intellect the material accidents of things and also that he does not know a particular as “something that can be pointed to” *qua* particular (*al-mushār ilayhi*); see *Notes*, 5.11–13, section 1.

72 See Avicenna, *Notes*, 39–40, section 20, and especially 40.1: “The First does not know it [the particular eclipse] by way of its existence [*min jihati wujūdihi*], but by way of its reasons [or causes, *min jihati asbābihi*]”; *Notes*, 120–121, section 160, and especially 121.5–7: “There can be an intelligible [*qad yakūn lahu maʿqūl*] of the particular [*al-juzʿī*] if it is known by way of its reasons and causes [*min*

It is likely this kind of solution to the conundrum of divine knowledge that Avicenna has in mind when he states in *Salvation* that “if the corruptible things [*al-fāsidāt*] are intellected with regard to their pure quiddity [*bi-l-māhiyyah al-mujarradah*] and to what follows it that does not become individualized [i. e., with its essential concomitants, not its accidents], then they are not intellected inasmuch as they are corruptible things.”⁷³ One may go even further and connect this argument with the ontological irreducibility and constancy of pure quiddity in individual concrete beings, which Avicenna describes in *Metaphysics* V.1. Recall that in this section, Avicenna connects the divine existence of pure quiddity with God’s causality and providence, which seems to establish a link between God’s knowing the pure quiddities and God’s causing them to exist in the world. On this reading, the existence of the pure quiddities in concrete beings is ‘divine,’ because it is so to speak an extension of the divine knowledge of these essences and of their existence in God. By the same token, this could explain how God’s knowledge can be said to encompass all the particular beings of this world, all of which subsist thanks to this divine nature and essence, which ultimately derives from God. In brief, it is not so much perhaps that God knows particulars in a universal way, but rather that He knows all things by virtue of knowing the pure essences and essential concomitants *that are common to both universal and particular existents*. In light of this interpretation, Avicenna’s apparently inconsistent comments concerning divine knowledge can be harmonized. A compelling explanation of how God can be said to know universals and particulars equally, without this knowledge affecting His being, can be articulated on the basis of his theory of pure quiddity, which is intrinsically indifferent to particularity and universality, but which exists in universal and particular existents.⁷⁴ What is more, since, as was shown previously in chapters II and III, pure quiddity possesses its own essential universality or commonness, which is distinct from the universality of concepts in the human mind, the previous interpretation would also allow for a kind of universality to be ascribed specifically to the objects of God’s knowledge. This interpretation would have the additional merit of countenancing Avicenna’s repeated claims to the effect that God’s knowledge is truly universal. The idea that the First knows things ‘in a universal way’ would be validated by the essential universality or commonness of pure quiddity. It would not be the result of a discursive, intentional, and

jīhah asbābihi wa-‘ilālīhi], and not by way of the senses pointing to it, as in the case of the particular eclipse and the particular human being.”

⁷³ Avicenna, *Salvation*, 594.6–7.

⁷⁴ Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 156–157, ascribes a similar theory to Ibn ‘Adī, which is of direct relevance here, given that the Christian thinker anticipates many of Avicenna’s core theories. Adamson also appears at one point in the article to ascribe this theory to Avicenna as well. He asserts that, for the *shaykh*, “God knows the absolute essence” of each thing, although he does not elaborate on this point. Since the author also claims that human and divine intellectual knowledge is necessarily universal for Avicenna, I am not sure how he would go about reconciling these two claims in the case of God.

synthetic mental process, as in the case of the human apprehension of the universals.

It is intriguing to surmise that the divine essence is the ultimate constitutive cause of the quidditative meanings contemplated by the First. God is the absolute cause for the very existence of the pure quiddities, for their foundational truth and reality (*ḥaqīqah*), which entails that He is the cause of how the constitutive or internal elements of essence relate to one another. Positing the absolute existence of the quiddities in God appears to be the only way to account for what makes a triangle a triangle, for example, as opposed to a stone or a river. As Avicenna explains, no posterior and retrospective human aetiological reasoning is able to account for this fact.⁷⁵ Rather, human beings can apprehend quiddities and seek to establish their existence. But it is God who is the source of the truth and reality of the quidditative meanings and of the relationship between their constitutive parts. These truths and realities exist in an absolutely simple mode within the divine essence, thereby justifying God's name as *the Ultimate Truth or Reality (al-ḥaqq)*. Furthermore, it is their existence in God, *the absolute Truth*, which is the source of the relative truth or truthfulness these quidditative meanings possess, a truthfulness that extends to their irreducible existence in the concrete entities outside of God. The pure quiddity triangueness is real and true, because it finds its ultimate origin and meaning in the absolute reality of God. Since the pure quiddities underlie the concrete particulars and the universals in the human mind, their reality and truth also extend to these two ontic realms.

1.4 Knowing quiddity: Avicenna's response to the *mutakallimūn*

In the decades prior to Avicenna's appearance on the philosophical scene, the Mu'tazilites had intensely debated the issues of how God could know things (*ashyā'*) without these things entailing multiplicity in His essence, and whether God knew them *qua* existent or nonexistent things. According to most Mu'tazilites, God knows all things eternally before their actual existence, with the implication that He knows nonexistent things (*ma'dūmāt*) or, according to some Mu'tazilites, things that lie in a state of nonexistence (*ḥāl al-'adam*).⁷⁶ This position is predicated on a sharp distinction between 'the thing' (*al-shay'*), 'the existent' (*al-mawjūd*), and 'the nonexistent' (*al-ma'dūm*), as well as on the greater extensionality of the first notion, which comprises the other two. This ontological model was endorsed by many proponents of Mu'tazilism during the classical period of Islam, including Abū Hāshim

⁷⁵ Cf. *Pointers*, vols. 3–4, 440–442.

⁷⁶ Recall that the issue of whether nonexistence is a state (*ḥāl*) was assiduously debated within the Bahshamite School. 'Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Rashīd seem to think that the nonexistent has no state or attribute of nonexistence, but others seem to have disagreed; see Abū Rashīd, *Addition*, 228.10 ff., 276.; Ibn Mattawayh, *Reminder*, 13.20 ff.

and his followers. In this connection, the main challenge for these Bahshamite thinkers was to elucidate the status of these nonexistent things in relation to the divine knowledge. Since the Bahshamites regard existence as a univocal attribute referring exclusively to realized, actual existence in the concrete world, it was of no use to describe future contingents. They had to resort instead to an alternative concept in order to describe the objects of God's knowledge *qua* nonexistent things.⁷⁷ The key to understanding the Bahshamite theological position on this issue revolves once again around the concept of the Attribute of the Essence.

In a preceding section, I touched on the question of whether God possesses His own Attribute of the Essence and concluded in the affirmative. According to the Bahshamite theologians, God has His own special *ṣifat al-dhāt*, which most thinkers of this school identify with 'God's being eternal' (*kawnuhu qadīman*). An additional issue that was of importance to these theologians was how God could be said to know things and especially in what capacity He could be said to know nonexistent things, such as future contingents. In this case as well, the theory of the Attribute of the Essence proved useful. One could cogently assert that God knows nonexistent things, because He knows their Attribute of the Essence. God's knowledge of the Attribute of the Essence of a thing occurs in abstraction from its actual, realized, and temporal existence, with the implication that the divine knowledge is independent of the consideration of whether that thing lies in a state of existence or nonexistence. Thus, God knows all existent and nonexistent atoms, because He knows the Attribute of the Essence of atom or 'atomness in itself,' which characterizes every single atom, even in its state of nonexistence. This kind of divine knowledge is also described as one of possibilities (*maqdūrāt, mumkināt*) in the Mu'tazilite sources. The nonexistent that is possible comes to exist in the concrete world as a result of God's creative will and act. As long as it does not actually exist, it remains in itself a possible entity. The Bahshamites therefore establish a narrow relationship between the Attribute of the Essence and possibility, since, in itself, a thing that is cognized through the Attribute of the Essence remains possible of existence and in need of an exterior cause to exist concretely. Put differently, knowing the Attribute of the Essence of a thing implies knowing that thing as possible of realized existence and of acquiring the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*), which, on this model, essentially follows the Attribute of the Essence. A thing's possibility (of existence) is therefore grounded, so to speak, in this Attribute. Now, since God's knowledge encompasses all things, includ-

77 According to Jolivet, *Aux origines*, 235, Bahshamite thinkers working on this topic sometimes sought to distinguish between various ontological aspects (such as realized existence, 'being known,' and 'being enunciated'), possibly in an attempt to bypass the pitfall of having to ascribe absolutely nonexistent things as objects of knowledge to human beings and especially to God. Although this is true, these considerations can hardly be reconciled with the doctrine of the univocal nature of existence and of existence as an attribute that applies equally to all existent entities. At any rate, 'being known' or 'enunciated' for the Bahshamites would be an instance of *kawn*, which is not tantamount to *wujūd*.

ing all possibles and future contingents (*maqḍūrāt*), it by the same token encompasses all the Attributes of the Essence of these things.⁷⁸ In brief, this Attribute appears as the key concept that accounts for God's knowledge of all existent and nonexistent things alike.

Avicenna addresses similar theological problems in his works, and the responses he provides vividly bring to mind this Bahshamite background. To begin with, the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity are extended from the human context to the divine context to explain God's knowledge, although this move is, admittedly, one that is not fully and explicitly articulated in the master's works. Avicenna and the Bahshamites regard God's intellection and knowledge as resting on the intellection and knowledge of these Attributes and quiddities, as opposed to a knowledge that would encompass solely particular things that exist actually in concrete reality. Remarkably, both the Attribute of the Essence and pure quiddity have an irreducible and permanent ontological and epistemological reality that does not depend on the realized existence of individual beings. They possess a perfect intelligibility whose reality does not depend on the concretization of existence, which is an attribute (*ṣifah*) for the Bahshamites and a necessary concomitant (*lāzim*) for Avicenna. This explains why human beings and God can know things even when these things do not actually exist in the concrete world. For the Bahshamites, these nonexistent and unrealized things are equated with the possibles (*maqḍūrāt*, *mumkināt*) in God's mind, whose reality is grounded in the Attributes of the Essence. For Avicenna as well, the quiddities are sometimes described as possibles, not inasmuch as they are intellected by God and *qua* objects of God's knowledge, but simply because, under one logical consideration, they are in themselves only possible of existence.

According to the Baṣrian Mu'tazilites, then, not only can we speak and conceive of 'the thing' in abstraction from 'the existent.' In a more committal way, we can posit 'nonexistent things' (*ma'dūmāt*) that can be known and, hence, be said to subsist in God's mind. This is tenable, because on their view the Attribute of the Essence, which designates the thing as it is in itself, has a mode that is unrelated and prior to the actual, realized existence of a thing. What is particularly noteworthy is that Abū Hāshim and Avicenna both articulate their respective doctrines on an intellectualist plane and around the notion of pure intelligibility: the Attribute of the Essence

78 Abū Rashīd, *Addition*, 271; Frank, *Al-ma'dūm*, 207–208. This doctrine in turn engenders a new problem: how do the various Attributes of the Essence of things relate to God? In particular, how do the *maqḍūrāt* or *mumkināt*, known solely through their Attributes of the Essence, relate to the divine essence, which is said to be one? This is an issue that the Bahshamites do not address in as much detail as one would expect. Presumably, in order to eschew the pitfall of multiplicity, the Mu'tazilites would proceed to equate the various Attributes of the Essence with God's own essence or rather with 'His being knowing.' But this move would in turn conflict with the idea that the possibility of the nonexistent thing is independent of God's power to act over it and create it in existence and belongs to the nonexistent in itself; this seems implied, for instance, in Abū Rashīd, *Addition*, 194.6–11. This question deserves further reflection.

and pure quiddity are what enable us and—in an eminent and primordial way—God to know all things as they truly are, irrespective of whether they exist as concrete particulars. Thus, the Attributes of the Essence and the pure quiddities are eternally real in God, which explains how God can know future contingents and possible things that do not yet actually exist. Consequently, God can know a multiplicity of entities (both *mawjūdāt* and *ma'dūmāt*) without their amounting to a multiplicity of existent or nonexistent things in Him. Instead, God's knowledge consists only of a multiplicity of states, relations, and attributes—namely, the Attributes of the Essence. Yet, in spite of these parallels, there seems to be a crucial difference between the positions of Abū Hāshim and Avicenna. The Bahshamites do not take the extra step of fully identifying the Attributes of the Essence with God's own essence (and the divine Attribute of the Essence), regarding the former as semi-autonomous attributes possessing a kind of objective reality. Avicenna, for his part, duly identifies all the objects of the divine intellection (i.e., the pure quiddities) with the divine essence itself. According to the master, 'the things,' 'forms,' 'quiddities,' etc., contemplated by God are, in the final analysis, conflated with the divine essence and lead to the postulation of a perfectly simple and unitary mode of being. Moreover, Avicenna's position remains unique when compared to the Mu'tazilite doctrines, since it is based on the theory of pure quiddity he articulates in his works, a theory, which, while deeply informed by Bahshamite sources in addition to Greek sources, remains idiosyncratic.⁷⁹ This point notwithstanding, it would seem that Avicenna's approach was shaped to some degree by the theories that Muslim theologians had formulated prior to his time, some of which he may have inherited as part of a general Islamic education or even perhaps due to direct exposure to Mu'tazilite teaching. These topics focused especially on how God could know a plurality of things, while at the same time remain one and unchanging, and how He could be said to know things that do not yet exist. In this sense, Avicenna's theory of quiddity in relation to God and the divine intellects should be regarded as a direct reply—and an alternative theological solution—to the various doctrines of God's knowledge that had been elaborated in the Mu'tazilite tradition. At any rate, these thinkers embrace an essentialist approach that allows them to ascribe a plurality of objects of knowledge to God. These objects are not ontologically nil, but rather possess their own special ontological status. This approach bypasses the problem of divine multiplicity that arises from positing realized existents or eternal co-existents alongside God's essence, as in the case of Ash'arite theology.

⁷⁹ Hence, the similarities between Avicennian and Mu'tazilite theology should not obscure the presence of significant differences as well. Another important divergence is that the *mutakallimūn* would state that God knows the substances and accidents of all future things, a view based partly on their atomistic conception of matter and reality. In contrast, in Avicenna's system, pure quiddity by definition excludes all accidents, which implies that God knows things only 'in themselves,' which, I would argue, would be for Him to know them as identical to His own essence.

2 The pure quiddities and the Agent Intellect

There is broad agreement in the scholarship on Avicenna that the Agent Intellect participates in human cognition and intellectual thought.⁸⁰ What is a subject of debate is whether it does so by emanating the intelligibles directly to the human intellect or merely by assisting its transition from potentiality to actuality, without actually providing it with the universal forms as such. This issue represents a point of cleavage among scholars and has given rise to abstractionist and emanationist interpretations of Avicenna's epistemology.⁸¹ Another point of contention concerns the role of the Agent Intellect with regard to sublunary ontology, especially the question of the kind of forms this intellect causes that allow the sublunary processes to occur. I had the occasion to touch on these two questions in earlier sections of this book, and will focus here on a third issue that has been largely neglected in the scholarship, but which is intimately tied to these questions: what kind of objects or intelligibles does the Agent Intellect contemplate? My main argument in what follows is that only the pure quiddities, and not the 'universals' as these are commonly defined by Avicenna, can be said to exist in the Agent Intellect. This in turn has an impact on the topics of abstractionism and emanationism.

The hypothesis that the pure quiddities exist in the Agent Intellect and the other separate intellects in addition to God appears likely on doctrinal and textual grounds. It should be noted to begin with that Avicenna at *Metaphysics* V.1 does not state specifically that the pure quiddities exist in God's essence exclusively, but merely that they possess "divine existence." This vague statement of course leaves open the possibility that these essences can be located in another 'divine' superlunary intellect in addition to God's.⁸² This hypothesis finds solid support in various passages that can be gleaned from Avicenna's writings, which locate the quiddities and forms in the separate intellects. The master does not specify in those passages whether these forms consist of the universal quiddities or the pure quiddities, and in this regard modern scholars have for the most part assumed that these forms correspond to the universal forms that exist in the human intellect. But, as I shall argue below, and building on my analysis of God's knowledge in the previous section, it is preferable to differentiate more strictly in this case as well between the pure quiddities and the universal forms and ascribe the former—not the latter—to the separate intellects.

80 There are numerous studies dealing with the Agent Intellect in Avicenna, all of which cannot be mentioned. For some valuable insight, see Davidson, *Alfarabi*; Janssens, *The Notions*; Lizzini, *Fluxus*; Acar, *Intellect*; and Allebban, *Conservation*.

81 For a survey of the previous scholarship and of these two interpretive paradigms, see Alpino, *Intellectual Knowledge*, 135–143; and Taylor, *Avicenna*.

82 Some modern scholars locate the pure quiddities in the Agent Intellect in addition to God Himself; see Porro, *Universaux*; and Black, *Avicenna*, 11, who mentions "God and the angelic intelligences."

Let me first review some of the relevant evidence for locating the forms in the separate intellects. In *Introduction* (Text 45), Avicenna alludes to the fact that the immaterial intellects have knowledge of the quidditative meanings (*ma'ānī*). This passage accords with another statement to that effect in *On the Soul* (Text 44), which in addition mentions the planetary souls, and which intimates that there is an important difference concerning how these different beings know the quiddities.⁸³ In *On the Soul* of both *The Cure* and *Salvation*, as well as in *The Lesser Destination*, he states that when a human being has perfected his intellect and reached the highest kind of intuition, “the forms of all things contained in the Agent Intellect are imprinted on him either at once or nearly so.”⁸⁴ In *On the Rational Soul*, the master states that “all the truths [*ḥaqā'iq*] are revealed to these [separate] intellects.”⁸⁵ In his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna makes repeated assertions to the effect that the separate intellects know their essence, their principles, and their effects, and that they have a science of universals and particulars—in fact, in this work, the entire supernal and intellectual world is said to know the principles and concomitants that derive from it. In addition, he at times explicitly refers to the separate intellects' knowledge of the quiddities (*māhiyyāt*). In one revealing passage, he explains that these immaterial principles know the quiddities not as separate and archetypal Platonic forms (*al-ṣuwar al-aflātūniyyah*), but in a non-discursive mode, all at once, and as related to one another with regard to logical entailment.⁸⁶ Finally, in *Notes*, one reads that all of the existents are “extracted from the forms in the [separate] intellects” (*muntaqishat al-ṣuwar fī l-'uqūl*) and that these forms are “in them like the existent patterns” of things (*al-hay'āt al-mawjūdah*).⁸⁷

Overall, then, it appears that there is sufficient evidence contained in the Avicennian corpus to conclude that the forms or quiddities exist not only in God's mind, but

83 The difference would stem from the important distinction Avicenna establishes between the pure noetical nature of the separate intellects and the psychological nature of the celestial souls, which, according to the master, are not pure intellects and are somehow connected with their corporeal nature. For more information on these points, see Janos, *Moving the Orbs*.

84 Gutas, *Avicenna*, 183–184 (translation slightly revised), with the relevant references to the Arabic texts.

85 Avicenna, *On the Rational Soul*, 198.16; translated in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 74.

86 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 37–38, 48; and especially 50.15–19 and 62.7–15. As in the case of God's intellection, Avicenna is not asserting, I reckon, that the intellects know particulars *qua* particulars, or even that they know universals *qua* universals. Rather, it is by knowing the quiddities in themselves (see below) that these intellects can by extension be said to know both particulars and universals, insofar as the sublunary existents are constituted of pure quiddities. As in the case of God's knowledge, then, this claim should be interpreted in light of the intellects' knowledge of the pure quiddities as objects that are *essentially universal*. Quiddity in itself is the core, the underlying reality of all existents, and it is by knowing it that the intellects can know these various classes of existents.

87 Avicenna, *Notes*, 353, section 629; cf. 381, section 676: “the first intellectual principles possess only pure intelligibles; the intelligibles are present in them, and they do not require discursive thought.”

also in the Agent Intellect (and by extension in the other separate intellects), which follow the First Cause. Avicenna routinely locates the various intelligible forms (*ṣuwar*) in the separate intellects and/or the Agent Intellect in his works on psychology and cosmology.⁸⁸ This Agent Intellect, which is identified with the Giver of Forms (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*), is responsible for emanating the substantial forms to the sublunary beings and the intelligibles to the human intellects, where they are apprehended in a universal way.⁸⁹

One crucial issue that remains to be settled, however, is whether the Agent Intellect contemplates the quiddities *qua* complex universal forms or *qua* pure quiddities. This point requires our immediate attention. In a brief but important passage at the end of *Metaphysics* V.1, Avicenna intimates that the universal quiddity (e.g., the universal concept ‘horse’) is a single and numerically one concept with regard to the mind of an individual human being thinking it, but that it is also numerically many in the sense that there can be several human intellects thinking this concept simultaneously and, hence, several instances of a universal quiddity existing actually at the same time.⁹⁰ In this connection, the master explicates that these multiple universal quiddities in human minds must stand in equal relation to another single and overarching notion of quiddity, in a manner similar to the way in which the concrete particulars relate to universal quiddity in the human mind. Now, since Avicenna adamantly rejects the theory of the Platonic forms, it is clear that he is unwilling to locate this higher or meta-universal essence in a realm of independently existent forms. Avicenna’s solution should therefore be sought elsewhere. Even though the

88 This feature of Avicenna’s metaphysics can be traced back to some of the Neoplatonic sources in Arabic, such as *The Book of Pure Good*. One finds in that work the idea that the separate intellects know what is ‘above’ and ‘below’ them (proposition 7), as well as frequent assertions regarding the existence of a plurality of forms (*ṣuwar*) in these intellects (propositions 4, 6, and 9).

89 Allebban’s, *Conservation*, interpretation of the Agent Intellect seems to exclude the possibility of locating the forms or essences in that intellect in a strong sense. She rejects the view that “forms have some separate existence (in the Active Intellect), i.e. a separate existence from the things they are forms of.” She adds: “And it seems Avicenna’s wording of the sentence, taking care to distinguish the different manners in which the *rasm* is in things, might be his way of making clear that the forms are only in the Active Intellect in this loose sense of being what the Active Intellect *impresses* into matter” (98). As discussed in this book, I think there is strong evidence to locate the essences or forms in the Agent Intellect (as well as in the other separate intellects) and to make them the primary object of these beings’ intellection. On this point, see also Gutas, *Avicenna*, 198 and 371; and Black, *Mental Existence*, 21. It should be noted, however, that unlike Allebban, I do not consider this scenario to be an instance of separate (*mufāriq*) existence, strictly speaking, since the forms or essences would be contained *within* the Agent Intellect. Rather, I construe the state of separateness with regard to the forms in a Platonic sense, i.e., as existing in themselves in separation from matter and all other things. This seems to be Avicenna’s position as well, who distinguishes between a Platonic view (which he rejects) and a theological-metaphysical view that locates forms, essences, intelligibles, etc., in the divine intellects. Avicenna never uses the term *mufāriq* to describe the forms *qua* intelligibles in the intellects, but only to describe the separate intellects themselves.

90 Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, 205.14–206.3.

master is laconic on this point and does not expressly answer the question he raises in that passage, it would seem from this and other textual hints that he locates this overarching or meta-form in the Agent Intellect. This would mean that the quiddities in the Agent Intellect would be ‘universal’ relative to their actualization in individual human intellects. On the analogy Avicenna suggests in *Metaphysics*, the concrete particular form is to the universal in the human mind what the latter is to the form in the Agent Intellect.

One thought-provoking question is whether the foregoing entails a distinction between the intellection of pure quiddity and of universal quiddity in the Agent Intellect, and which aspect of quiddity should be ascribed to this superlunary being. Does the Agent Intellect contemplate both the universals and the pure quiddities or only one class of objects? And is the situation in this case comparable to how this issue plays out in the contexts of human intellection and God’s intellection? One interpretive option is to argue that Avicenna is using the analogy in *Metaphysics* rather loosely and that he does not literally intend to say that the quiddities in the Agent Intellect are, strictly speaking, universals. On the basis of what was argued earlier in connection with the First, the quiddities in the Agent Intellect need not be regarded as universals, but merely as assuming a universal relation to those forms in the human intellects. This would imply that the quiddities in the Agent Intellect are *like* what the universals in the human mind are to concrete instantiations, but not actually so. Given that Avicenna ascribes universality to the quiddities in the First as well, which, however, cannot literally be complex universal concepts, it is likely that he is adopting a similar approach in this passage of *Metaphysics*. Accordingly, the pure quiddities in the Agent Intellect could fulfil the role of universal forms in the way I described earlier, without actually being the kind of universal forms that characterize human thought. Now, in order to serve as a ‘universal of universals,’ that is, if this overarching concept of quiddity in the Agent Intellect is the archetype for the various universal concepts that correspond to it in the human intellects, it cannot be universal in the sense in which this term applies to objects in the human mind. In other words, the quiddity in the Agent Intellect cannot have the same kind of universal ontological mode as the universal in the human mind, first, because each universal concept in each human mind is numerically one, and second, because it is complex and synthetic and therefore requires a cause for its constitution. What is more, the universal in the human mind is accompanied by an intention of universality and predicability of many, which has to do with the human apprehension of the concrete world, and which is absent from the pure and simple intellection of the separate intellects, which essentially precedes the sub-lunary particulars. Thus, if this kind of universal were ascribed to the Agent Intellect, the entire analogy Avicenna establishes between these various levels of universality would collapse.

One alluring solution to this problem is to posit that it is pure quiddity (e.g., horseness) devoid of its parasitical accidents and concomitants, rather than the mental universal as such, which exists in the Agent Intellect, and that it is in this capacity

that it acts as a model or archetype for all the individual universal forms in the human mind (e.g., ‘universal horse,’ which exists numerically in several human minds). The pure quiddity horseness in the Agent Intellect can become an indeterminate number of universal forms ‘horse’ in the human intellects. Thus, when Avicenna explains in his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle* that the intellection of the supernal intellects is simple, non-discursive, and immediate, and that “the intelligible form of each thing [*ṣūrah kull shay’ ma ‘qūlah*] is present in it, divested of its parasitical trappings,”⁹¹ this statement should be construed as referring to the absence of not only the material accidents of quiddity—this is obvious given that he is talking about intelligible forms—but also of its mental concomitants and accidents. In other words, it is the pristine and negatively-conditioned aspect of quiddity that these intellects contemplate, not mental universals as these exist in human discursive thought. This hypothesis has the by-effect of solving the problem of how various human minds can think of the same universal form, say ‘universal horse,’ without this form being identical or shared by these various minds. In sum, the key feature of my interpretation is that it is the pure quiddities, and not the universal quiddities, which are to be located in the Agent Intellect and, by extension, in all the divine intellects. The universals are, strictly speaking, intentional objects and complex concepts that are to be located in the human minds exclusively and that exist only ‘after matter’ or ‘after multiplicity.’ They are generated in the human mind only once the pure quiddities have been extracted from the world of matter and multiplicity or received from the Agent Intellect and combined with mental concomitants. Either way, the pure forms and essences exist as such in the Agent Intellect and serve as archetypes for the forms of the sublunary world, both in an epistemological and ontological sense. As Gutas notes, what Avicenna in *On the Rational Soul* calls “the forms of things as they are in themselves [*ṣuwar al-ashyā’ ka-mā hiya ‘alayhā*]” are found in God and in the separate intellects, including the Agent Intellect.⁹²

In spite of this, the putative role the Agent Intellect plays in human cognition and intellection still needs to be elucidated. More specifically, at this juncture I wish to address the vexed question of how abstraction relates to the emanation of the forms from the Agent Intellect. Modern scholars have come up with at least three main interpretations concerning the role of the Agent Intellect in the acquisition of universals in the human mind. It is worthwhile rehearsing these interpretations in order to get a clearer picture of the problem: (a) the universals are acquired exclusively from the Agent Intellect, which is responsible for emanating the intelligibles to the human mind; (b) the Agent Intellect emanates *only* mental accidents,

⁹¹ Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 62.14–15.

⁹² Gutas, *Avicenna*, 198, 371. This expression appears in *On the Rational Soul* (*Risālah fī l-kalām ‘alā l-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) to describe the perfection of the theoretical faculty: “The soul then becomes like a polished mirror upon which are reflected the forms of things as they are in themselves [*ṣuwar al-ashyā’ ka-mā hiya ‘alayhā*] without any distortion” (Avicenna, *On the Rational Soul*, 196.20–21; translated in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 71).

such as universality, to the human mind, and it is the process of abstraction that remains primarily responsible for the acquisition of the pure quiddities (note that this approach presupposes a sharp distinction between pure quiddity, universality, and the universal concept); (c) the human mind acquires the universal forms thanks to abstraction as well as to the causality of the Agent Intellect, even though the Agent Intellect emanates, strictly speaking, neither the pure quiddities nor the mental accidents that accompany them, but merely facilitates or enables the process by which the forms are abstracted and actualized in the human mind. Proponents of epistemological emanationism in Avicenna, such as Gilson, Davidson, Nuseibeh, Black, Hall, and D'Ancona, have defended position (a),⁹³ while upholders of abstractionism, such as Gutas and Hasse in some of his works, have defended variants of position (c).⁹⁴ From a historiographic point of view, these two positions (the emanationist and the abstractionist) have been the most influential in shaping the discourse on Avicennian epistemology. Nevertheless, a recent trend aiming at a reconciliation of these two stances ascribes a role to both the Agent Intellect and human abstraction. Accordingly, McGinnis has suggested interpretation (b),⁹⁵ while Hasse, Sebti, Alpina, and Taylor in recent papers have argued for variations of interpretation (c), which grant more significance to the Agent Intellect.⁹⁶ Let us examine in more detail how these various interpretations fit with the findings I have adduced thus far.

The results reached in the foregoing analysis regarding the doctrinal centrality of pure quiddity in Avicenna's philosophy are incompatible with some of these interpretations, which considerably narrows the scope of my investigation. Interpretation (a) above is contradicted by many of the conclusions I reached and also ignores the considerable evidence in the Avicennian texts according to which it is the human intellect that abstracts the pure quiddities (and by extension the universals) from the exterior objects of the world. But perhaps the main problem with this view is that the Agent Intellect cannot emanate the universals as such, simply because it does not contain the universals, but only the pure quiddities. For these reasons, I deem this position to be no longer tenable. Interpretation (b), which is the one recently put forth by McGinnis, is undermined on the same grounds. Although McGinnis made a crucial contribution to the debate by insisting that it is pure quiddity, not the universal as such, that is abstracted from concrete particulars by the human intellect,

93 Nuseibeh, Al-'Aql al-Qudsi; Davidson, *Alfarabi*; Black, *Mental Existence*; eadem, *How Do We Acquire Concepts?*; Hall, *Intellect*; and D'Ancona, *Degrees of Abstraction*.

94 Gutas, *Avicenna*; idem, *The Empiricism*, especially 412; Hasse, *Avicenna's De anima*; idem, *Avicenna on Abstraction*.

95 McGinnis, *Logic and Science*; idem, *Making Abstraction*.

96 Hasse, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*; Sebti, *L'analogie*; Alpina, *Intellectual Knowledge*; Taylor, *Avicenna*. There is a comparable debate in Thomistic studies regarding the acquisition of the primary notions, for which see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 171–177. As is recently the case with Avicenna, scholars have attempted to reconcile various aspects of Thomas Aquinas's account of how the primary notions are acquired by the intellect.

his contention that what emanates from the Agent Intellect are the “intelligible accidents,” such as universality, is on the other hand much more problematic. For the complex mental universals as such exist, according to Avicenna, only in the human mind and *post rem*, so that the concomitant or accident of universality cannot possibly be transmitted by the Agent Intellect to the human intellect.⁹⁷ In fact, universality as Avicenna defines it in this context is the hallmark of human cognition. It is defined as the concomitant of a quiddity that is being actually considered in the human mind, and which arises due to a cluster of logical, intentional, and discursive considerations (and, one might also say, the psychological limitations) that are proper to human ratiocination. Moreover, McGinnis’s interpretation is not supported by any strong evidence in the Avicennian sources, which would show unambiguously that it is the concomitants and accidents, rather than the quiddities, which are emanated from the Agent Intellect to the human minds. Finally, given that the mental concomitants and attributes of essence, such as universality, are non-constitutive of (*ghayr muqawwimah*) and external to (*khārij*) essence (and thus also essentially posterior to, and dependent on, the presence of the constitutive elements of quiddity), it is hard to imagine that they could exist separately and autonomously from quiddity as such in a divine intellect. As I showed in chapter II, the human mind has the ability to artificially separate the concomitants, say, genusness (*jinsiyyah*), oneness (*waḥdah*), and universality (*kulliyyah*), from the nature horseness (*farsiyyah*). But this ability is inextricably tied to human logical and discursive thought. So these concomitants emerge as by-products of the conception of essence in the human mind. Finally, if “intelligible accidents” were ascribed to the Agent Intellect, this would create a certain multiplicity that would render its intellection complex *in the very same way* that the human intellection of universals is complex. But Avicenna is keen in his writings to distinguish between these modes of intellection, and there is, at any rate, no indication that he attributes complex concepts and mental concomitants to the separate intellects.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ The view that the universals are located in the Agent Intellect and that the divine intellects can only apprehend universals or in a universal way is widespread in the literature, even though an explanation of what is meant by the term ‘universal’ is rarely given in this context. For example, Hasse, *Avicenna’s Epistemological Optimism*, 111, writes: “the same essences exist both in the active intellect as universal forms and in the sublunary substances as particular forms.” Adamson, *On Knowledge of Particulars*; and idem, *Knowledge of Universals*, also argues that God knows only universals. But given the ambiguity and shifting nature of this notion in the late-antique discussions, of which Avicenna is a direct heir, it seems necessary in my eyes to elucidate exactly what he means by universality in this context, especially given that he attributes it primarily to human intellectual concepts. My contention that the pure quiddities possess a special and essential universality that should be distinguished from the mental universality of complex universals in the mind strongly connects Avicenna to this late-antique background in that it presupposes a multifaceted or modulated construal of this notion, which was initiated already in the Greek philosophical sources.

⁹⁸ As Hasse, *Avicenna’s Epistemological Optimism*, 112–113, sharply noted in his reply to McGinnis, McGinnis’s argument faces a textual problem: “the distinction between abstract forms (or essences)

As for interpretation (c), which corresponds historiographically to the strict abstractionism advocated by Gutas and others, it runs into the same kind of difficulty as some of the other interpretations, namely, having to account for incompatible textual evidence. For there are numerous passages in which Avicenna does appear to ascribe a causal emanationist role to the Agent Intellect when it comes to human cognition. In light of this, some new variants on interpretation (c), which recognize but limit the role of epistemological emanationism, and which tread a middle course in an attempt to accommodate this complex body of evidence, seems the more constructive option. Incidentally, it is also the one that coheres with the bulk of the evidence collected in this study. Hasse, Alpina, and Taylor, who ascribe a role both to abstraction and the Agent Intellect, deploy what is by far the most promising approach, since it puts forth an interpretive framework that integrates the multifarious textual evidence and also successfully brings together the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic components of Avicenna's doctrine.⁹⁹

In what follows, I embrace some of their conclusions, but also qualify their interpretation in light of the results gathered previously. One crucial element that is on my view misrepresented in Hasse's analysis is the role of pure quiddity and the fundamental distinction between pure quiddity and universal quiddity. Hasse, following more traditional interpretations of the Agent Intellect, insists that the forms present in the Agent Intellect are universals, without providing any qualifications of this notion. He argues that "the forms which are in the active intellect already have the two components: essence and the mode of conceptual existence." This leads Hasse to conclude that "they cannot but exist in the way of conceptualization, that is, as universals."¹⁰⁰ Although McGinnis, for his part, sharply distinguishes between pure quiddity and the universal aspect of quiddity, his argument ultimately makes the Agent Intellect responsible for the emanation of universality and of the other accidents that accompany the apprehension of quiddity in the human mind. On my view, then, Hasse's and McGinnis's interpretations are equally problematic in this regard, because they introduce a multiplicity and accidentality in the di-

and intellectualizing forms (or accidents) does not have a textual basis in Avicenna's psychological works—nor does the idea of a "mixing" of emanated intellectualizing forms and abstracted forms." For another critical reply to McGinnis, see Taylor, *Avicenna*, 59–60.

⁹⁹ Hasse's thesis may be summarized as follows: the forms of abstract beings, such as the First and the separate intellects, are grasped directly, while those of material beings (e.g., human and horse) are grasped through abstraction. Nevertheless, even with regard to the latter, the intelligibles are originally derived from the Agent Intellect, so that, in the final analysis, it would seem that both abstraction and emanation play a role in the acquisition of the natural forms. Hasse argues that the reason why Avicenna ultimately relies on a theory of epistemological emanation is to solve the problem of human memory, that is, of where the abstracted forms would be stored or subsist when they are not being actually thought. I rely considerably on Hasse's insight to tackle the problem of the Agent Intellect in Avicenna, although I have some qualms with his description of universality, as I explain below.

¹⁰⁰ Hasse, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*, 113.

vine intellection that has no place there (at any rate, not this kind of multiplicity). To attribute the same kind of complex universals to the human intellects and to the divine intellects does not pay heed to Avicenna's explanations that universality is an accident of *human* thought. Moreover, it would be odd indeed if the Agent Intellect emanated the accidents of quiddities, but not the actual quiddities themselves, as McGinnis contends. This would assign a somewhat demeaning role to this separate intellect and also undermine its status as a 'Giver of Forms.'

A more promising approach, I would propose, is to maintain a sharper distinction between the intellection of the universals and the intellection of the pure quiddities. This implies allowing for an exception to the widely held rule of universal intellection—the assumption that intellection can only be universal in nature—in Avicenna's noetics and epistemology. This exception consists in the apprehension of quiddity in itself as a pure and distinct concept in the human and divine intellects. Alternatively, the results gathered in this book caution against recognizing only a single sense of universality, instead of regarding this notion as being modulated in nature and applying differently to different objects. If this hypothesis is retained, it would mean that the human intellects in addition to the supernal intellects can conceive of the pure quiddities in abstraction from their universality—at any rate, if universality is construed as a mental intention and concomitant. If such an intellectual act is possible for the human intellect, it is *a fortiori* possible for the Agent Intellect.¹⁰¹ Again, this does not preclude the intellection of pure quiddity from being es-

101 On my view, the shortcoming of Hasse's argumentation concerning this point is encapsulated in the following statement: "This [the emanation of the intelligibles to the human soul after it has engaged in the process of abstracting the forms in concrete beings] is possible since the essences of material forms exist both as universals in the active intellect and as particulars in the sublunary world" (Hasse, *Avicenna's Epistemological Optimism*, 117). This statement and the ascription of universals to the Agent Intellect raises serious difficulties, which Hasse does not address. One may wonder how the Agent Intellect can be said at the same time to comprise universals and emanate forms to particular concrete beings. In other words, how can the universal conceptual forms be identical with the immanent forms in natural bodies, which are clearly not universal, at least in the same sense or according to the same definition of universality? How, then, can the Agent Intellect be described as the provider (*wāhib*) of the substantial forms in bodies as well as the universals in the human mind? (On this issue, and for a different interpretation of the Agent Intellect, see Allebban, *Conservation*). Furthermore, why should one assume in the first place that the Agent Intellect and the human mind apprehend the same kinds of 'universals' or that universality means the same thing in both contexts? In fact, for Avicenna, the forms *qua* natures in concrete bodies are not identical to the complex universal ideas as these exist in the human mind or, on Hasse's view, as these exist in the Agent Intellect, so that ascribing universals *simpliciter* to the Agent Intellect seems misleading on these counts. On the other hand, confining complex universals to the human mind and replacing them with the pure quiddities in the Agent Intellect alleviates these difficulties. As Avicenna contends, pure quiddity is indifferent with regard to its contexts of existence, and it is also not numerically determined and free of the accidents of universality and particularity; these various concomitants attach to quiddity 'after' pure quiddity has been emanated by the Agent Intellect. This greatly facilitates the explanation of how the Agent Intellect can be called the Provider of Forms and emanate both the substantial forms of concrete things and the intelligible forms of the human mind.

entially *universal* in a certain qualified or modulated sense. But it prompts us to contrast it to the mental and intentional universality that Avicenna usually stresses in the context of human psychology.

Consequently, if *both* abstraction and emanation are regarded as valid cognitive modes, as Hasse and McGinnis convincingly suggest, or, at the very least, if we follow Alpina and Taylor in granting an increased importance to the Agent Intellect when it comes to the actualization of the intelligibles, while stopping short of positing a real emanation coming from it; if, moreover, we postulate that it is the pure quiddities that are acquired by the rational soul, and not complex universal concepts as such or mental accidents (as suggested by McGinnis); then new avenues of interpretation regarding the relation between abstraction and the causality of the Agent Intellect can be explored. On one, rather shy, reading, one could argue, elaborating on some brief remarks by Alpina, that the Agent Intellect actualizes the pure quiddities in the human soul that are acquired through abstraction.¹⁰² In this scenario, the *ma'nā* of the pure quiddity is acquired through abstraction but actualized as an intellectual object by the Agent Intellect. This *ma'nā*, or quidditative object, ensures an epistemic and ontological continuum from the concrete beings, to the sensual, imaginative, and estimative forms, to, finally, the intelligibles that are apprehended by the intellect. It also warrants that a certain commensurate relation exists between the forms in concrete beings, the forms abstracted by the human soul, and the forms contained in the Agent Intellect that serve as epistemic paradigms. Finally, it would also explain how the Agent Intellect can actualize and illuminate the objects in the human mind without actually emanating them.

Nevertheless, it is not completely outlandish to surmise that *both* abstraction and emanation could result in the acquisition of the intelligibles, if these intelligibles are identified with the pure quiddities. For on this interpretation, the quiddities acquired through abstraction and contemplated in the human mind would coincide epistemically and ontologically with the forms in the Agent Intellect. After all, 'horseness in itself' is just 'horseness in itself,' regardless of whether it is intellected by the Agent Intellect or a human rational soul. Given that they possess their own irreducible and intelligible mode of existence, the pure quiddities in the human mind become *epistemically* and *ontologically interchangeable* with the forms in the Agent Intellect, even though a difference remains with regard to how the divine intellects and the human intellects apprehend these forms, or, rather, the totality of these forms in their various interrelationships.¹⁰³ The notion of their epistemic and ontological interchangeability is premised on their being fully intelligible and irreducible and also free of all concomitants.

¹⁰² Alpina, *Intellectual Knowledge*, 164–165.

¹⁰³ Namely, discursive vs. non-discursive intellection, when the totality of the forms and quiddities are regarded as objects of thought. Gutas, *Avicenna*, 198, 371, seems to reach the same conclusion.

More specifically, the hypothesis entertained here is that although the acquisition of the forms would *generally* or *customarily* occur as a result of psychological abstraction (with the aid of the Agent Intellect), direct emanation of the pure quiddities from the Agent Intellect to the human rational soul would be an acceptable alternative in some exceptional cases. These exceptional cases would occur when a human being has reached the peak of intuition (*ḥads*) and has developed his or her theoretical faculty to its uttermost point. In those cases, Avicenna speaks of a heightened level of intuition and describes this aptitude in terms of a ‘saintly faculty’ (*quwwah qudsiyyah*), a ‘sanctified spirit’ (*rūḥ muqaddas*), a ‘sacred intellect’ (*‘aql qudsi*), and a ‘sacred spirit’ (*rūḥ qudsi*), apparently with the same intent.¹⁰⁴ As Gutas has shown, Avicenna’s understanding of this faculty and of the kinds of objects to which it pertains seems to have undergone a certain development over the span of his career.¹⁰⁵ What is important here is that in the works of his middle period the master holds that this exalted faculty and intellect enable human beings to acquire the forms all at once and, presumably, in their entirety, that is, all the forms contained in the Agent Intellect. As he puts it,

there might be a person whose soul has been rendered so powerful through extreme purity and intense contact with intellective principles that he blazes with Correct Guessing/intuition (i. e., with the ability to receive them in all matters from the Agent Intellect), and the forms of all things contained in the Agent Intellect are imprinted on him either at once or nearly so.¹⁰⁶

If the previous hypothesis is correct, it would explain quite convincingly why Avicenna sometimes describes a process of *emanation* of the forms from the Agent Intellect to the human intellect, and at other times a process of *abstraction* of these same forms from material beings, and why he seems to regard these two accounts as equally valid. The hypothesis of the equal validity of these two accounts relies on the ubiquitous ontological and epistemological status of pure quiddity in his philosophy, which bridges these various ontological contexts and gnoseological levels, as well as on the theory of the saintly faculty, which gives some human beings a privileged access to intellectual knowledge by connecting directly with the Agent Intellect. The main differentiator therefore between abstraction and emanation is not the object of intellection, which is always the pure quiddity, but rather the circumstances in which, and the mode by which, it is acquired. Abstraction is a discursive process that focuses on one form at a time, whereas the saintly faculty enables a direct, unmediated, and comprehensive access to the forms contained in the Agent Intellect.

104 For these terms and an English translation of the various passages where they appear, see Gutas, *Avicenna*, 182–187.

105 Gutas, *Avicenna*, 179–201; idem, Intuition.

106 This statement appears almost verbatim in three works by Avicenna: *The Lesser Destination*; *On the Soul of The Cure* and of *Salvation*. For the references to these texts and an English translation (slightly revised), see Gutas, *Avicenna*, 183–184.

From a cognitive perspective, the human mind and the divine intellects can know pure quiddity as such and in abstraction from universality construed as a *post rem* mental accident. This, it turns out, is one of the few intellectual abilities or powers shared by the human and divine intellects. The possibility for the human mind to think ‘essence in itself’ indicates that this pure essence can be acquired either by engaging in a process of abstraction of the forms from concrete particulars, or by turning directly to the Agent Intellect, which is the storehouse of the pure quiddities vis-à-vis the sublunary world. I would argue, then, that the main reason why Avicenna maintains these interpretations as equally valid has to do with his doctrine of the ubiquity of pure quiddity. The latter establishes a direct gnoseological and ontological correspondence and transference between the quiddities in the human intellects and the divine intellects.¹⁰⁷

Anchoring pure quiddity at the epicenter of the debate regarding abstraction and emanation also helps to alleviate the problem of universality. Since pure essence is ubiquitous to these contexts of existence (extramental, mental, and supernal or divine), it is clear that, in none of these cases, what is acquired by the human mind is the universal as such. More specifically, one should abandon the long-held belief that it is the synthetic, mental universals as such that are emanated from the Agent Intellect to the human mind. If anything is emanated from this supernal being, it is the pure quiddities, “the forms of things as they are in themselves [*ṣuwar al-ashyā’ ka-mā hiya ‘alayhā*],” as Avicenna himself puts it, which are the forms that dwell in the Agent Intellect, and which can be directly apprehended by the human mind. My contention is that whenever Avicenna refers to the intelligible forms in the Agent Intellect, as in *On the Soul* V.5–7, and even when he is seemingly referring to ‘universals’ in this being, he does not in fact intend those universals that dwell in the human mind, but rather the pure forms or quiddities.¹⁰⁸ It is only after these pure quiddities have been conveyed to the human intellect that they can be conceived of literally as complex mental universals, when the various mental accidents that accompany realized existence are attached to them.¹⁰⁹ The reason why

107 Avicenna sometimes uses the technical term *muṭābaqah* to express this notion of epistemological and ontological *correspondence* between quiddities in the intellect and in the concrete world. Interestingly, this term occupies an important place in the post-Avicennian discussion about quiddity, universality, the ‘thing in itself’ (*nafs al-amr*), and the rational ability of the mind to distinguish truth from falsehood.

108 Avicenna’s terminology in *On the Soul* V.5–7 to describe the forms in the Agent Intellect, such as *ṣuwar ‘aqliyyah*, is also implemented in *Introduction* I.12 and *Metaphysics* V.1–2 to describe pure quiddity in the human mind; see chapter II for its description as a *ṣūrah ‘aqliyyah*. From a terminological perspective, then, the pure quiddities are just as likely candidates as the universals for being identified with the forms in the Agent Intellect.

109 This point can be approached from another angle: why would the Agent Intellect need to contemplate the quiddities in a universal way at all? What intellectual or ontological benefit could it derive from that? After all, and contrary to the human mind, it does not engage in the process of abstracting forms, and it knows all the intelligibles at once and in a non-discursive way. Moreover,

Avicenna sometimes loosely refers to the forms or intelligibles in the Agent Intellect as ‘universals’ can easily be accounted for: the universal is only one step removed from pure quiddity in the human mind, and it is, so to speak, its logical conceptual extension. What is more, as I argued in chapters II and III, there is *a sense in which* pure quiddity is ‘universal,’ because it is, by its very indeterminacy and unconditionedness, also intrinsically shareable and common; it is in itself *essentially* universal.¹¹⁰ By knowing the pure quiddity ‘triangleness,’ we also, in a sense, know the universal ‘triangle,’ as well as all the individual instantiations to which the latter refers, for all of these things require the pure essence ‘triangleness.’ As I proposed earlier, this could explain how God and the Agent Intellect can be said to have a knowledge of all things (including the particulars) ‘in a universal way,’ without this divine knowledge being a knowledge ‘of universals.’ Alternatively, it may be argued that God and the separate intellects contemplate universals of a different kind than the universals that are formed and apprehended in the human mind. For, unlike the former, the latter are synthetic and complex, formed after multiplicity (*ba’d al-kathrah*), and related to logical predication and thus also to human language (*al-maqūl ‘alā kathīrīn*). This approach, of course, rests on Avicenna’s contention that universality is modulated. Under one aspect, it is a mental concomitant proper to human intellection, which is also why he describes the universal in the mind as ‘conditioned’ (*bi-shart*). Under another aspect, pure quiddity is essentially universal, but that sense of universality has nothing to do with linguistic predication and human intentionality. Furthermore, the foregoing helps to explain why Avicenna metaphorically or analogically describes the pure quiddities in the Agent Intellect as universals vis-à-vis their corresponding forms in the human intellect: since the pure quiddities located in the Agent Intellect are neither one nor many, they stand as principles or archetypes to the corresponding universal forms that flourish in the human intellects. Just as the quiddities in the concrete beings are only *potentially* universals when reflected upon by the human mind, so the pure quiddities in the Agent Intellect are only *potentially* universals with regard to the various human minds to which

positing universals in the Agent Intellect would introduce a kind of intellectual accidentality and complexity in that being, which are nowhere mentioned by Avicenna, at least not in this regard (rather, the multiplicity in the separate intellects stems from their thinking their essence and their cause). Thus, the account of conceptual synthesis and complexity Avicenna deploys in *Introduction* I.12 with regard to the universal is limited to human cogitation. In that same text, Avicenna contrasts human intellection to the intellection of the angels (*viz.*, separate intellects) and God, whose knowledge precedes the embodiment of forms in matter and multiplicity. The inference seems to be that the mental universality associated with these forms in the human mind appears only *post rem* and does not affect the intellectual mode of the supernal intellects.

110 As I stressed on repeated occasions, this ambiguity is not idiosyncratic to Avicenna, but affects many of the late-antique Greek and postclassical Arabic discussions about the universals.

they relate. In either case, true mental universality is actualized only as a result of human rational thought.¹¹¹

There is an additional argument, grounded in Avicenna's cosmology and meteorology, to the effect that the pure essences are located in the Agent Intellect and that these essences must possess a third mode of existence in this context. This argument might appear marginal at first glance, but it is in fact firmly supported by evidence derived from his works. As Gad Freudenthal has shown, Avicenna believes that the sublunary world, although temporally eternal, passes through different cosmic cycles during which its surface is either entirely covered by water or partly exposed as a mass of dry land.¹¹² This theory presumably entails a complete, albeit temporary, disappearance of all species on earth, which reappear only once these universal floods have receded. As Freudenthal explains, "this theory obviously implies that all the flora and fauna are regularly destroyed, and then come to be again. Avicenna posited that this regeneration of the species is brought about by natural necessities, including the assistance of the agent intellect."¹¹³ Now, if this is the case, then it is quite clear that there are historical periods—quite literally—during which the essence 'humanness' exists neither in concrete individuals nor, for that matter, as a universal in the human intellects, for the simple reason that there are no concrete human beings in existence in the world. Yet, on Avicenna's theory of cosmic flooding, human beings and the species 'human' return to existence through the agency of the Agent Intellect. This, on the master's reckoning, constitutes an exceptional case of 'spontaneous generation.'¹¹⁴ So there can be little doubt that the essence 'humanness' continues to exist as a pure form in the Agent Intellect, and this regardless of the existence of concrete instantiations corresponding to that archetypal form. Moreover, this intellect's emanation, when the circumstances allow it, enables the substantial forms to be actualized—or rather, re-actualized—in the sublunary world. The implication is that the pure essences of all natural things are eternally embedded in the intellect of the Giver of Forms according to an ontological mode that is distinct from that of concrete essence and from that of universal essence in the human mind.¹¹⁵

111 It is true that Avicenna sometimes suggests that it is the universals that are received by the human soul, as in the following passages from *On the Soul* I.5, 48.1: "the theoretical faculty receives an impression of universal forms." In those instances, however, as in several others, Avicenna appears to be using the notion of universality in a loose or ambiguous fashion, which is justified on account of the fact that the universals do eventually arise in the human mind out of the pure quiddities, but are not directly received as such. While not incorrect, of course, Avicenna's phrasing is unfortunate, in that it obscures some points of doctrine that he is in other passages—such as in *Introduction* I.2 and 12 and *Metaphysics* V.1–2—very keen to distinguish and clarify.

112 Freudenthal, *The Medieval Hebrew Reception*.

113 Freudenthal, *The Medieval Hebrew Reception*, 272; on this topic, see also Bertolacci, Averroes, who focuses more on the issue of spontaneous generation.

114 Bertolacci, Averroes, 42.

115 Granted, this argument establishes first and foremost that the essences exist in the Agent Intellect, rather than that they exist as pure quiddities in a mode distinct from the universals in the

My adaptation of some of Hasse's, McGinnis's, and Alpina's ideas on abstraction and emanation to articulate a new theory of the epistemological status of pure quiddity has the corollary effect of underlining the Neoplatonic sources that likely shaped the master's doctrines. Hasse himself relies heavily on D'Ancona's analysis of the Plotinian sources in order to elaborate his theory, and more recently Taylor has argued that Themistius's paraphrase of *On the Soul* likely influenced Avicenna's views.¹¹⁶ The role played by Plotinian noetical and emanationist theories in Avicenna's doctrine of quiddity is also a feature that emerges from the previous analysis. For not only is there a vital gnoseological link between the human and divine intellects (the fact that the pure quiddities exist in the human intellect and the Agent Intellect ensures an epistemological and ontological continuum between these two intellectual spheres).¹¹⁷ It also suggests that the human intellect can know certain things, i.e., the pure quiddities, *in the very same manner* as the Agent Intellect, according to a simple and unmediated intellective mode, and in abstraction from all mental accidents, even though the human mind cannot know the essences in this manner *all at once*. The main difference between the two types of intellect, therefore, is that the Agent Intellect knows the pure quiddities in this simple mode all at once, whereas the human intellect can acquire and apprehend only one form at a time—with the possible exception of persons endowed with the saintly faculty, as we saw above.¹¹⁸ And indeed, the potential connection with Neoplatonic noetics should be further considered in light of Avicenna's theory of the sacred intellect. In this case, it is possible that the pure quiddities are contemplated all at once and in a non-discursive manner. According to the master, the soul of the person who has perfected his or her intuition "becomes like a polished mirror upon which are reflected the forms of things as they are in themselves [*ṣuwar al-ashyā' ka-mā hiya 'alayhā*] without any distortion."¹¹⁹ If Avicenna's theory of the acquired intellect and especially of the sacred intellect is construed in light of his theory of quiddity in itself, it would

human mind. But the crux of the analysis in this section suggests that the latter proposition must derive from the former. In brief, if there are no human minds thinking the essences in a universal way during some periods of history, it seems safe to affirm also that there is no such thing as a universal mental mode of existence for these essences.

116 Taylor, Avicenna, 72–75.

117 In their dual epistemic and ontological role, the pure quiddities in Avicenna's philosophy can be compared to the *logoi* of Proclus's philosophy. The *logoi* exist both in the soul (as "essential reason-principles") and in nature in the forms that are immanent in matter. Hence, as Helmig explains, the forms in Proclus's system exist "on all levels of reality" (Helmig, Proclus). The same can be said of the pure quiddities in Avicenna's philosophy.

118 This indeed appears to be the main difference between divine and human intellection: the former encompasses all the forms at once in a single, non-discursive act of intellection, whereas the latter is discursive and must proceed from one object to the other. On this issue, see Adamson, *Non-Discursive Thought*; and D'Ancona, *Divine and Human Knowledge*.

119 Avicenna, *On the Rational Soul*, 196.20–21; translated in Gutas, *Avicenna*, 71. According to Gutas, *Avicenna*, 198–199, 371, "the forms of things as they are in themselves" are found in the supernal intellects in addition to the human intellects that have reached the peak of intuition.

essentially prove to be a vindication of the Neoplatonic and especially Plotinian nature of his noetics, where the human intellect can become like the divine intellect in apprehending the pure forms in a simple and unmediated mode.

These considerations are to be connected with yet other aspects of Avicenna's epistemology. One of them is his theory of conceptualization (*taṣawwur*), which Avicenna describes as "the first science" or "the first means of science" (*wa-l-taṣawwur huwa l-ʿilm al-awwal*), and which, it appears, must focus on the pure quiddities specifically. Another pertains to his comments in *Metaphysics* I.5 regarding epistemically prior and irreducible concepts in the mind, among which is 'the thing,' and, by extension, 'thingness.' Finally, the previous results also have some bearing on the differentiation between simple and complex intellection, which is particularly relevant when it comes to Avicenna's Neoplatonic affiliations. Avicenna's views on simple intellection or simple knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-basīṭ*) in particular presupposes the theory of the pure quiddities, which are free of numerical and accidental multiplicity, and hence can exist in the Agent Intellect in a state of non-multiplicity.¹²⁰ The non-numerical, non-accidental, and non-complex nature of the pure quiddities suggests that they do not lend themselves to division and combination, which characterizes regular human discursive intellection. Instead, they are well-suited to a kind of divine non-discursive and immediate intellection. The 'divine' quality of pure quiddity therefore appears to be invested with a gnoseological dimension as well. Avicenna seems to have adapted Neoplatonic theories on simple and non-discursive intellection to fit his theory of pure quiddity, making the latter the stepping stone of his epistemological doctrine of divine and human intellection. My contention, then, is that these various arguments and theories, while inspired by remote Neoplatonic elements, appear to be grounded in the distinctly Avicennian concept of pure quiddity.

If the foregoing interpretation of pure quiddity is correct, then it enables us to better grasp some of the Plotinian roots of Avicenna's epistemology and metaphysics. This indebtedness to his Neoplatonic predecessor would be based, among other things, on the premise of human beings' direct access to the intellectual contents of the divine intellects, in this case the Agent Intellect. This establishes an epistemological bridge between the human intellects and the supernal intellects. The foregoing also clarifies Avicenna's theory of non-discursive knowledge by situating the pure quiddities at the center of this theory and describing them as the main objects of divine intellection. Furthermore, my contention facilitates an explanation of how the Agent Intellect can impact *both* the concrete world and the human intellects, by hypothesizing that it is the pure quiddities that are emanated to each one of these contexts, not universal forms as such. The interpretation articulated here relies on the postulate that pure quiddity is an *epistemological and ontological constant* in Avicenna's noetics.

120 On this issue, see Adamson, *Non-Discursive Thought*; D'Ancona, *Divine and Human Knowledge*. These authors, however, do not resort to the doctrine of pure quiddity to explain this aspect of Avicenna's noetics.

na's metaphysics, which, moreover, assumes a distinct mode of existence in the human and divine intellects. The unique gnoseological status of pure quiddity is derived from its abstract and intelligible mode of existence, which precedes realized existence and the set of concomitants that accompany it. This notion enables us to connect the supernal world and the concrete world, the separate intellects and the human intellect, in a manner that few other notions can in Avicenna's philosophy. For example, earlier interpretations had struggled to account for how the Agent Intellect could convey forms to the sublunary world of nature as well as to the human mind, when the former are forms in matter and the latter universals in the mind. The attribution of universals *simpliciter* to the Agent Intellect only compounded this problem. But if one hypothesizes that the Agent Intellect contains and emanates only the pure quiddities, then the various difficulties plaguing this topic recede significantly. For quiddity in itself is just quiddity in itself, regardless of whether it exists immanently in concrete beings or as a distinct concept in the human mind, and regardless of whether we are dealing with intellectual forms or hylomorphic forms. In each case, it is the very same intelligible meaning and essence that underlies these forms and that, *qua ma'nā*, is emanated from the Agent Intellect. This ontological unconditionedness or undeterminedness means that pure quiddity can exist with other things (e. g., in concrete beings or in the complex universal concept) or distinctly in the mind; intellectually or extramentally; in a sublunary context or in a divine context.

Furthermore, as was shown above, this interpretation considerably alleviates the tension between abstraction and emanation that is encountered in many accounts of Avicenna's epistemology, since, in either case, it is pure quiddity alone that is acquired by the human mind. In other words, the human intellect acquires the same pure quiddities that ultimately exist in the Agent Intellect by engaging in psychological abstraction and by extracting quidditative meanings from the concrete beings, which themselves acquired their immanent quidditative forms from the Agent Intellect. So the same *ma'nā* can be said to underlie these three planes of existence. By virtue of a theory of ontological correspondence or equivalence (*muqāyahah, muṭābaqah*), the pure quiddities in the human mind coincide with those in concrete beings as well as with those in the Agent Intellect. Emphasizing the role of pure quiddity leads to a unifying and systematic interpretation of the master's philosophical system.

With these considerations, the discussion has reverted to its starting point, namely, with the human conception of pure quiddity in chapter II. Quiddity in itself, it appears from the foregoing analysis, exists in all intellects and in all noetical spheres: in God's intellect, in the separate intellects, in the Agent Intellect, and in the human intellect. However, it exists in those intellects not *qua* contingent and complex mental existent, but rather in a manner that transcends the various concomitants and attributes associated with realized mental existence, including universality. This is true primarily, of course, of the various divine intellects, whose apprehension is simple, immediate, and non-discursive. But it is also true of the human

intellect inasmuch as the concept of pure quiddity in the human mind is simple, prior, and distinct when compared to that of the universal or the data of sense-perception. Moreover, it would seem that the pure quiddities are emanated from God to the separate intellects, and from these intellects to the human minds through a process of cosmic causality that connects all noetic and ontic levels with one another. The main principles that tie together this hierarchical transfer of pure quiddity are the Avicennian theories of efficient, formal, and final causality.

According to the interpretation advocated here, all the separate intellectual existents from the First to the Agent Intellect would contemplate the pure quiddities. However, the mode of intellection would differ from one intellect to the next. Whereas the First apprehends them as fully identical with Its essence, the other separate intellects contemplate them as distinct from their essence and as part of their complex intellectual makeup, even though this kind of intellection would still be simple and non-discursive when compared to human discursive thought.¹²¹ As for human beings, they can also have an immediate and simple apprehension of pure quiddity. It dwells in the human mind as a transcendent, irreducible, and simple intelligible notion. Acquisition of the pure essences and forms can arise from abstraction and/or be obtained by emanation from the Agent Intellect (in people endowed with the sacred faculty), these being two ways ultimately of describing the same cognitive phenomenon rooted in pure quiddity. Avicenna's apparently contradictory statements regarding abstraction and emanation stem from different ways of relating pure quiddity to the human mind, not from some inconsistent doctrinal position on his part.

121 Avicenna locates multiplicity in the separate intellects at the level of their fragmented intellection. The various objects of thought of these intellects lead to the emergence of certain intelligible concomitants (*lawāzim*) and thus to intelligible multiplicity (*kathrah*), which in turn explains why they require a cause (i.e., they are not absolutely simple beings). Thus, they know the First and their own essence, and they know the latter according to the modalities of the possible and the necessary. What is more, it is clear on the basis of what Avicenna says that they also contemplate the quiddities as a result of their self-intellection. But here again, one may wonder whether these quiddities would be perfectly identical to their essence in the way in which this ontological and epistemic unity applies in the case of God. In light of this, one should be wary of the statement in Black, *Mental Existence*, 20, to the effect that “in God and the separate substances there is a complete identity of knower and known.” Beyond these general remarks, not much can be said about the state of quiddity in the separate intellects, given that Avicenna says little about this topic. Yet, there is a real need to account for the scattered evidence in the Avicennian sources that points to the separate intellects' knowledge of the quiddities and the forms. Avicenna is, of course, primarily interested in the First Intellect, which is God, and in the Agent Intellect, given the latter's influence on the sublunary world. He is also relatively interested in the First Effect (the intellect immediately caused to exist by God), given its unique status as the being in which multiplicity starts to exist. But the numerous intellects lying between the First Effect and the Agent Intellect hardly get a detailed mention in the entire Avicennian corpus. Their role beyond celestial motion is secondary, and none of them stands out in a particular way. There is also the consideration that Avicenna may have been ultimately undecided about their number; see Janos, *Moving the Orbs*.

3 The pure quiddities and divine causation

3.1 Intellection and causation

If the previous interpretation articulated in chapter V is correct, then it would mean (a) that God thinks the quidditative meanings (*ma'ānī*) and the pure quiddities and natures in themselves, albeit by thinking His own essence; (b) that these non-numerical quidditative meanings possess a mode of existence that is collapsible with God's perfectly unitary existence, which explains why they do not amount to a multiplicity in the divine essence; and (c) that their originative source in God's essence, which is the absolute Truth (*al-ḥaqq*), accounts for their real and true nature as quiddities, their *ḥaqīqah*. What is more, the implications of such an interpretation would be (d) that God causes these quiddities to exist in the exterior world as a result of His intellection of them, and (e) that these notions become epistemically and ontologically distinct only as a result of the divine intellection and causation. In spite of its sophistication, or perhaps because of it, Avicenna's account is not free of inherent tensions. There are three residual issues in particular I wish to address in the following paragraphs. First, how can God cause things to exist that can already be said to exist within Him? Second, how can God think all the quiddities at once and yet cause only one specific being to exist (i. e., the First Effect)? And third, given that Avicenna establishes a narrow connection between essence and possibility, can the quiddities be said to be possible while dwelling in the divine essence? I tackle the first two questions below and devote a specific section to the third one due to its complexity.

In Avicenna's theology, there is a direct connection between divine thought and divine creation. God's thinking the quiddities and His creating them is an identical act. In fact, one may say that the divine demiurgy is fundamentally noetical in nature, since creation is the outward or exterior manifestation of God's intellectual activity. In *Metaphysics* VIII.7, the master explains that with regard to the First, "the very object of His apprehension—namely, that which He intellectually apprehends of the whole—is the cause of the whole." And he adds: "hence, apprehension [i. e., intellection] and bringing into existence is a single meaning [*ma'nā*] in Him."¹²² In *Notes*, Avicenna explains that the divine knowledge and conception of each existent is the rationale for its existence.¹²³ As can be observed, there is a direct connection between the objects of God's knowledge and the effects of God's creation. What God thinks necessarily comes into existence. Strikingly, Avicenna resorts to the term *ma'nā* to express this interface, which yet again testifies to the ontological implications of this term.¹²⁴ I argued in the previous section that the objects of God's

¹²² See *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.7, 366.14–16: *fa-ma'nā wāḥid minhu huwa idrāk wa-sabīl ilā l-ijād*.

¹²³ Avicenna, *Notes*, 53, section 35.

¹²⁴ This holds, even if the term *ma'nā* is not used in a technical sense in this passage; here it could just mean something like "the meaning" of intellection and creation is one in God. Nevertheless, I

knowledge are none other than the pure quiddities (*māhiyyāt*) and true natures (*ḥa-qā'iq*), even though Avicenna describes them by resorting to a rich and varied terminology (depending on which aspect of his doctrine he intends to emphasize), which might not make this immediately apparent. At any rate, his statements regarding the divine causation of quiddity are numerous and explicit. In *Metaphysics of The Cure*, he argues that the quiddities (*al-māhiyyāt*) are in themselves possible of existence (*mumkinat al-wujūd*), that existence occurs to them from the outside (*yu'raḍu lahā wujūd min khārij*), and that they have existence emanated upon them by the First Cause (*yufīḍu 'alayhā l-wujūd minhu*).¹²⁵ Avicenna also states elsewhere that “the forms [of things] emanate from God as intelligibles” (*tafīḍu 'anhu ṣuwaruhā ma'qūlah*). This statement is mirrored in *Notes*: “the intelligible forms emanate from Him [God].”¹²⁶ Finally, in his *Commentary on Book Lambda*, he states that God is “the principle of the essence of each substance” (*huwa mabda' dhāt kull jawhar*).¹²⁷ In this fashion, there is an intelligible identity between (a) the things that are entailed or necessitated (*muqtaḍā*) by God and the concomitants (*lawāzim*) that arise from His self-intellection, (b) the intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*, *ma'lūmāt*) that God knows, and (c) the quidditative meanings (*ma'ānī*), which are identical with His essence.

The actual existence of the quiddities as forms in concrete beings is essentially preceded by God's intellection of them. Recall, however, that according to Avicenna's theological model, God does not contemplate things *outside* His essence. The logical implication is that He first contemplates the intelligibles and forms within It, and that they subsequently come to exist in the exterior world. Crucially, however, these intelligibles and forms, insofar as they are identical with the absolute, divine existence of God, are not individualized in God. They become distinguishable and individualized only when they proceed from the divine essence and are actualized in exterior reality. In spite of this, I pinpointed two ‘moments’ in God's intellection: first, there is God's contemplation of Himself *simpliciter*; second, there is God's intellection of all the forms and intelligibles through His own self-intellection, as an extension, so to speak, of his own intellection. As such, these intelligibles are logically and essentially posterior entities vis-à-vis God's contemplation of Himself.¹²⁸ Finally, at this juncture, a third, distinct ‘moment’ or ‘stage’ can be added to the demiurgic act, which focuses on the actualization of these intellectual objects as exterior concrete entities as a result of divine causation. Their creation and actualization occur on

believe it is not a coincidence that Avicenna selects this term to express the identity of divine thought and causation. It also establishes a connection with the quiddities *qua* divine *ma'ānī*, on which the divine intellection and causation focus.

¹²⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Cure*, VIII.4, 346.13–347.12.

¹²⁶ Avicenna, *Notes*, 350.10–351.1. At 14.5, the *lawāzim* are identified with the *ma'lūmāt*.

¹²⁷ Avicenna, *Commentary on Book Lambda*, 55.123.

¹²⁸ These first two ‘moments’ can be said to correspond to the distinction between God taken ‘in Himself’ and God taken ‘in relation to’ the external and caused beings; on this point, see Adamson, *From the Necessary Existent*, especially 174–175.

account of the divine intellective act, but in a mode fully detached from the divine intellection itself, which is purely reflexive. This is when, on Avicenna's account, the pure quidditative meanings and entities (*ma'ānī*) that were perfectly identical with God's essence become differentiated one from the other and hierarchized through causation, "according to the order of cause and being caused" (*'alā l-tartīb al-sababī wa-l-musabbabī*).¹²⁹ This model of divine causation sheds light on those textual passages in which the pure quiddities are said to be created or caused absolutely (*mubda'ah*).¹³⁰ An inclusivist or maximalist treatment of Avicenna's account in *Metaphysics* V.1 therefore suggests that the 'divine existence' of pure quiddity alluded to in this passage means not only that the quiddities exist in God (as was shown in the previous sections), but that they may also exist outside of God as a direct effect of the divine intellection. The previous interpretation accounts for the distinction between the existence of quiddity 'before matter' or 'before multiplicity' and its existence 'in matter' or 'in multiplicity,' as well as to Avicenna's reference in that passage to God's providence (*'ināyah*). Divine intellection and causation are the link between these two orders or 'contexts.' In brief, the epithet 'divine' when applied to the pure quiddities covers a plurality of meanings: (1) they exist in God; (2) they are directly related to the divine intellection and causation, through which they exist in the concrete world; and (3) by virtue of their divine origin, they possess an unconditioned, constant, and simple mode of existence. It is their divine origin, (1) and (2), which explains (3) the special mode in which they exist in the concrete world as a result of the divine causative act.

Locating the pure quiddities in God and tying them to the intellective process that causes the existence of concrete beings has one additional advantage, which should not be underestimated. It provides a convenient exegetical solution to Avicenna's problematic tendency to describe the result of God's causation sometimes in terms of a plurality—God causes all things—and other times in terms of a singularity—God causes only a single effect, the 'First Effect' (*al-ma'lūl al-awwal*). In holding these views, it appears at first sight that Avicenna is seeking to maintain two ultimately incompatible theses: that—as the only being that is necessary of existence—God is the only true cause of all contingent beings, and yet that He directly causes only one intellectual being to exist, since an absolutely simple and unitary being can only produce a single effect. However, if one surmises that the pure quiddities are in God and, as a consequence, also in the First Effect, then these various assertions can

¹²⁹ Avicenna, *Metaphysics*, VIII.7, 365.7.

¹³⁰ In Avicenna, *Notes*, 139, section 185, the pure nature humanness is said to be "neither generated, nor corruptible, but rather created absolutely" (*ṭabī'at al-insān bi-mā hiya tilka l-ṭabī'ah ghayr kā'inah wa-lā fāsīdah bal mubda'ah*). Likewise, the quiddity of prime matter is "created absolutely" (171, section 251). Those references to absolute creation necessarily imply the agency of an intellectual principle, at the very least the Agent Intellect. But since the existence of the intelligibles in the Agent Intellect is to be traced back in turn to its cause, the ultimate origin for the creation of these pure quiddities must be the First Itself.

be reconciled with one another. The master's dual claims according to which God knows and causes all things, and yet that these various things are contained, at this initial level of causation, within the First Effect—where they amount to the pure quiddities as intellected by this being—strike one as philosophically coherent and as reflecting the various faces of a single prism. Technically speaking, God causes only one *lāzim*, identified with the First Effect. But since this *lāzim* is itself the cause of the various *lawāzim* that come after it, due to the fact that it comprises all the forms or essences, God by extension can be said to be the originative cause of all the *lawāzim*. This presumably is why Avicenna alternates between these two descriptions. The quiddities or intelligibles would represent a multiplicity-in-unity in the First Effect along the lines of the forms contained in Plotinus's Intellectual-Principle. Consequently, and in light of this purely intelligible multiplicity inherent in the First Effect, it would be correct to say that God causes one single thing *and*, through that thing, and thanks to all the *ma'ānī* contained in the First Effect, that He is the cause of all the other quiddities and existents of the world. This seems to be precisely how Avicenna conceives of the notion of divine providence.¹³¹

At this juncture, let us return to Avicenna's rather vivid assertion at *Metaphysics* V.1 that the pure quiddities possess a divine existence and that they are caused by God's providence (*'ināyah*).¹³² Given what was said above, pure quiddity can be called "divine," not only because it exists *in* the divine essence, but also because (*li-anna*) it is linked to God's providence and causation of the world. These claims, however, are interconnected. It is because they originally exist in God that the quiddities present in the world can be traced back to the First. In this regard, Avicenna contrasts the causation of pure quiddity or nature (*ṭabī'ah*)—which occurs exclusively through God's benevolent intellection—to the causation of quiddity taken together with its extraneous concomitants and embedded in particular concrete things, which is the result also of natural phenomena and processes. The latter is the outcome of divine causality acting through the "particularizing nature" (*al-ṭabī'ah al-juz'īyyah*). Again in this case, Avicenna seeks to distinguish pure quiddity (nature, *ṭabī'ah*) from quiddity taken with its concomitants and material accidents (particularizing nature), linking the former with God, His causality and providence, and the latter with the processes of realization and concretization. A passage of *Notes* underlines these points:

Providence [*al-'ināyah*] is that the Necessary Existent intellects [for example] the arrangement of the organs of a human being, or the movement of the heaven, in a way that [these things] be-

131 Avicenna's theory of providence (*'ināyah*) seems premised on the ideas that God knows the forms, intelligibles, etc. of all things in a perfectly unitary way and that He causes these intelligible forms to exist in the intellectual principles from the First Effect onward.

132 For a brief discussion of this term in connection with quiddity, see Benevich, *Die 'göttliche Existenz'*; and Faruque, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, 283–285.

come optimal [*fāḍilayn*] and that a sound order [*nizām al-khayr*] come to exist in them, without desire, pursuit, and intent following from this knowledge.¹³³

We may infer from this definition of providence that God not only intellects the pure quiddities (such as ‘human’ and ‘heaven’), but also their concomitants (such as the circular motion of the heaven) in order to create an optimal universal order. Hence, in spite of its obvious religious connotation, the term ‘*ināyah*’ is to be connected here with the theory of divine intellection and causation that was outlined above. Later on in the same section of *Notes*, Avicenna explains that the divine providence is identical with the divine knowledge (‘*ilm*’).¹³⁴ The notion of providence is merely another way of conveying the doctrine of the actualization of the pure quiddities in the exterior world after their intelligible existence in the First—their originative source is God’s reflexive intellection. However, since the pure quiddities dwell at every intellectual stage of the divine emanation, from the First to the Agent Intellect, and then from the latter to the realm of the sublunary beings, the term ‘*ināyah*’ encompasses this hierarchy and the various ontic levels of Avicenna’s cosmology. It brings home the point that pure quiddity, *qua* reality, truth, and foundational meaning, finds its origin in God as the ultimate purveyor of truth (see Text 49 below).

If the pure quiddities are identified with the *ma‘ānī* that Avicenna mentions in his discussions of divine knowledge—and I believe they ought to be—then they would also play a decisive role in this thinker’s account of divine causation or creation. For this would mean that God, in a sense, contemplates within His very essence the various meanings and forms that will subsequently acquire actual existence in the concrete world. This reflexive intellectual act would mirror in a perfectly unitary way the actual order of the universe and the hierarchy of causes and effects issuing from God. Yet, the idea that God could create or cause these quiddities to exist in the exterior world as a result of His intellection is baffling and raises complications that must be addressed. When existing in God in an absolute state, the pure quiddities are not to be dissociated ontologically from the divine essence. It is only subsequently that they are caused to exist in an individuated manner in the exterior world as a result of God’s demiurgic intellection. We are therefore dealing here with two entirely different modes of existence, and not with a single mode that could be duplicated and, hence, produce redundancy. When they are in the divine essence prior to their actualization in reality, the quiddities possess an ontological mode that transcends the one associated with the conditioned and caused beings and their concrete

133 Avicenna, *Notes*, 18.1–4, section 3. Cf. Avicenna, *Notes*, 109–110, section 141, where the existence of genera and species, and by implication of the individuals, as well as the differences between these things (*al-ikhtilāfāt*) are explained in terms of “the order of the whole” (*nizām al-kull*) and “entailed by the order of the good in the whole, which points to [lit., which leads to] an intelligible order” (*muq-taḍīhā nizām al-khayr fī l-kull wa-huwa yu’addī ilā nizām ‘aqlī*). One finds here the same notion of divine providence as the cause for the existence of the eternal genera and species.

134 Avicenna, *Notes*, 19.8–9, section 3.

accidents and concomitants. Their state is also, accordingly, to be demarcated from ‘actual’ or ‘realized’ existence, as these terms are usually construed in the frame of Avicenna’s metaphysics of causation to refer to the contingent created beings. These pure quiddities do not exist in God *qua* actual, contingent, and complex beings, but only according to a special ontological state that Avicenna describes as ‘simple,’ ‘absolute,’ and ‘divine’ and that precludes all the attributes and concomitants associated with actual, contingent existence, including oneness and multiplicity. It is in this regard perhaps that one can speak most pertinently of the *esse essentiae* of the pure quiddities, insofar as they are identified with the divine being. But this does not signify that the quiddities receive actual existence twice. Rather, it means that they exist in two different modes, one being the divine mode, the other the actual or realized mode pertaining to contingent entities; hence Avicenna’s distinction between ‘nature’ (*ṭabī‘ah*) and ‘particularizing nature’ (*al-ṭabī‘ah al-juz‘iyyah*). Regarding this point, I believe that some of the medieval Latin interpreters of Avicenna were right to distinguish between these various ontological modes and to insist on the fact that the quiddities in God have a special status distinct from the one of contingent beings.¹³⁵

Two technical terms that appear in Avicenna’s argumentation of divine causation are liable to cast additional light on this issue: *ma‘ānī* and *lawāzīm*. The master frequently uses the term *ma‘ānī* to refer not only to the objects of divine thought, but also and by extension to the kinds of things that are caused by the divine intellection. Recall that this is one of the words Avicenna relies on to describe the pure quiddities—in this case, the term may be translated as ‘quidditative meanings.’ Avicenna is adamant that these meanings do not constitute a multiplicity in God and that God knows them by knowing Himself. God knows all these meanings by knowing His own meaning (*ma‘nā*), which encompasses all the others and provides them with their reality and truth. However, these quidditative meanings do not, by virtue of being objects of God’s intellection, serve as a kind of template through which the divine causation would occur, in a manner comparable to some of the cosmological theories found in Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, where the Forms serve as archetypes for divine creation. According to an interpretation of Plato’s Demiurge that became widespread in Platonic circles, creation occurs when the Demiurge contemplates the Forms and then models the physical universe according to this ideal blueprint. Avicenna defends a different thesis insofar as God does not think the quiddities as distinct entities or as something other than Himself, which He would follow as a model for creation. Rather, He knows them by thinking Himself, and causation results from this reflexive act of intellection. With that being said, if these quidditative meanings exist in God and can be identified with His quiddity and intellection, and if

135 See especially the works of Henry of Ghent. On my account of Avicenna’s metaphysics, there are intriguing metaphysical parallels between these two thinkers’ doctrines of quiddity and their theology, some of which have already been aptly discussed by Porro, Universaux; Counet, Avicenne; and Aertsen, Avicenna’s Doctrine.

His intellection is what causes them to exist in the exterior world *qua* actual, contingent beings, then the pure quiddities would be in a relation to the exterior concrete existents as a cause is to its effect, insofar as they would essentially and ontologically precede them. In brief, then, even though the pure quiddities do not precede the divine intellection, since they are for all intents and purposes identical with it, they essentially and logically precede the causation of contingent existents. It is significant in this respect that Avicenna applies the same term *ma'ānī* to the quiddities embedded in concrete individuals, to the reality and foundational nature of each concrete existent, as well as to the objects of divine intellection. This aptly indicates that the term *ma'ānī* establishes a link between the quiddities in God and those in the concrete world. It points to the semantic and ontological continuity between these two realms, recalling in the process some *kalām* uses of this term. It is perhaps also primarily in this respect that a parallel can be observed between Avicenna's doctrine and the Platonic doctrine of the forms. In the latter case as well, there is a correspondence, through the theory of participation, between the forms used by the Demiurge to create the world and the forms inhering in concrete beings.

In a second stage, these quidditative meanings emerge out of the divine being *qua* 'concomitants' (*lawāzīm*) as a result of the causative act triggered by God's self-intellection.¹³⁶ Generally speaking, the term *lawāzīm* conveys a notion of logical and conceptual entailment, as in the contexts of Avicenna's logic and psychology and more specifically of his discussion of quiddity and its mental attributes (see chapter II). Avicenna frequently uses this term in an epistemological context to refer to the concomitant meanings or predicates of quiddity (e.g., universality and oneness are *lawāzīm* of horseness). In this case, however, and unlike the term *ma'ānī*, the term *lawāzīm* emphasizes (in addition to logical entailment) the causative, derivative, and entitative aspects of quiddity, as well as the status of the essences as effects or concomitants of the divine essence Itself. In a metaphysical context, the *lawāzīm* are the by-products and effects of the divine intellective process (e.g., the First Effect is a *lāzīm*, and, in turn, the effects of the First Effect and of the other separate intellects can also be called *lawāzīm*). In both cases, epistemological and metaphysical, the term *lawāzīm* emphasizes externality or extrinsicality relative to the source or cause that produces them. This term's dual epistemic and ontological connotations explain why Avicenna repeatedly states in his works that God apprehends the *lawāzīm* emerging out of His essence: it refers epistemically to the objects

136 For a discussion of the term *lāzīm/lawāzīm* in the context of Avicenna's theology, see De Smet and Sebtī, Avicenna's Philosophical Approach. In their article, the authors insist on distinguishing between the divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) *qua* *lawāzīm* and the effects caused to exist by God *qua* *lawāzīm*, even though they are fully aware that such a distinction poses problem. For a discussion of this issue, see section IV.2.5 above. For my purposes, and because I am not convinced of the validity of this dual reading of the term, I treat the *lawāzīm* as referring exclusively to the effects proceeding from God, as well as to the knowledge God has of these effects. Accordingly, the *lawāzīm* overlap with the *ma'lūlāt*, but they also coincide with God's *ma'qūlāt*.

of the divine contemplation and ontologically to their status as derivative effects. Given that thought and existence are intertwined in the intelligible world, the term *lawāzim* covers these two aspects. In fact, Avicenna stresses the point that the existence of the *lawāzim* is identical to their being intellectuated by God, or that their existence is their intelligibility in God (*wujūd lawāzimahu ayḍan huwa ma'qūliyyatuhā; 'illat wujūd lawāzimahu 'aqliyyatuhu lahā; tilka l-lawāzim ma'lūmiyyatuhā hiya nafs wujūdihā*, etc.).¹³⁷ However, whereas the pure essences *qua ma'ānī* are fully identical with God, the *lawāzim* refer technically to things outside of God, or at least to things that are not strictly identical with His essence, inasmuch as they are caused by It. In that sense, the term *lawāzim* is connected with notions of multiplicity (*kathrah*) and causality (*'illiyyah*), which need not affect the *ma'ānī* regarded purely as objects of God's thought. It is this terminological nuance and emphasis on causality that justify the claim that, while God knows the *lawāzim*, these do not exist in Him, but proceed from Him.¹³⁸ Yet, the key idea remains that God considers these external concomitants not as things outside of His own essence, but rather as indistinguishable from His essence *qua ma'ānī*. This fully unitary act of self-intellection in turn results in the causation of concomitants that are different from and external to the divine essence. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the terms *ma'ānī* and *lawāzim* bridge the internal, reflexive, and intellective aspect and the external, causative, and relational aspect that together characterize Avicenna's account of God's causation of other beings. These theories represent yet another instance of the implementation of the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model, adapted this time to Avicenna's theology.

3.2 The Neoplatonic tripartite division and other Avicennian distinctions

It is with these various considerations in mind that Avicenna outlines the threefold distinction *before*, *in*, and *after* multiplicity in *Introduction I.12* (Text 21). Indeed, having introduced these notions at the beginning of this chapter, he proceeds later on in the same work to apply the first one, 'before multiplicity' (*qabl al-kathrah*), to the topic of divine intellection and demiurgy (Text 44 and especially Text 45). More generally, however, if there is a way in which this scheme may be said to square with Avicenna's metaphysics, it is with regard to the issue of quiddity in itself and divine knowledge. If God and the separate intellects think the pure quiddities by thinking their own essence, this knowledge would be *before multiplicity* (as well as *before matter*). This, at the very least, is the case of the First, who is beyond any kind of multiplicity, but it can also be extended presumably to all the separate intellects, if one intends the kind of multiplicity associated with the sublunary beings. Thus, the di-

¹³⁷ Avicenna, *Notes*, 576.12–577.1, section 1000; 577, section 1001; 578, section 1003; cf. 573, section 998.

¹³⁸ Avicenna, *Notes*, 543, section 957.

vine knowledge and existence of the quiddities would be prior vis-à-vis the complex and contingent existents of the sublunary world. This classification establishes the causal and ontological priority of quiddity in itself as an intelligible object in the divine beings over the quiddity that is embodied in particular existents (*in* multiplicity or matter) or produced as a universal in the mind (*after* multiplicity or matter).

Although one could argue that the threefold distinction that appears in *Introduction* I.12 should be construed primarily along epistemic and cognitive lines, there can be little doubt that on Avicenna's mind it possesses an ontological thrust as well. This is equally true of quiddity *before* multiplicity, since this aspect of quiddity can refer only to its state in God's mind or in all the separate intellects, where thought is existence, and where each intelligible object must possess being in some sense. In Avicenna's model, this simple mode of intelligible being is not affected by material multiplicity, and, at the very least in the case of God, it is also devoid of immaterial multiplicity.¹³⁹ The mode of existence before matter and multiplicity, which is divine and intellectual, is obviously devoid of concomitants and accidents, whether of a mental or concrete kind. This pristine mode of existence corresponds precisely to the status of pure quiddity as an intelligible object in God's essence. In contrast, quiddity in matter/multiplicity and after matter/multiplicity corresponds to quiddity combined with concrete and mental concomitants respectively. This makes the state of quiddity before multiplicity, in its ontological priority, a kind of blueprint or paradigm for those states 'in' and 'after multiplicity.'¹⁴⁰ The notions of priority and posteriority I have been employing throughout my analysis are, of course, to be taken in a nontemporal sense. They point to an ontological and essential priority of the quidditative meanings in God and the separate intellects over mental and concrete existents, and this in a realm where the notions of time, discursiveness, and sequentiality do not apply. In the case, say, of horseness, the divine, concrete, and universal instances of quiddity can be temporally synchronous, in that they can be said to exist at the same time, given that Avicenna believes in an eternal universe and eternal time, as well as in the eternity of species.¹⁴¹ But the priority of pure essence over materiality and multiplicity, which corresponds to the divine state of quiddity in God, will always remain essentially and causally prior,

139 Avicenna does not always clearly distinguish between the intellection of God and that of the other separate intellects. In this particular case, the question of whether the contemplation of the quiddities would amount to a certain kind of intelligible multiplicity in the separate intellects other than God (as opposed, say, to the multiplicity arising from the subject-object distinction) must be left unaddressed. I intend to examine these issues in depth in another study. In any case, my point here concerns primarily God's knowledge.

140 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 40 and 46, describes the forms in matter as "imitations of the true intelligible forms" (*muḥākīyyāt li-l-ṣuwar al-'aqliyyah al-ḥaqqaḥ*), which adequately stresses the hierarchical relation between these two planes.

141 Recall in this connection that Avicenna adheres to the doctrine of an eternal universe, so that there is no *temporal* precedence or priority of the intelligible over the material, but only an essential, causative, and ontological priority.

since the other two aspects depend on it, and since they are complex vis-à-vis the intelligible simplicity of pure quiddity. This forcefully brings home the point that quiddity, in its being a pure quidditative meaning in the divine intellect, is prior and fully unconnected to the complex physical and intellectual existents. It enjoys an absolute status of its own in the divine being that precedes its instantiation in both concrete and mental things. In other words, the *māhiyyah* in God is prior to the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* complex that unfolds in the external world as a result of the divine causation.

Retrospectively, it seems that Avicenna adapted crucial aspects of his metaphysics and theology to fit the threefold scheme he inherited from the Neoplatonists. His ascription of forms and quiddities to God and the separate intellects, including the Agent Intellect, accords with the aspect of the universal 'before multiplicity' he outlines in *Introduction*, which can be traced directly to various Greek Neoplatonic and Christian Syriac texts. As already mentioned, Ibn 'Adī, in a quite Platonic vein, also situates the forms in God's mind.¹⁴² What is more, Ibn al-Ṭayyib, who was roughly contemporary with the *shaykh al-ra'īs*, conveys a similar picture in his *Introduction*, which he attributes to Plato:

As for Plato, he held that genera and species have three modes of existence [*wujūdāt thalāthah*], [the first one being] existence before multiplicity. He held that there were existing forms in God before He created that which He created, that is, that the forms 'human being,' 'donkey,' and 'gold' [for example] were in God and that Nature used these paradigms to produce [*taf'alu*] what it produced.¹⁴³

Ibn al-Ṭayyib goes on to gloss Plato's concept of form as the power of God (*qudrat Allah*), thereby providing an interpretation that fits with his own theological interests. But what is important for our purposes is, first, the fact that this thinker, who was Avicenna's contemporary, was also cognizant of the triplex distinction Avicenna reports in *Introduction*, and, second and more importantly, his report to the effect that Plato located the forms or universals expressly in God's mind. Although Ibn al-Ṭayyib's comments pertain chiefly to some of the Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists who held such a position, rather than to Plato himself, they reflect a common understanding in Islam according to which the ancient philosophers had described one aspect of the universals as paradigms in the divine intellect(s). Avicenna was thus consciously building on a common Greco-Syriac perception regarding the ontological modes of the universals, and he adapted this theory to his metaphysics of pure quiddity. Even with regard to early Arabic philosophy, Avicenna was not an innovator in locating one aspect of essence or the universal in the divine minds. Pre-

¹⁴² Rashed, Ibn 'Adī; Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 150–159.

¹⁴³ Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Introduction*, 54.1–4; Adamson, *Knowledge of Universals*, 159–163. Ibn al-Ṭayyib's remarks rely historically on some Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic interpretations of the forms as inhering in the Demiurge. As is well known, this interpretation, mediated through the works of Augustine, exercised a deep and lasting influence on the Latin west.

vious reconstructions of Fārābī's theory of the universals show that this thinker also located them in the divine intellects, at the very least in the Agent Intellect, but also perhaps in God's mind.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, and in spite of this shared heritage, Avicenna's contribution proved innovative on some crucial counts. If my interpretation is correct, he was apparently the first thinker to argue for a single mode of existence on behalf of pure quiddity regardless of the various contexts in which it is to be found, thereby making it an ontological constant in his system, and introducing other ontological distinctions only with regard to the relations and conditions that attach to quiddity and its external concomitants. Even Fārābī and Ibn 'Adī, to whose ontological schemes Avicenna's doctrines are closely related, did not articulate an ontology of pure quiddity in the manner achieved by Avicenna. Their ontology focuses primarily on kinds of existence (*ajnās al-wujūd*) and especially kinds of existents (*ajnās al-mawjūdāt*),¹⁴⁵ whereas Avicenna delves into the various *modes* and *senses* of existence through the lens of his theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). In addition, he tackles the specific question of how they relate to the various aspects, considerations, and conditions of essence. His approach strikes one as much more conceptual and theoretical than that of his predecessors, a development that was made possible by his thorough distinction between essence and existence, his modulated approach to the notion of existence and other key philosophical notions, as well as his recognition of the distinct and transcendental concept of pure quiddity.

This threefold Neoplatonic scheme of universals is only one of many conceptual matrices Avicenna taps into in order to articulate his account of quiddity. Of equal importance to the Persian master are the conceptual schemes conveying (a) the various considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity, (b) the distinction between 'the natural,' 'the logical,' and 'the intellectual,' (c) the conditions (*shurūṭ*) as these apply to quiddity, and (d) the crucial distinction between essential distinctness and irreducibility (conveyed by the expressions *min ḥaythu hiya hiya, fī nafsihā*, etc.). The first appears in *Introduction* I.2 and outlines the three considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity ('in itself,' 'in the mind,' and 'in concrete beings'); the second is described in *Introduction* I.12 and appears alongside the threefold distinction 'before,' 'in,' and 'after multiplicity.' As for sets (c) and (d), they underpin Avicenna's account of essence in both his metaphysical and logical works. While some of these distinctions were bequeathed to Avicenna from late antiquity—this is the case notably of (b) and of the distinction 'before,' 'in,' and 'after multiplicity'—others seem to have been devised by the master himself. These various matrices of distinctions should be regarded as key Avicennian elaborations, and they play out in a unique manner in his metaphysics, culminating in an innovative theory of quiddity in itself and its special mode of existence.¹⁴⁶ Later

¹⁴⁴ Madkour, *L'organon*, 146–148; Vallat, *Du possible au nécessaire*, 91, 98–99 and note 30, 116–121.

¹⁴⁵ This expression appears, for example, in Fārābī's *Selected Aphorisms*, 78.12ff.

¹⁴⁶ For a tentative schematic representation of how these matrices of distinctions relate to one another, see Appendix III.

thinkers and luminaries, such as the Scholastics of medieval Europe and Avicenna's Arabic commentators, intuited his daring initiative in this regard and had no qualms adopting these various distinctions. At this juncture, it seems worthwhile to try to better understand how these matrices of distinctions interrelate in the master's philosophy. To what extent are they interconnected, and what kind of overlap can be detected?¹⁴⁷

It appears that there is only a relative or partial correspondence between these various matrices of distinctions. However, the parallels are convincing enough to merit discussion, and in at least two cases, there is a neat overlap of various notions. As was pointed out in chapter III, quiddity *in concrete beings* intersects with existence *in multiplicity*, and both notions in turn have a direct relation to the notion of *nature* and *the natural*, which Avicenna employs to designate quiddity in the concrete beings. Likewise, what is *in conception* or *in the mind* corresponds to both *the logical* and *the intellectual*. These in turn interconnect with existence *after multiplicity*, at any rate when it comes to the universals and human intellection.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, it was shown that quiddity 'in itself' can also be said to apply to these two contexts, albeit in different ways. If pure quiddity is regarded as a principle or part of these various existents, then it can be said to exist in them according to one sense of 'in itself,' i.e., irreducibly, but not separately. Alternatively, if it is conceived of as a distinct form in the mind, then it exists in the mind according to another sense of 'in itself,' which implies not only irreducibility, but also distinctness. According to this last aspect, however, quiddity 'in itself' is not necessarily after multiplicity, because it can also coincide with the intelligibles of God and of the supernal

147 Some scholars have attempted to answer this question, but they limited their analysis to the two sets of distinctions described in *Introduction* I.12, thereby providing only a partial account. According to Madkour, *L'organon*, 151–152, 'the natural' corresponds to what exists 'before multiplicity,' 'the intellectual' to what is 'in multiplicity,' and 'the logical' to what is 'after multiplicity' (cf. Madkour in Avicenna, *Introduction*, Preface, 64). This, however, cannot be correct, nor is Madkour's rather crude ascription to Avicenna of a Platonic doctrine of forms (presumably on the basis of the theory of the Agent Intellect). Ahwānī (*apud* Marmura) identifies 'the intellectual' with what is prior, 'the natural' with what is in the multiple, and 'the logical' with what exists in the mind. Marmura, Avicenna's Chapter on Universals, 39–41, recognizes the complexity of this question, but he opines that "the two tripartite modes, though related, represent two different classifications." As for Rashed, Ibn 'Adī, he claims that Avicenna adopted and transformed Ibn 'Adī's threefold scheme of existents and cites this passage in support for this ontological division. But it is important to note that the threefold distinction that Avicenna makes here does not overlap strictly with kinds or groups of existents (*mawjūdāt*), as it does in Ibn 'Adī's treatise. Rather, Avicenna uses these terms flexibly to describe different aspects of quiddity and different contexts in which it can be said to exist.

148 Madkour's suggestion that 'the intellectual' for Avicenna exists in concrete beings is somewhat outlandish, except if we take it to mean 'potentially intellectual.' In fact, I myself argued in chapter III that pure quiddity *qua ma'nā* exists in concrete beings in an intelligible mode. Even then, I do not follow Madkour's lead here, since this would result in a disruption in the order of distinctions established by Avicenna, which seems to correlate quite clearly the universal 'in matter' with 'the natural' or *ṭabī'ī*.

intellects, which are prior to multiplicity (in the case of the latter, their multiplicity does not derive from the plurality of the quiddities, but rather from their dual intellection of God and of their own essence). As far as the human mind is concerned, what would distinguish pure quiddity from the universal would be its purely simple, concomitant- and accident-free, and transcendent mode of intelligible existence.

But what about the divine world? Insofar as the divine context of quiddity is also intellectual and noetic, there is a connection with the intellectual or *'aqlī*. Even though Avicenna applies the notion *'aqlī* chiefly to the aspect of quiddity in human intellection in the course of his analysis in *Introduction*, and especially in chapter I.12 (where he introduces these various notions), it would seem to be the category that is best suited to describe the state of pure quiddity in the divine intellects. In fact, Avicenna does discuss the divine beings' intellectual knowledge of quiddity in another section of this logical work (see Text 45). Now, as I showed in chapter II, there are various considerations (*i'tibārāt*) of quiddity that can be called 'mental' or 'intellectual' in a certain loose or general way (*'aqlī*) on account of the fact that they are all subject to human logical thought and ratiocination, but only one aspect of quiddity (viz., the complex universal concept) corresponds unambiguously in Avicenna's works to an intellectual existent proper (*'aqlī²*). As for quiddity in itself, it can certainly be said to be *'aqlī¹*, in the sense that it is considered as a logical aspect in the human mind. Additionally, in light of the analysis deployed in this book, it can quite convincingly be endowed with an ontological and entitative status of its own, since it possesses intelligible being in the mind. In order to differentiate it from the complex universal (*'aqlī²*), it shall be designated as *'aqlī³*. What is more, we can further distinguish between *'aqlī³*, which refers to the pure quiddities in the human mind, and *'aqlī⁴*, which refers to their mode of existence in the separate intellects and in God's intellect. In sum, the aspect of quiddity 'in itself' outlined in *Introduction* I.2 would amount not only to a mere logical notion (*'aqlī¹*), but also to the mode of existence of pure quiddity as a simple, irreducible, and distinct object of thought in the human and divine intellects (*'aqlī³* and *'aqlī⁴*), where, at least according to the last sense, it is fundamentally prior to multiplicity (*qabl al-kathrah*).

3.3 Pure quiddity, possibility, and divine causation

There remain the complex issues of how possibility/contingency (*imkān*) relates to pure quiddity and whether the quiddities exist as 'possible' objects in God's mind before their actualization in the concrete world.¹⁴⁹ Some scholars have argued that locating the quiddities in the divine mind would result in the existence of possibility

¹⁴⁹ This section is an elaboration on section IV.2.4 in light of Avicenna's theories of divine knowledge and causation. Although *imkān* can be translated as meaning both possibility and contingency, I opt for the former translation in this section and address the issue of whether God can be said to intellect 'possible things' or *mumkināt*.

in the divine essence or would allow one to posit other entities alongside God that are possible of existence. This smacks of the Mu‘tazilite theory of the nonexistent things (*ashyā’ ma‘dūmah*). This point seems all the more problematic, given that Avicenna often correlates essence and possibility—as exemplified in his famous formula that a thing is ‘possible of existence in itself [or in its essence]’ (*mumkin al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*). The assumption would be that, prior to their creation, the quiddities dwell as possible things in God’s essence or exist *qua* unrealized possibles in Him. As Olga Lizzini remarked, this would also make divine creation a creation *ex possibili*:

And although the meaning of “possible” seems at times to coincide with the meaning of the existent *in intellectu*—as some passages appear to suggest—this does not solve the problem: if the possible is what exists in the divine intellect—or what exists in the intellectual dimension of the celestial world, intelligence after intelligence, as Avicenna describes the emanation in *Ilah*. IX, 4 —“creation” becomes nothing but a transition from the possible (or intellectual existence) to the real (i. e. concrete existence), a transition that does not suffice to explain the origin of the possible itself in so far as, properly speaking, creation is no longer a *creatio ex nihilo* but a *creatio ex possibili*.¹⁵⁰

So, if the pure quiddities constitute objects for the divine intellection, and if these quiddities in addition are intrinsically possible of existence (sing., *mumkin al-wujūd*)—or are, at the very least, associated with the modality of possibility (*imkān*)—and, finally, if God causes them to exist actually in the concrete world as a result of His intellecting them, then the conclusion seems to be that these quiddities introduce possibility in the divine being Itself. This point emerges starkly the moment one posits the existence of the pure quiddities in God.

In spite of the difficulty of this theological problem, one may gesture toward its resolution by examining how Avicenna conceives of the relationship between quiddity and possibility. Recall that for Avicenna pure quiddity is itself and only itself and can be considered in abstraction from all its external concomitants and other intentions added to it. Now, it is these external and added concomitants, attributes, and intentions that generate multiplicity, especially in the cases of the intellect and of immaterial beings, where the multiplication of intelligible concomitants is the only kind of multiplicity that can be posited, given that these beings are free of matter. In fact, intelligible multiplicity, Avicenna explicates, arises out of the plurality of the concomitants of essence. In his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, he states:

It is not the case as some assert that there is no multiplicity there [in the intelligible world], nor [is it the case] that multiplicity there consists of parts of the essence. It rather consists of concomitants of the essence, whereby some things are concomitants of other things in the intelligible world, as was shown in detail in *The Eastern Philosophy* in particular.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Lizzini, *A Mysterious Order*, 125. Thus, according to Bäck, Avicenna, 236, Avicenna believes that all the possibles are in God’s mind. But this position is not tenable, strictly speaking, since it introduces possibility in the divine mind.

¹⁵¹ Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 58.7–9.

Avicenna writes something quite similar in a passage of *Notes*, when discussing the multiplicity that can be found within the First Effect:

There is no multiplicity in the [first caused] intellect, except in its [already] mentioned trinality [*al-tathlith*], that is, that its possibility comes from its essence, its necessity comes from the First, and that it thinks the First. These [aspects] are the cause of multiplicity, and the cause of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in them [the separate intellects], *for there is no multiplicity in this realm apart from these [already] mentioned concomitants [al-lawāzīm al-madhkūrah]*.¹⁵²

Two important points may be emphasized here. First, for Avicenna, it is the concomitants (*lawāzīm*) of quiddity or essence that cause multiplicity in the immaterial beings, not quiddity itself. Given that these beings have a simple nature or quiddity that is pure intellect (*ʿaql*), no multiplicity is attached to it. Rather, multiplicity derives from the external concomitants of their quiddity. Second, as we saw already in section IV.2.4, possibility appears to be one of the external concomitants of essence, and so it is in this capacity that it contributes to the production of intelligible multiplicity. As a concomitant, it prevents perfect oneness or unity from existing in those beings. Regarding the latter point, Avicenna adds in his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle* that possibility is “a concomitant state of this quiddity [*ḥāl lāzīmah li-tilka l-māhiyyah*],” and in *Discussions* he states in a similar vein that “possibility is among the necessary concomitants of quiddity that are necessitated by quiddity.”¹⁵³ Possibility, however, is not just any concomitant. Rather, on Avicenna’s mind, it may justifiably be called ‘the first concomitant’ of quiddity, and this is in fact how he refers to it in some of his writings.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, possibility is a requisite for the other

¹⁵² Avicenna, *Notes*, 112.18–21.

¹⁵³ Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 61.19; idem, *Discussions*, 309, section 867.

¹⁵⁴ See, for instance, Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 60.18–61.24. The priority of possibility, of course, goes hand in hand with Avicenna’s frequent association of possibility and essence, to the extent that both notions are sometimes treated interchangeably and appear inextricably linked in his metaphysical account (as in *Metaphysics* VIII.4). Strictly speaking, however, they remain distinct notions, and quiddity in itself is unaffected by the modalities. The point here is, first, that possibility is a concomitant of essence that does not enter into its constitutive core and definition, and second, that possibility is a special concomitant of quiddity that holds a unique status, inasmuch as it essentially and logically precedes the other concomitants, including necessity and existence. This is because, for a thing to be necessary of existence through another or even simply existent (*mawjūd*) in any real sense, it must be (in a way that is at least logically and essentially prior) possible of existence. In that sense, it is true to say that possibility is a mode that directly qualifies quiddity, albeit in relation to realized existence. If a thing is not possible of existence, it will forever remain impossible and a nonexistent. Hence, the possible needs an exterior cause to exist or else it remains a pure possibility. In brief, possibility is only meaningful as an ontological modality as expressing a state of relation to actual, realized, and concrete existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal* or *ḥāṣil*). This, in turn, means that this modality is extrinsic to pure quiddity, which is envisaged in abstraction from all considerations of realized existence. Consequently, as I explain below, these points do not apply to the pure quiddities in God.

concomitants to arise—indeed, a quiddity needs to be ‘possible’ for anything else meaningful to be said of it, and for it to actually exist together with other things. As we saw in chapter II, nothing can be said of something that is inherently or logically impossible, that is, absolutely impossible in every regard. Such a ‘thing’—if it can be called that at all—is not even conceivable. These remarks seem particularly pregnant in view of the fact that pure quiddity, for Avicenna, is an intelligible principle that also exists in the beings of the concrete world, so that this essential possibility will apply to these beings as well.¹⁵⁵ Accordingly, the concomitants of quiddity, such as oneness and plurality, particularity and universality, etc., are responsible for causing multiplicity in material and immaterial beings, the latter of which are otherwise devoid of composition. The difficulty, at this point in the analysis, is to understand at which ‘moment’ possibility as a concomitant of essence enters this metaphysical picture. Furthermore, is possibility merely a mental concomitant, a logical or conceptual notion added to quiddity in the human mind? Or is it, rather, a metaphysical or ontological concomitant in the strong sense, in which case it would exist both in the mind and in the concrete world?

One important observation is that Avicenna usually discusses the status of possibility as a concomitant of quiddity in the context of cosmological and metaphysical causation. In this context, it refers to a being whose actual and concrete existence is, in itself, merely possible, but necessarily caused by an external agent. In other words, the possibility associated with quiddity and regarded as one of its concomitants is defined in terms of the causation of realized existence in the concrete world. In contrast, possibility plays no role in Avicenna’s treatment of the ontology of pure quiddity or when he discusses pure quiddity as a concept in the human mind. Thus, possibility remains, strictly speaking, distinct from quiddity in itself, when envisaged both as a notion in the mind as well as a metaphysical concomitant in reality (as it seems to be described in the passages cited above). From a conceptual perspective, it remains something extrinsic to the constituents of pure quiddity and is a meaning added to it in the mind, especially when it is correlated with the notions of efficient causation, realized existence, and necessity, which are also external to quiddity.¹⁵⁶ In fact, Avicenna himself appears to have been perfectly aware of the link between possibility *qua* concomitant of quiddity and realized existence, or, to put it another way, between possibility and divine creation, since he explicitly refers to this issue in his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*. He writes:

155 Admittedly, there is an important difference in that the concrete beings also have a possibility *qua* potentiality that derives from their matter, and which can, in a qualified sense, be said to precede their actualization. But what is at stake here is the metaphysical possibility associated with essence, which applies to both material and immaterial beings indiscriminately.

156 Thus, Avicenna’s claim that quiddity in itself excludes all other things should be extended to its exclusion of possibility as well. After all, possibility does not enter the definition of ‘horse’ or ‘triangle,’ and the pure quiddities of these things also exclude any consideration of actual existence and, hence, the modalities of ‘possible’ and ‘necessary of existence.’

As for the questions [A] of how possibility can be one of the concomitants of the quiddities, and [B] whether it is subsumed under creation [*ibdā'*] in spite of this or not, and [C] how it should be defined if it is subsumed under creation or if it is not connected with creation, but is a thing coming after the First—these have been clarified in the *The Eastern Philosophy*.¹⁵⁷

In this passage, Avicenna raises the very issues that are at the heart of the present inquiry, namely, how the concomitant of possibility relates to quiddity and how both in turn are connected with divine causation. The key questions here are [B] and [C], whether possibility should be “subsumed under [God’s absolute] creation” or separated from it, and whether, as a corollary, it be regarded as “a thing coming after the First.” Although Avicenna in this passage does not explicitly take sides and refers to the lost metaphysics section of *The Eastern Philosophy* for a fuller treatment of this topic, it is possible, on the grounds of the preceding analysis, to advance some compelling hypotheses. First, it is quite evident that the master thoroughly separates possibility from God and from divine causation, since multiplicity and complexity would result, if one posited possible things in or alongside the First. Consequently, possibility is definitely to be defined as a thing “coming after the First” and as a concomitant of quiddity that is intelligible only after the divine creative act has occurred. These views cohere with the evidence that has been drawn from the master’s other works to the effect that God does not intellect the intelligibles and quiddities *qua* possibles (*mumkināt*).

In view of this, it is important to stress that quiddity and possibility ultimately remain two different and distinct notions in Avicenna’s philosophy. In spite of the fact that there is a close relationship between them and that modern scholars often conflate the two and speak inaccurately of ‘possible essences,’ possibility does not enter into the *ma’nā* of pure quiddity, nor does it enter into its special existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) and inner reality (*ḥaqīqah*). In turn, this suggests that one can sensibly posit pure quiddities in the divine essence while refraining from ascribing possibility to them.¹⁵⁸ Accordingly, the pure quiddities in the divine essence do not entail *any* concomitants, which would include the concomitant of possibility. If human beings are able to conceive of pure quiddity in abstraction from its concomitants and, thus, of possibility, this would be *a fortiori* true of the divine intellection. This applies particularly to the theological context under discussion, because possibility is meaningful only *in relation to* the notion of realized, conditioned, contingent, and concrete existence, which is external to God and different from the ontological mode of the essences in the First.

¹⁵⁷ Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 61.22–24.

¹⁵⁸ In this regard, Bäck’s claim (Avicenna’s Conception, 236) that the Avicennian view that all the possibles are in the mind of the Necessary Existent threatens the notion of His immutability, seems unwarranted, since, according to Avicenna, we may conceive of quiddity in abstraction from its concomitants, which would include also the concomitant of possibility itself.

The upshot of the foregoing is that possibility is a concomitant of quiddity inasmuch as the latter exists in concrete, contingent beings, that is, in beings that have already been caused to exist in the actual world or will exist in the future, or, alternatively, inasmuch as the human intellect apprehends quiddities as being possible of existence. Either way, it pertains to the actual or potential realization of existence in the concrete world. On the other hand, it is meaningless to discuss possibility in connection with the pure quiddities in God, since in this case they exist in a mode free of all concomitants and accidents. They are not realized existents, but possess an unconditioned ontological mode. This is precisely how God Himself apprehends them: in a perfectly unitary way and identically with His own essence. Possibility enters the picture only when quiddity is predicated of contingent and caused entities, starting with the separate intellects, whose essence is ‘possible in itself.’ In brief, possibility, and by extension, ‘the possible of existence’ (*mumkin al-wujūd*), as Avicenna puts it, relate exclusively to *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, acquired or realized existence, and, therefore, to the mode of existence of composite, contingent beings, in contradistinction to the ‘special existence’ (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) that intrinsically qualifies pure quiddity. *Imkān* is possibility for *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, but not for *wujūd khāṣṣ*.

By defining possibility as an external concomitant of quiddity in a metaphysical context, Avicenna is able, as he was also in a psychological context, to thoroughly distinguish quiddity in itself from all other things. This in turn enables him to locate only the pure essences in God. This abstraction includes even the concomitant that is arguably most closely related to essence, namely, possibility. So if possibility qualifies the quiddities that exist in the concrete world from the First Effect onward, it by no means qualifies the state of the quiddities as these exist in the divine being.¹⁵⁹ For Avicenna, possibility expresses a relation to ‘realized’ or ‘acquired’ existence, to an efficient cause, and thus to something extrinsic to quiddity. Realized and caused existence pertain to the concomitants of quiddity, but not to the special being of quiddity itself. In this picture, possibility appears inextricably linked to creation or causation, where the distinctions between cause and effect, and between ‘self’ and ‘other,’ become paramount. Avicenna elaborates on these points in his *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*¹⁶⁰:

159 Vallat, *Du possible au nécessaire*, 98–99 and note 30, 116–121, develops an interesting argument regarding Fārābī’s theory of divine knowledge that in some ways overlaps with mine above. According to him, Fārābī posits the forms and universals as existing in God in a mode prior to multiplicity, and as entities devoid of possibility and necessity. It is only subsequently to their emanation that they can be qualified as such. If Vallat’s interpretation is correct, then Fārābī’s works would, as in so many other cases, represent an important precedent for Avicenna’s views on this issue. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that the evidence in Fārābī is quite ambiguous. Moreover, Fārābī does not develop a theory of pure quiddity along the lines advocated by the *shaykh al-ra’īs*.

160 The interpretation of these texts is difficult, and this for two distinct reasons. First, we do not possess a good edition of Avicenna’s commentary. Second, *Discussions*, like *Notes*, is perhaps more appropriately and constructively regarded as the product of Avicenna’s circle, rather than as a treatise penned by Avicenna himself.

Text 49: The first [kind of] duality in what is created [*al-mubda'*]¹⁶¹—whichever created thing that may be—is that possibility [*al-inkān*] belongs to it by virtue of itself and existence [or necessity]¹⁶¹ belongs to it by virtue of the First Truth [*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*] ... Quiddity [in itself] is not composite with regard to these two relations [*min jihat al-nisbatayn*],¹⁶² and it is not created *qua* quiddity, but only inasmuch as it is connected with [realized] existence. If it is conceived only in itself and in abstraction from all other things, quiddity is not a combination of quiddity and existence granted by the First that makes it necessary; rather, existence is related to it as a thing occurring to it [*bal al-wujūd muḍāf ilayhā ka-sha'y ṭārīn 'alayhā*]. Quiddity does not, therefore, entail duality in itself insofar as it is a quiddity, but this may nevertheless occur when the quiddity is a thing composed in its true reality.¹⁶³

On the basis of this passage, it can be inferred that multiplicity is not intrinsic to quiddity in itself, but rather arises from the external connections of quiddity with possibility and realized existence (or necessity), once, and only once, it has come to exist in concrete reality. In other words, God does not create first a quiddity that would be intrinsically possible of existence or that would itself already possess existence, only to endow it afterwards with realized existence and external attributes. Rather, these concomitants become attached to quiddity only as a result of causation unfolding in the exterior world. This kind of multiplicity in existence is subsequent or comes 'after' the intellection of the divine mind. Avicenna reiterates some of these points, while also elaborating on them, in two sections of *Discussions* that partly mirror the one in *Commentary*.¹⁶⁴ The first section is particularly important for our purposes, because it tackles the issue of how possibility fits in an account of metaphysical causation in a more pointed way:

Text 50: Problem [*mas'alah*]: It is said: 'The first [kind of] duality in what is created [*al-mubda'*] is that possibility [*al-inkān*] belongs to it by virtue of itself and necessity [or existence] belongs to it by virtue of the True First [*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*]. From these two things the existence of its inner being is constituted.' But if this is so, then where is the reality of its essence [*ḥaqīqatu dhā-*

161 One can read either *wujūd* or *wujūb* here, although the fact that a quasi-similar passage in *Discussions* (see Text 50 below) proposes the latter makes that reading more likely.

162 This is presumably a reference to quiddity's relation to possibility and necessity, and, through them, to nonexistence and existence.

163 Avicenna, *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, 60.18–61.11. As mentioned above, it is plausible on my view that the term 'existence' (*wujūd*) that appears in the first sentence of this excerpt should be read instead as 'necessity' (*wujūb*). Since Avicenna begins by mentioning 'possibility,' one expects him to mention 'necessity' to maintain the argumentative symmetry. At any rate, this issue does not impact on the main point here, which is that Avicenna is discussing a metaphysical duality with regard to concrete, realized beings.

164 Avicenna, *Discussions*, 309–310, sections 867–868, which raise the same questions regarding quiddity and possibility as in *Commentary*, and which even quote verbatim from that work. The exact textual and authorial relationship between these two works is an important issue that remains to be elucidated, but is a task that cannot be taken up in the present study. The fact that the same set of questions regarding essence and possibility appears in these late works suggests that this topic preoccupied Avicenna acutely toward the end of his life. This is not surprising, given that these are intricate questions he did not fully address in *The Cure* and *Salvation*.

tihī) from which possibility and necessity emerge, regardless of whether this essence is an intellect or a reality from which it follows that it would be an intellect? So there must necessarily be [in this case] a trinity [*al-tathlīth*]. Here is the reply by his hand [*bi-khaṭṭihī*]: Possibility is among the concomitants [*lawāzīm*] of quiddity that are entailed by quiddity, just as quiddity entails many [other] things—for example, what the triangle entails with regard to its angles being equal to two right angles, or what quiddity entails with regard to its parts. If there is a quiddity that is not preceded by its possibility [e.g., the separate intellects], then this possibility exists together with it [or is present to it, *wujda lahā dhālika l-ḥikmān*], in the sense of it [possibility] being existent [*mawjūd*], not in the sense of its being entailed by quiddity; for the thing, inasmuch as it is existent, is other than the aspect under which it is entailed by quiddity. But if there is a possibility that precedes it [i.e., the possibility of contingent beings linked with matter], then its existence [in the concrete world] would [still] be with [or through] its quiddity [*bi-māhiyyatihā*]. But this is a mystery [*wa-hādihā sirr*]. For this would be as good as having two [states of] possibility characterizing [the thing] that is preceded by its quiddity.¹⁶⁵ What we mean by the term ‘existence’ [*wujūd*] [here] is concrete [realized] existence, not [the notion of] existence that encompasses the two states of individual and intellectual existence. This [intellectual mode of] existence is also always constantly a concomitant of quiddity, for its [the quiddity] being [*kawnuhā*] a thing and a quiddity is not its being this existence. This is inferred from the difference between these two concepts [essence and existence] and the fact that one of them [quiddity] is a subject [*mawḍūʿ*] for the other [existence].¹⁶⁶

Unlike in the related passage from *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, the interlocutor in *Discussions* has explicitly framed the relation between essence, possibility, and necessity (or, alternatively, between essence, possibility, and existence) in terms of a philosophical ‘problem’ or ‘issue’ (*mas’alah*). The issue that is raised is whether these elements amount to a metaphysical trinity or merely to a duality. Avicenna’s answer to this important question as preserved in this passage of *Discus-*

165 This entire passage is very difficult and highly elliptical. Exactly what Avicenna considers a mystery is not immediately clear. One interpretation is that he is contrasting here two distinct senses of *ḥikmān*: first, possibility as the potentiality connected with matter, which would apply only to material beings, and which would be a sense of possibility that precedes the realization of the thing in existence; and second, a ‘metaphysical’ sense of possibility, which applies to all beings irrespective of their relation to matter, and which has to do with a state of contingency and being caused. This metaphysical sense is the one that Avicenna regards as a necessary concomitant of quiddity in this passage, in the sense that anything that exists or can theoretically exist is essentially possible or *mumkin al-wujūd*. These two senses of possibility are jointly discussed in other parts of the Avicennian corpus; see especially *Notes*, 50, section 31. So perhaps the ‘mystery’ alluded to in this passage pertains to how various senses of possibility relate to essence prior to its actualization and what ontological status it may be said to have.

166 That is, a subject of predication, but the point assumes a metaphysical dimension as well. The ‘being’ of quiddity has nothing to do with realized existence and even with the possibility of realized existence. Quite relevantly, the expression Avicenna uses in this passage (*kawnuhā*) mirrors the Bahshamite use of this term to express the state of an attribute, which is not that of realized existence. Hence, for example, blackness’s being blackness (*kawn al-sawād sawādan*) designates the Attribute of the Essence of blackness and is distinct from its existing or being an existent (*mawjūd*) in the strong sense in the concrete world.

sions is not as clearly articulated as one would wish.¹⁶⁷ Regardless, what is important for the present purposes is that his argument apparently relies on the distinction between quiddity and its concomitants and, hence, on the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model. In this regard, like the previous excerpts taken from *Notes* and *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle*, the passage from *Discussions* explicitly defines possibility as one of the concomitants (*lawāzim*) of quiddity.

At this juncture, there are two questions I wish to address in more detail. The first is: what kind of *lāzim* is possibility relative to quiddity? Since Avicenna applies the term *lāzim* to various different items—to the non-constitutive but essential predicates of essence, as well as to its accidents—it is important to clarify exactly what kind of concomitant possibility amounts to. Second, does Avicenna regard possibility merely as a *mental* concomitant or attribute, as a consideration or intention added to quiddity in the mind as a result of reflection? Or is possibility somehow reified and conceived of as a real metaphysical feature, concomitant, or entity? Put differently, does possibility represent an ontological state or mode that characterizes the quiddity in existence?

Avicenna himself provides a relatively clear answer to the first question. He compares the relation between quiddity and possibility to that between the quiddity of triangle and the fact that the three angles of the triangle equal two right angles. Now, the latter proposition, for Avicenna, is a non-constitutive concomitant (*lāzim ghayr muqawwim*) of the quiddity of triangle, which, however, is not an accident (*‘araḍ*) proper. This means that it is something that necessarily follows from the essence of triangle without however being internal to it and without being a requisite for the definition and conception of triangle to obtain. A non-constitutive concomitant is different from the internal, essential constituents of the essence (*muqawwimāt*), on the one hand, as well as from the true accidents (*a‘rāḍ*) that may or may not come to be realized in concrete existence, on the other. Implying that possibility is a non-constitutive concomitant of essence has two important upshots. First, it confirms the idea, already put forth earlier, that possibility is in no way inherent to and constitutive of pure quiddity. Thus, when Avicenna loosely asserts that essence is possible, what he means is that possibility is entailed by essence, in the same manner that oneness, multiplicity, universality, and particularity, for example, are en-

167 This question should be regarded as a dialectical opportunity to explore the relations between quiddity and its concomitants, and not as an issue requesting a clear-cut or definitive answer. Recall that in the passage of *Notes* quoted above, Avicenna actually refers to the trinity (*tathlith*) of the First Effect. So one can perceive the first created thing either as a duality or a trinity (or, perhaps, under even more aspects if one persists in this conceptual analysis), depending on how many considerations (*i‘tibārāt*) of it are elaborated in the mind and also, importantly, how many concomitants of quiddity are posited. Avicenna does not provide a clear answer to the question posed (this, of course, might have something to do with the editing of *Notes*, where bits and pieces of Avicenna’s writings were artificially collated, probably for didactic purposes). What is significant here is Avicenna’s treatment of how the concomitant of possibility relates to quiddity, which is the focus of the discussion.

tailed by essence. More specifically, what he means is that essence has a possibility for ‘realized existence,’ which is also a concomitant and external to it. The implication is that *the pure quiddities are not in themselves possible*, but are so only as a result of an additional consideration or concomitant being added to them. This is an important proviso to the commonly held view in the modern scholarship on Avicenna that essence and possibility are somehow interchangeable notions. Instead, the foregoing suggests that quiddity is not *in itself* possible. Rather, it is *its possible relation* to realized existence and to a potential efficient cause that makes it possible. Consequently, and as a second upshot, God’s conceiving the pure quiddities need not be a conception of them *qua* possibles (*mumkināt*), but only in themselves, which, in this case, excludes possibility *qua* concomitant altogether and makes the essences fully identical with His necessary essence. So defining *imkān* as a non-constitutive concomitant of quiddity allows Avicenna to separate the divine intellection and causation entirely from possibility, which appears only at a posterior stage, once the quiddities themselves become realized and acquire existence as a result of the divine causation.

The second problem mentioned above is more intricate, because it intersects with the broader issue of the real vs. conceptual distinction of essence and existence. It would appear that Avicenna, even though he would define possibility *primarily* as a mental notion and logical predicate, does not intend his comments on the relation between possibility and essence to be limited to the logical and conceptual planes alone. The cosmological context and the notions of divine creation and causation that underpin these passages suggest that he ascribes a real ontological state or status to this concomitant as it pertains to the concrete beings. This would go hand in hand with his mereological and realist descriptions of quiddity and its concomitants in concrete beings, as we saw in chapter III. This hypothesis seems to cohere also with other statements encountered previously, such as when Avicenna asserts in *Salvation* that “thingness is something other than existence *in concrete reality* [*fī l-ʿān*].”¹⁶⁸ In fact, toward the end of the passage of *Discussions* quoted above, Avicenna explains that he is dealing expressly with realized, concrete existence and, hence, with the relationship between quiddity and its concomitants *in realized existence*. This qualification is reiterated in the next section of *Discussions*:

Text 51: ‘Exactly how is possibility one of the concomitants [*lawāzīm*] of the quiddities? Is it subsumed under creation [*al-ibdāʿ*] or not? And is there a thing after the First that is not connected with creation?’ The answer from his hand: The consideration [*iʿtibār*] that quiddity is possible is other than the consideration that its possibility is existent as a concrete entity [*mawjūd ʿaynan*]. Likewise, the consideration that the triangle has angles that equal two right angles is other than the consideration of whether this [concomitant or description] is actualized [or realized, *ḥāṣil*] with the nonexistence [or privation] of the triangle. For this [concomitant or description] is entailed by quiddity, and it is other than the existence in actuality that belongs to quiddity. Like-

168 Avicenna, *Salvation*, 520.1–2; transl. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, 163; see Text 11 above for a discussion of this passage.

wise, the quiddity that is not an existent in actuality is a quiddity in the concrete world [by virtue of its being] a meaning and essential entailment [*ka-mā anna l-māhiyyah ghayr al-mawjūd bi-l-fi'l māhiyyah fī l-a'yān mafhūman wa-luzūman*].¹⁶⁹

In this—admittedly obscure and difficult—passage, Avicenna differentiates between the considerations (*i'tibārāt*) that pertain to quiddity taken in abstraction from existence and those that apply strictly to realized existence. Although this is standard Avicennian practice, what makes this excerpt particularly interesting for my analysis is its focus on the modality of possibility and its relation to quiddity in the mind and in concrete reality. In this connection, although Avicenna describes possibility primarily as a predicate or concomitant that derives from the very essence of a thing and that would, consequently, appear to be limited to a consideration or to a notional or conceptual act in the mind, he ends the passage by suggesting that quiddity (and its concomitants) are also present in the concrete world *qua* meaning and essential entailment (*mafhūman wa-luzūman*), be it only potentially. In other words, Avicenna appears to extend to the concrete world the scope of essential entailment he attributes to quiddity in the mind, in the very same way that he describes pure quiddity, nature, true reality, and even sometimes the universals, as somehow extending to the exterior world and existing in concrete beings. The subtlety, however, is that possibility in itself (*al-imkān*) cannot be said to exist as a separate concrete thing in the world (*mawjūd 'aynan*), for this would be an instance of reifying a concept in a quite drastic and erroneous way. Yet, inasmuch as quiddity has an intelligible reality and causality in the world, and inasmuch as the essential concomitants of quiddity are entailed by it and come to be realized in existence through an external cause, the concomitant of possibility can be said to possess a certain reality or even existence that is attached to the concrete being and qualifies it in a real way. Like the other non-constitutive concomitants of quiddity, such as oneness, particularity, or universality, possibility would therefore possess a certain ontological reality in those entities that possess realized existence. In that sense, it appears that Avicenna's comments sometimes verge on a tendency to ontologize or reify logical notions, or at least that he attributes a certain ontological entailment to these notions in the exterior world.¹⁷⁰

Returning to Text 50, one observes that possibility can either be permanently attached to quiddity, as in the case of eternal beings such as the separate intellects, or it can precede the realization of quiddity in the concrete world, as in the case of perishable material beings, where the possibility and potentiality of matter can be said,

¹⁶⁹ Avicenna, *Discussions*, section 868, p. 310. The beginning of the text in the form of questions replicates a passage in *Commentary on Theology of Aristotle* (61.22–24) with a slightly different phrasing.

¹⁷⁰ For another passage that seems to reify possibility to some extent, see Avicenna, *Notes*, 222, section 354, where the master speaks of “the existence of the possible in the thing” (*al-mumkin wujūduhu fī l-shay'*).

in a qualified sense, to precede the actualization of the concrete thing. In either case, possibility concerns the realization and concretization of quiddity and, by implication, its connection to realized existence. Or rather, it implies the realization of the external concomitants of quiddity. Avicenna makes it clear, however, that it is quiddity that entails possibility, not possibility that entails quiddity. The *māhiyyah* is always essentially prior to its *lawāzim*. Moreover, Avicenna's distinction between intellectual and concrete existence toward the end of Text 50 and his qualification that he is discussing concrete existence specifically suggest that quiddity can exist in the intellect without being attached in any way to possibility. To conclude, then, one significant implication of the master's argumentation in the passages discussed above seems to be that, in the intellect, quiddity can be conceived of in abstraction from possibility and existence. Both, in fact, are concomitants of quiddity and are entailed by quiddity, but they do not entail quiddity. The 'being' of quiddity in the intellect is thus distinct from the possibility of realized, concrete existence.

How do these remarks concerning possibility inform the discussion of God's objects of knowledge? Let us return briefly to the main issue raised by Text 46 above. There Avicenna writes that God knows "the other' [*al-ākhar*], even if it does not [yet] exist [contingently]," and that God knows both "realized and possible existence" (*al-wujūd al-ḥāṣil wa-l-mumkin*). In making these claims, the master is obviously not referring to intelligibles that would exist in the First according to the mode of realized existence that characterizes the contingent beings. Furthermore, Avicenna is also not claiming that God knows them by turning His intellection outside of His own essence toward these realized beings. In order to fully dispel these erroneous options, the master adds that God knows these things "inasmuch as they are intellectually apprehended, not inasmuch as they have existence in external reality." At the same time, however, it would be absurd to presume that God knows these things *qua* devoid of all existence, *qua* nonexistent, since the absolute nonexistent for Avicenna is impossible and is not, at any rate, 'a thing.' Nor can God be said to know them *qua* possibles (*mumkināt*), since this would introduce possibility in the divine essence. Moreover, on the standard modern interpretation of Avicenna, the 'possible essence' can in no sense be said to exist in itself, and it is also irreversibly contaminated with possibility. What interpretive option remains? Given that the intelligibles in God are characterized neither by nonexistence (*ʿadam*), nor by realized existence (*wujūd muḥaṣṣal*), nor even by possibility (*imkān*) construed as a concomitant of essence, then they must exist in some other mode. The most compelling solution to this conundrum is to identify these divine intelligibles with the pure quiddities. *In themselves*, the latter exclude realized existence and possibility, and exist identically with the divine essence. In that state or mode, the true quiddities, natures, and realities merge with God's absolute *māhiyyah* and *ḥaqīqah* and exclude possibility altogether. Avicenna's approach implies a sharp and uncompromising separation between quiddity and its constitutive parts, on the one hand, and everything else that is external to it, namely, the *lawāzim*, on the other. The master is here proposing a new elaboration on the

māhiyyah-lawāzim model in his theological writings, building on what he had already achieved in his psychological and logical writings.

4 Conclusion

This chapter showed that there is substantial and crucial evidence in Avicenna's works that warrants the view that the separate intellects, including God Himself, contemplate the pure quiddities. God knows the pure quiddities by knowing His own essence. Moreover, the demiurgic or causative outcome entailed by His self-knowledge consists in the intellection and causation of the pure quiddities. Divine self-knowledge, knowledge of the pure essences, and causation of the essences in the external world represent different stages or 'moments' (metaphorically speaking) in the divine intellection. This implies that Avicenna defended the view of a multiplicity-in-unity along Neoplatonic lines, although he adapted this ancient philosophical view to fit his theory of essence. In parallel to this account, I articulated a new interpretation regarding the thorny issue of how God's 'universal' knowledge should be understood, stressing the modulated nature of the notion of 'universality' (*kullīyyah*) in Avicenna's philosophy, while also presenting the Avicennian theory of pure quiddity as a useful tool to overcome a cluster of well-known interpretive pitfalls linked to this topic. Due to their being intrinsically deprived of concomitants and attributes, including oneness and multiplicity, as well as actuality and potentiality, the pure quiddities emerge as serious candidates for the objects of the divine intellection. Taken as a whole, they constitute a valid intelligible content without entailing numerical multiplicity, potentiality, or possibility in the divine essence. This remarkable fact suggests that they, unlike many other classes of objects, are ideally suited for a theory of divine, simple, and non-discursive intellection, such as the one Avicenna advocates in his works. In addition, the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* distinction also helps to explain how God, by knowing the pure quiddities, can know all the things they entail, including, perhaps, particular things.

This new approach to divine knowledge in Avicenna—or rather, the new rationale I provide for upholding this interpretation—opens new avenues of research for the history of postclassical thought in Islam. Many post-Avicennian thinkers routinely ascribe a plurality of intellectual objects to God, which they describe alternatively as 'things' (*ashyā'*), 'quiddities' (*māhiyyāt*), 'meanings' (*ma'ānī*), or 'fixed entities' (*a'yān thābitah*). Far from being alien to Avicenna's cosmological and theological outlook, I tried to show that this common interpretation articulated in the postclassical sources—from Rāzī in the twelfth century to Kūrānī in the seventeenth century CE—finds support and a direct source of inspiration in the master's works.¹⁷¹ On

171 For Kūrānī's position, see the detailed and enlightening study by Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life*.

my mind, this also calls for a re-evaluation of the Akbarian tradition and its relation to Avicennism, all the more so given the intertwinement of philosophical, theological, and mystical ideas in later Islamic intellectual history. What changes in the works of these later authors is the explanation put forth regarding *the ontological status* of these divine objects, i.e., whether they should be described as existent (*mawjūd*), as non-existent (*ma'dūm*), or as occupying an intermediary status between the two (*lā mawjūd wa-lā ma'dūm*). But the basic presumption that God knows all things and essences (by knowing Himself) and that His creation of the world relies on this cognition of the many-in-the-one seems to have one of its roots in the Avicennian texts. Whatever the case may be, what enables Avicenna to articulate this view of divine self-knowledge and insert it within a strict philosophical formulation of *tawhīd* is the theory of pure quiddity and especially his *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* model.

These results enable us to contextualize the theological aspect of Avicenna's doctrine within his broader ontology. The question of the ontological status of quiddity in itself has typically been framed in the modern scholarship in terms of its existence or nonexistence, where existence is taken to correspond necessarily to one of the two aspects of realized or acquired existence Avicenna frequently refers to in his works: complex and caused concrete and mental existence (*al-wujūdāyn*). This dual theory of realized existence dictates that entities that fall under it be composite or complex, conditioned, caused, and contingent. In other words, this kind of existence presupposes a proliferation of concrete or intellectual accidents and concomitants that are necessarily entailed by a quiddity. These concomitants of quiddity, which are ontologically external to it, are the condition *sine qua non* of realized and acquired existence in Avicenna's ontology, which is why the master refers to this aspect of quiddity as conditioned by other things (*bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar*). Although this ontological model holds true for most beings of Avicenna's ontology, quiddity in itself, like the First, represents an exception and cannot be straightforwardly included in *al-wujūdāyn*. In contrast to these contingent and conditioned beings, quiddity in itself possesses a distinct mode of existence, which can be described as prior, absolute, simple, and unconditioned. Moreover, I argued that this special mode of existence is also different from what one might call 'neutral existence' or 'subsistence' as construed by some medieval and modern scholars. Hence, one of the fundamental theses put forth by this study is nothing short of the claim that Avicenna posited a special mode of existence that belongs exclusively and irreducibly to pure quiddity. As this chapter has shown, the reason why the First and the pure quiddities are exceptions in Avicenna's ontology is because they share a common source, or, more precisely, because the pure quiddities find their originative source in God's special existence.

Dumairieh's analysis shows the debt that a later thinker such as Kūrānī owes to Avicennism in addition to *kalām* sources and the Akbarian tradition.

In this connection, the present study also made a series of claims regarding the problem of the *localization* of pure quiddity. I tried to show that the medieval scholastic and modern interpretations—notably that of Marwan Rashed—that locate the pure quiddities in God and Marmura’s tentative hypothesis of a distinct (human) mental existence of the pure quiddities are equally valid and have to be unified into a *common theory of the ontology of quiddity*. These contexts of quidditative existence jointly depend on the postulation of this special and unconditioned existential mode that characterizes quiddity. It is because pure quiddity belongs to neither aspect of realized existence and is free of all the concomitants associated with them that it is possible for it to exist in God, in concrete individuals, and in the human mind as an epistemic and ontological constant. Fundamentally, however, the mode of existence of pure quiddity is intellectual or rather intelligible, and so pure quiddity should be regarded primarily as a distinct and irreducible entity in the intellect. In this regard, Avicenna’s debt to the late-antique discussions about the universals or common things as existing before multiplicity (in the divine world), in multiplicity (in concrete individuals), and after multiplicity (in human minds) was emphasized and incorporated into the analysis. In spite of significant divergences in terminology and doctrine, Avicenna maintained and thoroughly adapted this basic scheme in his metaphysics. These various levels of discourse and his views regarding the ontological localization of pure quiddity are underpinned by this Neoplatonic heritage. Grafted onto this scheme is the idiosyncratic Avicennian theory of proper existence, as well as ideas co-opted from the Bahshamite ontological tradition, which are deftly unified into a single essentialist doctrine. In brief, it seems that Avicenna inherited wholesale, but also transformed considerably, the late-antique philosophical template for interpreting the ontological problem of the universals. He adapted it thoroughly to his metaphysical and theological system by combining it with new sets of conceptual distinctions he devised as well as with elements taken from *kalām*. The result is a unique and highly intricate doctrine that finds no exact parallel in the previous Greek and Arabic sources.

If one adopts this line of interpretation, some of the protracted textual and doctrinal paradoxes that arise from the scrutiny of Avicenna’s writings—that quiddity in itself somehow exists, but that it exists neither in the mind nor in the concrete world; that pure quiddity exists both in things and distinctly from them; that pure quiddity can exist in different ontological contexts, etc.—turn out not to be paradoxes at all, but differences in formulation that depend entirely on context and emphasis. Avicenna is sometimes keen to rely on negative formulations and to stress what pure quiddity *is not*, especially when he contrasts its mode of being to that of the realized concomitants. At other times, he is intent on depicting it in positive terms. Hence, when it comes to pure quiddity, just as when it comes to the First, Avicenna’s speech oscillates between apophatic and kataphatic statements, which are not in any way intended to be paradoxical, but rather complementary. In this light, the dilemma of having to relate quiddity in itself either to acquired existence or to nonexistence strikes one as artificial. The problem should be recast in terms of distinguishing be-

tween various contexts, aspects, and modes of existence, as well as engaging in a process of disambiguation of the various senses of *wujūd* that Avicenna outlines in his works. This approach yields questions that are more intricate but also more nuanced and relevant, since the ontological judgments emitted by the human mind regarding quiddity will vary depending on whether relations are introduced between it and other things or whether it is considered purely in itself. Here again, an intriguing parallel between pure quiddity and what is, in Avicenna's eyes, the correct way of talking about the First can be highlighted: the First can be conceived of either 'in itself' and with 'a negative condition' (the divine essence), or together 'with other things' and through 'relations' or 'relational attributes,' i.e., in relation to the created world.

Another crucial point that emerges from this chapter is that mental existence is not reducible to *complex universal mental existence*, where universality is construed as one of many external and posterior concomitants of quiddity connected with intentionality in the human mind. Rather, pure quiddity exists in the human and divine intellects without being strictly speaking a universal construed in the traditional sense and, hence, without assuming the mental concomitants that affect the complex and conditioned universal concepts present in the human mind. The alternative view held by some scholars of Avicenna to the effect that existence in the mind necessarily implies a set of mental concomitants and accidents—with the consequence that pure quiddity cannot exist intellectually as a distinct entity, although it may be an object of epistemic or logical consideration—creates unsurmountable problems when it comes to divine intellection and also leaves unanswered crucial passages in *Metaphysics*, such as the one where Avicenna states unambiguously that 'negatively-conditioned' quiddity exists in the mind (and where the proposition 'negatively-conditioned quiddity' clearly cannot correspond to the complex universal). Not only is pure quiddity epistemically distinct in the human mind, but it is also ontologically distinct. In contrast, in God's intellect it is for all intents and purposes indistinguishable from His essence. The latter point is tenable thanks to Avicenna's special description of pure quiddity as something that is neither one nor many, neither actual nor potential, etc. This point in turn enables the formulation of new solutions to old theological problems affecting Avicenna's theories of God's knowledge and existence. In teasing out Avicenna's often implicit position regarding these issues, I had the opportunity to insist on the importance and relevance of the late-antique Greek Neoplatonic sources as well as the Arabic *kalām* sources for understanding Avicenna's approach. Plotinus's theory of the Intellectual-Principle, the Neoplatonic tripartition of the universals and especially the recognition of a class of universals 'before multiplicity' unlinked to human thought, as well as the narrow connection in Neoplatonism between intellection and causation, are all aspects that came to inform Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity in a divine context. Likewise, the Bahshamite theory of the intrinsic epistemic and ontological irreducibility of the Attribute of the Essence, which is known by God irrespective of its realization in existence, profoundly informed Avicenna's ontology and theology of quiddity. Ultimately, then, the

divine origin of pure quiddity in Avicenna's system should be regarded as his response to both the Greek Neoplatonists and the *mutakallimūn*. It is also what lends doctrinal cohesiveness and gnoseological depth to his doctrine of quiddity, since it enables him to elaborate sophisticated theories regarding reversion and final causality, human beings' intellectual perfection and self-fulfillment, and the symmetry between the divine and human realms. All of these theories rest on the premise of the ontological and epistemic irreducibility, constancy, and ubiquity of the pure quiddities and on the archetypal and primitive existence of these quiddities in the divine intellects. In this regard, the overlap of Avicenna's technical vocabulary of nature and pure quiddity in a psychological, metaphysical and theological context is remarkable and certainly not coincidental. To take but one example, God's unique and essential *ma'nā* is by extension the *ma'nā* of all the pure quiddities, which find their ultimate source, truth, and ontological grounding in God, where they exist identically with His essence. These quiddities themselves are in turn frequently described as *ma'ānī*, a term which, when traced back to their divine origin, should be taken in its semantic and epistemic dimension—God provides the foundational meaning and truth for all quiddities—as well as in its ontological and entitative sense—these quiddities exist in God, but without producing any multiplicity.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to provide a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity in three different philosophical contexts—the human mind, the concrete world, and the divine world. The results adduced in this book enable us to conclude that the theory of quiddity in itself represents a central feature of Avicenna's ontology, theology, and epistemology and underlies virtually every major metaphysical doctrine articulated by the master. Furthermore, it displays a high degree of doctrinal coherence and serves to bridge Avicenna's logical, psychological, and metaphysical expositions, thereby also enabling a unifying interpretation of his philosophy. In its broad lines, Avicenna's ontology of quiddity marks a crucial departure from earlier ontological systems and opens new avenues of abstract thinking and conceptualization that were to profoundly mark subsequent intellectual history. This is true especially of his discussions of quiddity in the mind and its relevance to the issue of mental existence; his elucidation of the epistemic and ontological relations between the constituents of quiddity and its external concomitants, or what I called the *māhiyyah-lawāzim* model or distinction; his sophisticated classification of the extramental and mental conditions (*shurūṭ*) of quiddity; and his reconfiguration of ontology by means of a theory of modulation (*tashkīk*), which he applies to various key notions (such as universality, unity, form, priority), but especially to existence or *wujūd*. These innovations enabled him to develop a full-fledged theory of the intelligible being of quiddity, and they also decisively influenced, albeit in different forms and through different means, the later development of Latin and Hebrew scholastic thought as well as the postclassical Islamic discourses on essence and existence.

In this book I argued that one of Avicenna's main contributions to the history of philosophy was his ascription of a *distinct ontological and epistemological status* to pure quiddity, or quiddity 'in itself,' in the human mind and in the divine intellects. This doctrine not only had major metaphysical and theological implications in his works and those of his successors; it also greatly expanded the horizon of theoretical reflection and eventually transformed the field of Arabic epistemology as a whole. For, in the Arabic philosophical tradition prior to Avicenna, the only entity that could be considered or conceived of strictly or absolutely 'in itself,' i.e., as not entailing any accidents, attributes, or concomitants, was the First Cause or God, which, as many thinkers were intent on stressing, is multiple neither in concrete reality nor in the mind. To this theological constant or absolute, Avicenna added the conceptualization of a pristine, irreducible, transcendent, and essentially intelligible object: quiddity in itself, which can be considered in abstraction from all other things, of everything else that is not strictly itself. By expanding the scope of conceptual thought to include the pure quiddities and pure natures, Avicenna not only complexified and deepened the notion of mental existence, but also granted the mind a heightened

and unique ability to know abstract objects and the inner realities of things in a simple and unmediated way.

In this fashion, Avicenna accomplished in metaphysics what he had also striven to achieve in mathematics by placing algebra on a special theoretical and undetermined epistemic plane and defining it as a pure object of conceptual thought.¹ In both cases, his innovative outlook hinged on the postulation of an abstract, irreducible, autonomous, and, ultimately, intelligibly transcendent realm of mental entities, which enabled a degree of theoretical reflection not attained by previous epistemological systems.²

In conjunction with these claims, I argued that Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity emerged out of a dialectical encounter with two major historic ontological traditions—the late-antique Greek tradition and the Mu'tazilite, especially Bahshamite, tradition. More specifically, it is the convergence of the late-antique debate about the universals and the *kalām* debate about the ontology of the thing (*shay'*) and the states (*aḥwāl*) that decisively shaped his views on the epistemology and ontology of pure quiddity, either by way of direct appropriation, or, most often, by way of critical adaptation and transformation of the material Avicenna found in those sources. If the Neoplatonic sources provided the main theoretical framework for his treatment of universals, and if the Bahshamite theory of the Attribute of the Essence was a direct model for his discussion of quiddity in itself, Avicenna added to this inherited philosophical substrate his own ontological innovations and concerns. On the one hand, he devises new sets of distinctions to better conceptualize the relation between quiddity and its concomitants, as well as quiddity and existence. On the other, he prioritizes certain issues, e.g., mental existence and its various criteria, which were only touched upon or relegated to a secondary position by his predecessors.

1 See Roshdi Rashed, *Mathématiques*, 34–35. As Rashed explains, “Aussi l’objet des algébristes, ‘la chose’, doit-il être suffisamment général pour recevoir des contenus divers ; mais il doit en outre exister indépendamment de ses propres déterminations ... Du statut ontologique d’un tel objet, la théorie aristotélicienne ne peut, à l’évidence, rendre compte. Il faut donc faire intervenir une nouvelle ontologie, qui autorise à parler d’un objet dépourvu des caractères qui, pourtant, auraient seuls permis de discerner de quoi il est l’abstraction.” The parallels between Avicenna’s mathematical and metaphysical theories are indeed striking, as Roshdi Rashed notes, and may have proceeded from a common methodological concern. Nevertheless, the causality underlying this development, as well as Rashed’s claim that Avicenna applied to his metaphysics a framework that had already been devised in his mathematical works and in the larger mathematical culture of his day, remain on my view questionable. I would be more inclined to trace the origin of the Avicennian doctrine of pure quiddity primarily to the set of Greek and Arabic theological and philosophical sources he consulted, rather than to mathematical sources, without denying that the latter may have played a role as well.

2 The rich array of terms and expressions in Appendix 1 referring to this pristine and abstracted aspect of pure quiddity testifies to the importance of this phenomenon in Avicenna’s methodology.

In my view, the outstanding features of Avicenna's approach to what was, at root, an old problem in both the Greek and Mu'tazilite traditions—namely, how we can conceive of the essence of things and how this concept in our mind relates to reality—amount to two in particular: first, he deliberately and decisively reoriented the discussion to focus on mental existence specifically and proceeded to elucidate the various conditions and criteria surrounding the conception and existence of quiddity in the mind. This is what eventually led him to his original theory of pure quiddity as a distinct and unique intellectual object. Second, and as a direct corollary of this, he was forced to reconfigure the ontological models and interpretations of existence he inherited from these traditions in order to address these new concerns, many of which were derived from his immersion in the Bahshamite sources. The study showed that Avicenna was deeply influenced by Bahshamite ontology, especially their theory of the Attribute of the Essence (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) and how it relates to the other essential attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyyah*), especially the attribute of existence (*ṣifat al-wujūd*). Avicenna's sharp distinction between the ontology of pure quiddity or essence taken in itself (i. e., its essential intelligible being) and the ontology of the concomitants of quiddity, and by extension, of the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* compound (i. e., realized, contingent, and complex existence), can be partly traced to these Mu'tazilite texts, although it was also informed by the Greek ontological tradition and more specifically by Aristotle's ideas regarding the predication of being as articulated in *Metaphysics*.

These Mu'tazilite sources, it should be noted, provided many of the key issues, terms, and notions Avicenna relies upon in his own investigation. However, they could not satisfactorily tackle the problem of mental existence, which was naturally raised by these theologians' postulation of intrinsically conceivable and intelligible nonexistent things (through the Attribute of the Essence). It is this state of affairs that prompted Avicenna to creatively elaborate on and amplify his ontology in an attempt to accommodate the new ontological status of pure quiddity. Hence, Avicenna's doctrine of the special ontological mode of pure quiddity can be defined as a direct response to (what he regarded as) an inappropriate Mu'tazilite solution (the intermediary ontological status of the states) to a valid Mu'tazilite problem (the ontological status of mental objects and especially of the Attribute of the Essence). Avicenna solved this conundrum by engaging in a process of disambiguation of the notion of existence in light of the Greek sources and expanding the senses and modes of existence (through modulation or *tashkīk*) to include the special intelligible status of pure quiddity and the notion of essential being. It is, I believe, the unique confluence of these various sources in the master's works that was responsible for shaping his idiosyncratic doctrine of essence as articulated in *The Cure*. In light of the foregoing, it is unclear whether Avicenna's ontology is best described as an elaboration on late-antique Aristotelian-Neoplatonic ontology or as an elaboration on Bahshamite ontology. But this is a moot question, and, ultimately, a poorly formulated one. It is more precise to say that Avicenna creatively adapted some fea-

tures of both Aristotelian-Neoplatonic and Bahshamite ontology to fashion his own, distinct, and fundamentally unique system.

Arguably, however, the main framework through which Avicenna approaches these philosophical problems remains the late-antique Greek theorizations of the universals. The reason for this is that the analysis of quiddity interfaces in Avicenna's works with that of the universals and universality. In this regard, the Neoplatonic legacy supplied the threefold distinction of universality in the human mind, in concrete reality, and in the divine intellects, a framework which could be conveniently applied to the notion of quiddity. Avicenna appears to have been highly indebted to the late-antique Greek discourse on the common things and universals, as well as highly creative in his own treatment of the problem. At any rate, he played a key role in reshaping this ancient legacy, and his views on quiddity—supported as they were by traditional and new distinctions, concepts, and theories of the universals—deeply influenced later philosophical and theological disquisitions in the Islamic world and the Latin West.

One reason why Avicenna's views proved so influential on the later philosophical traditions of postclassical Islam and medieval Europe was that their sophistication and, at times, ambiguity, enabled and even encouraged a wide range of interpretations. For example, Avicenna's outlook on how universality relates to pure essence is intricate and cannot be framed in simplistic terms. On the one hand, he sharply distinguishes between the two notions and articulates his theory of pure quiddity largely on the basis of this distinction. On the other hand, there are philosophical residues scattered throughout his writings that inextricably connect pure quiddity with universality in an essential way, suggesting a highly flexible and modulated handling of this notion. For one thing, Avicenna frequently talks about God's universal knowledge of things or His knowledge of universals, a position to be connected historically with the view that God knows the universals *ante rem*, as he himself intimates in *Introduction* I.12. What is more, he at times refers to the quiddities or natures in the concrete world as (potential) universals, and he is also inclined to regard the concept of pure quiddity in the mind as being essentially (as opposed to accidentally) universal, or as possessing its own special sense of universality. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the fact that Avicenna mentions and applies a wide range of terms and conceptual tools to his inquiry into quiddity, which are immediately derived from the Greek sources—such as the threefold scheme *before, in, and after multiplicity*, the concepts of nature and of the commonality of nature in concrete individuals, of abstraction, etc.—indicates that he was thoroughly inscribed in the continuation of this philosophical trend and could not extricate himself fully from this tradition. This, of course, makes Avicenna a Neoplatonist in ways that have not hitherto been fully acknowledged. Nonetheless, whereas the Neoplatonists had devised these tools expressly to address the set of questions pertaining to the universals that was formulated in Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, and which concerned especially how Aristotle's theory of universals as mental concepts related to Plato's theory of universals as archetypal forms, Avicenna, while also addressing these queries, put

them at the service of a personal investigation of the intrinsic nature of pure quiddity and its ontological and epistemological status. Universality as such, redefined merely as one of the many external concomitants of pure quiddity, becomes for him a corollary issue and part of a much larger and multifaceted philosophical project focusing on the ontology and knowability of quiddity.

The various results generated in this book have alternatively corroborated older interpretations of Avicenna's philosophy, questioned or challenged the majority opinion regarding some specific aspects of his thought, and provided fresh attempts at solving the most daunting problems associated with essence. The study showed that the question of the ontological status of pure quiddity is not reducible to a single issue, but is complex and multifaceted: it is made up of several interconnected issues and unfolds in various philosophical contexts, each one of them calling for a detailed case study. Part of this complexity arises from the variety of the philosophical and *kalām* sources Avicenna taps into and synthesizes in his works. Another has to do with his conceptual framework. At the heart of his approach is a subtle matrix of logical distinctions, which are carried over into the metaphysical arena and adapted to his ontological, noetical, and causal theories.

One of the master's most radical departures from the earlier tradition, albeit one that was to some extent anticipated by his predecessor Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, was to exploit the ontologization of logical notions, and more specifically of the logical relationships between the internal constituents and external concomitants of quiddity. Pursuing the trail opened by Marwan Rashed, the study showed that Yaḥyā's metaphysics decisively influenced Avicenna's reflection on essence and the universals, as well as their relation to existence. Nevertheless, the Persian thinker elaborated on his predecessor by devising a sophisticated theory of ontological modulation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). This theory, which relied on a set of well-thought-out modes or aspects designed to modulate existence, enabled him to distinguish what is ontologically intrinsic, constant, simple, and uncaused, from what is extrinsic, contingent, complex, and caused, and (by implication) to extend ontological modulation to cases of essential being, namely, God and pure quiddity. Avicenna's rigor and analytical depth in this regard surpass the more succinct metaphysical treatment one finds in Yaḥyā's treatises. Nevertheless, the philosophical connection between these two thinkers remains a highly significant one, which deserves further scrutiny.

It is as a result of these major shifts in ontological perspective that pure quiddity emerges in Avicenna's philosophy as an *epistemic and ontological constant*, which is characterized by a single, special ontological mode, but which can nonetheless be said to exist in various different *contexts* and under different *aspects*. This ensures that the epistemology of quiddity is to some extent commensurate with the ontology of quiddity. Put differently, to every conceptualization of quiddity, there is a corresponding ontological context, aspect, or mode of quiddity. In this regard, it was argued that quiddity in itself and the universal exist distinctly in the mind, albeit in a different mode, and that quiddity also exists in the extramental context in concrete beings as a nature, a reality, and a quidditative meaning. However, in each case, it is

quiddity in itself that exists, either alone, or together with material or mental concomitants. This means that there is a constancy of pure quiddity across the ontological spectrum. The quiddity that exists in concrete beings is just quiddity, and is hence no other than the quiddity that exists in the mind. In every case, then, quiddity in itself exists either as a part of concrete or mental existents or simply as a distinct object in the mind. In this regard, one crucial distinction that was established in the analysis was between irreducibility and distinctness. Pure essence, regardless of its context or the aspect of existence with which it is associated, is always in itself irreducible, but it is not always distinct, in the sense that it may be combined with external attributes or accidents and exist together with them. It is only ever both irreducible *and* distinct when contemplated in itself as a pure concept in the mind. In contrast, one position Avicenna consistently rejects is that pure quiddity can be said to exist separately (*mufāriqah*, *mufradah*) in the concrete world, a view he associates with Platonism. So whereas Avicenna posits a special intelligible being of quiddity, he rejects its separate and independent existence in the concrete world.

In hindsight, I believe that the Latin scholastic tradition—as well as some modern scholars stemming from this tradition—were right to speak of *esse essentiae* in Avicenna's philosophy, even though they might originally have intended something quite different by it.³ On the basis of their exegesis of the Avicennian writings, some of the medieval Latin philosophers proceeded to adapt such a theory to specific aspects of their system and were especially keen to tease out the theological implications of such a view. In addition, they paid heed to the emphasis Avicenna laid on mental existence and especially on the possibility of a purely intelligible and transcendent mode of being characterizing pure quiddity in the mind. On my reconstruction of the evidence, there is undeniably a certain intellectual affiliation that stretches from Avicenna to thinkers such as Duns Scotus, Gabriel Vasquez, Francisco Suárez, and even some idealist philosophers of early modern Europe. A rich commentatorial literature also flourished in the Arabic tradition in the wake of Avicenna's philosophical legacy. These Muslim authors programmatically and intensively discussed the *māhiyyah-lawāzīm* distinction Avicenna devised and the hypothesis of the mental and concrete existence of pure quiddity. What is more, they often implicitly endorsed a realist ontological position, although more research on this issue is called for.

Regardless of these later developments, which, as fascinating as they are, should be regarded as transformative interpretations of Avicenna, this study has made a

³ As mentioned in the Introduction, this interpretive tradition stretches from Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus to some modern scholars, even though it underwent several permutations in the interim. Although the Latin Scholastics were justified in implicitly ascribing to Avicenna a theory of essential being, the sources and ramifications of his ontology of quiddity are more complex than they could have fathomed. This is understandable, given that they did not have access to the entirety of the Avicennian corpus and were reading Latin translations of the master's works.

case for the idea that the ontology of quiddity underscores the master's entire epistemology, metaphysics, and theology. It ultimately allows for a unifying and integrated interpretation of these disciplines in his philosophy. Furthermore, it proposes engaging solutions to traditional and persistent Avicennian conundrums, such as the theory of psychological abstraction vs. emanation, God's knowledge of universals and particulars, the relationship between essence and existence in God, how a plurality of intelligibles can be said to exist in God without causing multiplicity and possibility, and how quiddity can be said to exist ubiquitously in human minds and in concrete beings without this entailing absurd metaphysical consequences.

In retrospect, it seems that two of the most recognizable theories proffered by interpreters on behalf of the master, namely, the theory of essential being and the theory of the co-extensionality of essence and existence, can be daringly but fruitfully reconciled. The ontology of essence does not contradict the thesis of the co-extensionality of essence and existence. Rather, it strengthens it and compels us to reframe the relationship between these notions in light of Avicenna's highly elaborate theory of modulation. The results of this study suggest that the relation between 'the thing' and 'the existent,' between 'thingness' and 'existence,' needs to be subjected to various qualifications and does not allow for a simple answer. Avicenna, *contra* the Mu'tazilites, does not recognize nonexistent things (*ashyā' ma'dūmah*). Nor does he recognize attributes (*ṣifāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*) that occupy an intermediary position between existence and nonexistence, or which could in any way qualify a nonexistent thing. The thing, for Avicenna, is always an existent, and *vice versa*. This holds both for the concrete existents of the extramental world and for mental existents, such as the universal concept horse. At the very least, then, a thing is always a mental existent for Avicenna, a *mawjūd fī l-dhihn* or *fī l-'aql*.

But this problematic increases in difficulty with regard to 'thingness' itself, i.e., the very essential reality of the thing, since a conception of thingness in complete abstraction from existence, which is possible according to Avicenna, would seem to entail a dissociation between these notions. In effect, this was the Mu'tazilite position, which recognizes and validates the status of the nonexistent thing, while at the same time positing that thingness subsists in the Attribute of the Essence. The latter, *qua* attribute, occupies an intermediary state (*ḥāl*) between existence and nonexistence and remains intelligible to the mind. On this point, however, Avicenna departs from the Mu'tazilites and refuses to conceive of thingness in the mind as merely a subsistent or actual state divested of existence. Rather, thingness possesses its own irreducible, special or proper existence, which can be defined as *its intelligible and irreducible being what it is*. This, of course, implies in a sense the co-extensionality of thingness and existence in a way precluded by Bahshamite ontology. What is more, it even implies, in the case of the intellection of pure quiddity, an *identity* between the two, and, as a result, a certain co-intensionality as well between these notions. Here drawing a parallel between pure quiddity and the strict identity and co-intensionality of essence and existence in God is inevitable and in fact required to make sense of the former case, given the divine origin of the pure quiddities.

Appendix 1:

The Avicennian terminology of pure quiddity

Introduction of *The Cure*

- al-māhiyyah bi-mā hiya tilka l-māhiyyah* (I.2, 15.2)
- al-ḥayawāniyyah* (I.12, 65.13)
- al-ḥayawān fī nafsīhi* (I.12, 65.16–17)

Categories of *The Cure*

- ṭabīʿat al-ḥayawān* (I.5, 38.18–39.1)
- al-ḥayawān bi-mā huwa ḥayawān faqaṭ* (I.5, 39.6)
- al-insāniyyah* (II.4, 75.7–8)
- al-bayād ... li-dhātīhi* (II.4, 75.13)
- al-thalāthiyyah ... wa-l-rubāʿiyyah* (II.4, 76.3–6)
- al-shayʿiyyah* (IV.5, 159.19ff.)

On the Soul of *The Cure*

- māhiyyat al-insāniyyah ṭabīʿah* (58.12)
- ṭabīʿat al-insāniyyah* (58.15)

Physics of *The Cure*

- māhiyyat al-insān min ḥaythu huwa insān* (I.3, 29.14–15)
- al-insāniyyah māhiyyah* (I.4, 34.5)
- al-insān bi-mā huwa insān* (I.4, 34.9–10)
- al-sawād al-muṭlaq* (II.2, 131.10)
- al-ḥarakah al-muṭlaqah* (II.2, 134.1)
- ṭabāʿīʿ al-umūr wa-dhawātīhā mujarradat al-māhiyyāt* (II.2, 134.11)

Metaphysics of *The Cure*

- ḥaqīqah huwa bi-hā mā huwa* (I.5, 31.6)
- ḥaqīqah khāṣṣah hiya māhiyyah* (I.5, 31.10)
- al-ḥaqīqah allatī ʿalayhā l-shayʿ* (I.5, 31.8–9)
- al-farasiyyah, al-ḥayawāniyyah* (V.1, 196.8; 203.8, 17)
- al-farasiyyah fī nafsīhā farasiyyah faqaṭ* (V.1, 196.16)
- huwwiyat al-insāniyyah* (V.1, 197.10–11)
- al-insāniyyah min ḥaythu hiya insāniyyah* (V.1, 197.13)
- min ḥaythu huwa/hiya insāniyyah faqaṭ* (V.1, 198.7; 198.12–13; 200.9)
- bi-mā huwa huwa* (V.1, 198.8)
- insāniyyah faqaṭ* (V.1, 198.13, 16; 199.6)
- al-insāniyyah allatī hiya min ḥaythu hiya insāniyyah* (V.1, 200.3–5)
- al-ḥayawān bi-mā huwa ḥayawān, al-insān bi-mā huwa insān* (V.1, 201.1–2; 202.3–4)

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- ḥayawān manzūr ilayhi waḥdahu (V.1, 201.6)
- al-ḥayawān bi-dhātīhi (V.1, 201.8)
- dhātuḥu lahu bi-dhātīhi (V.1, 201.9)
- ḥayawān faqaṭ wa-insān faqaṭ (V.1, 201.13)
- ṭabīʿat al-ḥayawāniyyah (V.1, 203.2)
- al-ḥayawān fī annahu ḥayawān (V.1, 203.6)
- al-ḥayawān bi-mujarrad al-ḥayawāniyyah (V.1, 204.8)
- huwa alladhī huwa fī nafsihi (V.1, 204.9–10)
- al-maʿkhūdh bi-dhātīhi hiya l-ṭabīʿah (V.1, 204.17)
- al-ḥayawān al-mujarrad (V.1, 205.5)
- ṭabīʿat al-insān min ḥaythu huwa insān (V.2, 207.10)

Salvation

- al-māhiyyah al-insāniyyah ṭabīʿah (344.10)
- ṭabīʿat al-insāniyyah (344.13–14)
- amr mushtarak ... huwa l-shayʿiyyah (520.1–2)
- al-insān bi-mā huwa insān (536.8)
- al-insāniyyah bi-mā hiya insāniyyah (536.16)
- al-lawniyyah fī annahā lawniyyah (563.12)

Pointers

- ḥaqīqat al-muthallath (vol. 1, 189.1–2)
- al-ṭabīʿah al-aṣliyyah ... mithl al-insāniyyah (vol. 1, 204.5)
- al-insāniyyah (vol. 1, 202.9)
- ḥaqīqatuhu l-dhātīyyah (vols. 3–4, 440.3)
- ḥaqīqat al-muthallathiyyah (vols. 3–4, 441.5)

Notes

- al-insāniyyah al-muṭlaqah (43.11, section 25)
- al-insāniyyah al-mujarradah (44.4–5, section 26)
- huwa bi-mā huwa ḥayawān (61.6, section 49)
- huwa min ḥaythu huwa ḥayawān (61.7, section 49)
- al-sawād al-muṭlaq (99.12–13, section 121)
- ṭabīʿat al-insān bi-mā hiya tilka l-ṭabīʿah (139.1, section 185)
- kawn al-ḥayawān ḥayawān (394.5, section 699)
- al-ḥayawāniyyah ... min ḥaythu hiya ḥayawāniyyah (394.4–5, section 699)

Appendix 2:

The existence of pure quiddity: A list of textual references

Introduction of The Cure

I.2, 15.1: *wa-māhiyyāt al-ashyā' qad takūn fī a'yān al-ashyā' wa-qad takūn fī l-taṣawwur*

I.12, 69.11–12: *fa-yakūnu mā huwa fī 'ilm Allāh wa-l-malā'ikah min ḥaqīqat al-ma'lūm wa-l-mudrak min al-umūr al-ṭabī'iyah mawjūd qabl al-kathrah*

On the Soul of The Cure

IV.2, 178.14–17: *fa-naqūlu inna ma'ānī jamī' al-umūr al-kā'inah fī l-'ālam mimmā salafa wa-mimmā ḥaḍara wa-mimmā yurīdu an yakūna mawjūdah fī 'ilm al-bāri' wa-l-malā'ikah al-'aqliyyah min jihatin wa-mawjūdah fī anfus al-malā'ikah al-samāwiyyah min jihatin*

II.2, 58.11–14: *al-ṣūrat al-insāniyyah wa-l-māhiyyah al-insāniyyah ṭabī'ah ... qad 'araḍa lahā an wujūdat fī hādihā l-shakḥ wa-dhālika l-shakḥ*

Physics of The Cure

I.2, 21.5–6: *al-ṣūrah māhiyyah mā bi-nafsihā zā'idat al-wujūd 'alā l-wujūd alladhī li-l-hayūlā*

Metaphysics of The Cure

I.5, 31.7–8: *wa-dhālika huwa alladhī rubbamā sammaynā l-wujūd al-khāṣṣ wa-lam nurid bi-hi ma'nā l-wujūd al-ithbātī*

I.5, 31.12–13: *ḥaqīqah kadhā mawjūdah immā fī l-a'yān aw fī l-anfus aw muṭlaqan ya'ummuhā jamī'an*

I.5, 34.16–17: *al-mawjūd ... fa-innahu ma'nā muttafiq fīhi 'alā l-taqdīm wa-l-ta'khīr wa-awwal mā yakūn yakūn li-l-māhiyyah allatī hiya l-jawhar thumma yakūn li-mā ba'dahu*

V.1, 196.12–13: *bal [mawjūd] min ḥaythu huwa farasiyyah faqaṭ¹*

V.1, 197.10–198.2: *fa-innahu laysa idhā kāna l-insān wāḥid aw abyāḍ kānat huwiyyat al-insāniyyah hiya huwiyyat al-waḥdah aw al-bayāḍ ... huwiyyat al-insāniyyah shay' ghayr kull wāḥid minhumā wa-lā yūjad fī ḥadd dhālika l-shay' illā l-insāniyyah faqaṭ*

V.1, 201.10–13: *fa-hādihā l-i'tibār mutaqqaddim fī l-wujūd ... wa-bi hādihā l-wujūd lā huwa jins wa-lā naw' wa-lā shakḥ wa-lā wāḥid wa-lā kathīr bal huwa bi-hādihā l-wujūd ḥayawān faqaṭ wa-insān faqaṭ*

V.1, 204.6–10: *bal al-ḥayawān bi-sharṭ lā shay' ākhar wujūduhu fī l-dhihn faqaṭ ... wa-ammā l-ḥayawān mujarrad lā bi-sharṭ shay' ākhar fa-lahu wujūd fī l-a'yān ... fa-l-ḥayawān mujarrad al-ḥayawāniyyah mawjūd fī l-a'yān ... bal huwa alladhī huwa fī nafsihi khāl 'an al-sharā'it al-lāḥiqah mawjūd fī l-a'yān*

1 For an explanation and justification of this reading as well as a full interpretation of the passage, see chapter II.

V.1, 204.16–205.2: *yuqālu inna **wujūdahā** aqdam min al-wujūd al-ṭabīʿī ... wa-huwa alladhī yakhuṣṣu wujūduhu bi-annahū **l-wujūd al-ilāhī***

Salvation

520.1–2: *fa-inna **l-ma'nā lahu wujūd** fī l-a'yān wa-**wujūd fī l-nafs** wa-amr mushtarak fa-dhālika l-mushtarak huwa l-shay'iyah*

537.13: *wa-l-kulli bi-l-i'tibār al-awwal **mawjūd bi-l-fi'l fī l-ashyā'***

Notes

43, section 25: *wa-ma'qūl al-awwal ... **huwa nafs al-ṣūrah al-ma'qūlah wa-hiya l-insāniyyah al-muṭlaqah***

394, section 699: *hādihā l-ma'nā [al-ḥayawāniyyah min ḥaythu hiya ḥayawāniyyah] **yaḥṣulu bi-dhātihī***

Appendix 3: Quiddity and Avicenna's matrices of distinctions

Context	Considerations or mental aspects (<i>i'tibārāt</i>) (Introduction 1.2 / <i>Metaphysics</i> V.1)	Temporal and/or essential status (Introduction 1.12)	Conditions (<i>shurūṭ</i>) (<i>Metaphysics</i> V.1, <i>Salvation</i>)	Logical descriptor (Introduction 1.12 <i>Metaphysics</i> V.1)	Mode of existence (<i>Metaphysics</i> V.1 and VIII)
First/God	in itself (<i>min ḥaythu hiya hiya</i>)	prior to multiplicity (<i>qabl al-kathrah</i>) (in an absolute sense)	negatively conditioned (<i>bi-sharṭ lā shay'</i>)	intellectual, divine (' <i>aqīl'</i> , <i>ilāhī</i>)	identical with God's mode of existence and special essential being
separate intellects	in itself (<i>min ḥaythu hiya hiya</i>)	prior to multiplicity (<i>qabl al-kathrah</i>)	negatively conditioned (<i>bi-sharṭ lā shay'</i>)	intellectual, divine (' <i>aqīl'</i> , <i>ilāhī</i>)	irreducible and distinct, but not identical with the intellects' existence
concrete existents	in the concrete (<i>fī l-a'yān</i>)	in multiplicity (<i>fī l-kathrah</i>)	unconditioned (<i>lā bi-sharṭ shay'</i>) or conditioned (<i>bi-sharṭ shay'</i>)	natural (<i>ṭabīṭ</i>)	pure quiddity is irreducible, immanent, and a part of the concrete existent
human mind:					
– universal concept	in conception, in the mind, in the intellect, in the soul (<i>fī l-ṭaṣawwur, fī l-dhīn, fī l-'aql, fī l-naḥs</i>)	after multiplicity (<i>ba'd al-kathrah</i>)	conditioned (<i>bi-sharṭ shay'</i>)	logical and intellectual (<i>manṭiqī and 'aqīlī</i>)	pure quiddity is irreducible and a part of the complex universal concept in the intellect
– concept of pure quiddity	'in itself' in conception, in the mind or the intellect (<i>min ḥaythu hiya hiya fī l-ṭaṣawwur, fī l-dhīn, fī l-'aql</i>)	after multiplicity (<i>ba'd al-kathrah</i>) (but connected to quiddity prior to multiplicity)	negatively conditioned (<i>bi-sharṭ lā shay'</i>)	intellectual (<i>'aqīlī</i>)	irreducible and distinct concept in the intellect

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