AVICENNA IV. METAPHYSICS
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Published: December 15, 1987
Last Updated: October 27, 2017

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General characteristics. Avicenna's metaphysical system is one of the most comprehensive and detailed in the history of philosophy. Its ingredients, its conceptual building blocks, so to speak, are largely Aristotelian and Neoplatonic, but the final structure is other than the sum of its parts. Avicenna himself hints at this when in introducing his magnum opus, the voluminous *Šefāʾ* (Healing), he writes: "There is nothing in the books of the ancients but we have included in this our book. If something is not found in a place where it is normally found, it would be found in another place where I judge it more fit to be in. I have added to this what I have apprehended with my thought and attained through my reflection, particularly in physics, metaphysics and logic" (*Šefāʾ*, *Isagoge*, pp. 9-10).

While the ingredients of his metaphysics derive "from the books of the ancients," Avicenna criticizes, selects and refines this material, but above all, informs it with his own insights to construct a world-view that has a character all its own. He also injects into it a pattern of deductive reasoning that anticipates the kind of thinking encountered in seventeenth-century European rationalist philosophies. At the same time, it should be remembered that his metaphysics is part of medieval Islam's intellectual history. It represents a climactic development of medieval Islamic Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought. It also has to be understood (in part, at least) as a response to

doctrines encountered in Islamic theology (*kalām*).

The Islamic philosopher who influenced Avicenna most was Fārābī (d. 339/950). Avicenna was indebted to Fārābī's various exegeses of Aristotle's works, logical and philosophical. He was also greatly influenced by the Neoplatonic emanative scheme Fārābī outlines in some of his more popular works. Avicenna, however, introduces important modifications to this scheme, gives a more comprehensive and detailed account of the descent of beings from God, and makes the connection between his version of emanation and the essence-existence distinction explicit and intimate. Thus the two schemes while closely related remain distinct. It should also be added that Avicenna's theory of the state, which is connected with his metaphysics, is grounded in Fārābī's political philosophy. There is, moreover, in Avicenna's metaphysics an underlying Farabian motif, namely, that the quest after philosophical knowledge is for the sake of perfecting one's soul and hence for the attainment of happiness in this world and the next.

As to the Islamic theologians, the *motakallemūn*, his criticism of their doctrines tends to be muted. Nonetheless, it represents an important undercurrent of his metaphysical writings. He refers to the theologians by name when criticizing their interpretation of the meaning of the term "origination," *ḥodūṯ*, and the doctrine of the world's creation ex nihilo it implies. In other instances, however, he makes no explicit mention of the *motakallemūn*, but the doctrines he criticizes are definitely identifiable as held by one of their schools. Thus, for example, he criticizes the doctrine of latency (*komūn*), a theory that has Stoic antecedents, but which in Islam was developed by the Muʿtazilite theologian Ebrāhīm Naẓẓām (d. ca. 840) and identified with him and his followers. Avicenna is also highly critical of the notorious Muʿtazilite argument for bodily resurrection and the doctrine on which it is based, namely that nonexistence (*ʿadam*) is "a thing" (*šayʾ*). Again, in his discussions of efficient causality, he answers typical arguments used by the Asḥʿarite occasionalist theologians to deny secondary causes. It should be added that as an Aristotelian, Avicenna criticizes and rejects atomism, his criticism, no doubt, being directed at the Greek atomists. But was it not aimed at *kalām* atomism as well? Here, again, there is no reference to the *motakallemūn*, the vast majority of whom were atomists. It is true that their doctrine of the transient atom, temporally created ex nihilo, contrasts sharply with the Greek concept of eternal atoms. But Avicenna's criticism is logically applicable to both versions of atomism. Taking into account that he opposed a number of the doctrines of the *motakallemūn*,

including that of the world's creation ex nihilo, intimately related to their atomism, it seems unlikely that he did not intend his criticism of atomism to include its *kalām* version.

Criticism in Avicenna's metaphysical writings, by no means confined to the *kalām* or to atomism, is a manifestation of a very characteristic aspect of these writings, the analytic. It is here that one encounters his distinctions, clarifications and hard-headed attempts to solve problems. This is complemented by a synthetic aspect, where he strives to construct a deductive system. Both aspects, however, interweave, the system he constructs being constantly buttressed by the analyses and distinctions he makes. This system is admittedly an ambitious one, particularly as it includes a cosmological scheme in which he endeavors to infer from the First Principle, God, the Ptolemaic astronomical scheme to which he subscribes. Such an attempt, wide open as it is to serious criticism, serves to reveal a facet of his rationalist approach, namely, his belief that in principle, at least, some human minds, whether intuitively or "naturally," as with prophets, or through arduous processes of discursive reasoning, are capable of grasping the basic structure of reality as it emanates from its Source.

This brings us to the "rationalist" character of Avicenna's philosophy, manifest in what he holds to be (a) the object of our knowledge and (b) the manner of attaining it. The principle of all existence, God, for Avicenna, is pure intellect (*ʿaql maḥż*) and hence the highest object of human knowledge is intellect. All other existents, whether minds, souls or bodies, emanate from the pure intellect, God. They form an orderly hierarchical chain of causes and effects that are necessarily connected and hence (when all necessary conditions obtain) are rationally inferable from each other. Knowledge by its very definition is conceptual, intellectual, consisting (on the human level) of the mind's reception of the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*). One class of these intelligibles which includes the self-evident truths of logic are received directly by all men from the Active Intellect, the last of the celestial intelligences emanating from God. They are received "directly" in the sense that this reception requires neither observation of the external world nor the thinking processes associated with such observation. Another class of intelligibles, less simple and less general, the secondary, consisting of universal concepts and inferences, are normally "acquired" in a different manner. Normally, they require the presence of the self-evident logical truths and observation of the external world with concomitant thinking activities on the sensory, imaginative,

particular levels. Observation and its accompanying thinking activities, however, do not themselves in the real sense acquire the secondary intelligibles. Rather, they are activities that prepare the soul for the reception of the secondary intelligibles from the Active Intellect. Only prophets can receive the secondary intelligibles directly, without the need of the preparatory activities of the soul and the learning processes that accompany them. Thus the object of knowledge is the intelligible, received from a rational principle, the Active Intellect.

But this is not all. To fully appreciate the extent of Avicenna's rationalism it should be noted that he also includes with the class of intelligibles that normally do not require for their reception perception of the external world primary concepts that are the most general—the concepts of "the existent," "the thing," and "the necessary." These, like the self evident propositional truths of logic, are "impressed on the soul in a primary manner." This class of intelligibles, consisting of the primary concepts and the self-evident truths of logic, are sufficient in Avicenna's system for formulating a proof leading to the existence of God, demonstrating His uniqueness, and for inferring the existing of the world (with its order) from God. Thus the highest form of metaphysical knowledge is attainable rationally, independently of our perception of the external world.

The affinity of this rationalism to seventeenth-century continental European modes of philosophizing has often been noted, particularly the similarity between the Cartesian *Cogito* and Avicenna's hypothetical example of a human floating in space (cf. Psychology). According to this example, if we imagine ourselves to be born all at once, fully mature, but suspended in space in such a manner that we are totally unaware of our physical and bodily circumstances, we would still be aware of ourselves as individual selves. Without denying parallels between this example and aspects of Descartes' process of systematic doubting of the senses, it is important to recognize a difference quite fundamental for understanding Avicenna's metaphysical approach.

Avicenna's metaphysical starting point is not doubt. (The primary intention of the example of a person suspended in space is to show that the human rational soul is immaterial and individual.) As has been noted, the concept of "the existent" for him is a primary concept, intuited immediately. It is indubitable. He begins one version of his proof from contingency for God's existence with the statement: "There is no doubt that there is existence" (*lā*

šakka anna hāhonā wojūdan). But existence, as he points out, divides into that which is in itself necessary and that which in itself is only possible. The existents immediately encountered (including ourselves) are in themselves only possible. They can exist or not exist. Yet in fact they do exist. Why is this the case? In his metaphysics, Avicenna, in effect, seeks an answer to this very question, namely, why is it that that which in itself is only possible (and this includes the whole world as distinct from God) exists at all?

Definition and scope of metaphysics. Although the question of why is it that that which in itself is only possible exists at all is at the heart of Avicenna's metaphysics, it does not constitute its starting point. In the *Metaphysics* of the *Šefāʾ*, for example, it suggests itself quite unobtrusively when Avicenna is establishing one of his basic premises for his proof of God's existence. Nor is the existence of God and the simplicity of His essence "the subject matter" of metaphysics. Rather, as will be shortly seen, these are among the things "sought after" in metaphysics. Avicenna's starting point and conception of metaphysics are Aristotelian. This Aristotelianism is clearly seen in the distinction he draws between metaphysics and the two other theoretical sciences, physics and mathematics. He makes this distinction in terms of two related criteria: (a) the relation of the objects of knowledge belonging to each of these sciences to matter and motion; (b) the subject matter, in its broadest sense, of each of these disciplines.

The objects of knowledge of both physics and mathematics are always "mixed" with matter (and motion), but in different ways. With physics, the object is always "mixed" with a specific kind of matter. A human being, for example, as the object of natural science, can not be separated from a specific kind of matter, from the material body of the genus, animal. Again, the object may be of a different sort that can be separated from matter—causality, for example. But when it is the object of natural science, it must be associated, not only with matter, but with matter of a specific kind. The physicist is concerned with the cause of motion of this or that specific kind of matter, not with causality as such. In the case of mathematics, on the other hand, although its object is always "mixed" with matter, it is not "mixed" with a specific kind of matter. Triangles and squares in external non-mental existence must be of some kind of material, but not confined to a specific kind. As such, as objects of knowledge, they undergo a degree of abstraction, whereby the mathematician can consider them dissociated from a specific kind of matter. Other objects of mathematical knowledge, such as plurality or unity, can be separated from

matter. But as objects of mathematical inquiry, they are treated as associated with matter, but not of a specific kind. Again, there is a degree of abstraction. But they are not regarded in pure abstraction. The mathematician considers them in terms of quantity, related to some kind of matter or another, but not confined to a specific kind.

Metaphysics, however, always has as its object that which is not "mixed" with matter. The object may be necessarily immaterial, as with God and mind. It can, however, consist of objects that can mix with matter. The metaphysician, however, is concerned with these objects in themselves, *men ḥayṯo hīa hīa*, abstractly and immaterially. Thus to take causality again as an example, unlike the natural scientist who is concerned with the cause of a specific kind of matter, the metaphysician is concerned with causality as such and with causality as one of the concomitants of the existent considered as such. This brings us to the second criterion for the distinction between the three theoretical sciences: their respective subject matter.

All three theoretical sciences have for their subject matter the existent, but with a difference. Physics is concerned with the existent inasmuch as it is in motion or in its relation to motion. Mathematics is concerned with the existent inasmuch as it is quantified or relates to measure and quantity. Metaphysics, on the other hand, has for its object the existent without qualification. Its subject matter is the existent inasmuch as it exists (*al-mawjūd be mā howa mawjūd*), or, as Avicenna puts it in his *Najāt*, "absolute existence" (*al-wojūd al-moṭlaq*). Metaphysics undertakes investigating the relation of the existent to the ten categories, the states that affect it, and the concomitants (*lawāḥeq*) that adhere to it. Following the methodology of the *Posterior Analytics*, Avicenna distinguishes between "the subject matter" (*mawżūʿ*) of metaphysics and that which "is sought in it" (*maṭlūb*). Among the things that are sought after and established in metaphysics are the principles presupposed in natural science and mathematics. In this sense, physics and mathematics receive "their credentials," as it were, from metaphysics.

Among the things "sought after" in metaphysics are the four causes (material, formal, efficient, and final) of existing things and the ultimate cause of all existence, God. Hence, investigating the four causes and the existence and nature of God do not constitute "the subject matter" of metaphysics. This, as has been pointed out, is the existent inasmuch as it exists. But the concept of the existent qua existent as the subject matter of metaphysics raises a methodological difficulty regarding the quest in it for the principles of existing

things. “If the existent is made the subject of this science,” it could be argued, writes Avicenna, “then the principles of the existent can not be established in it, since in every science, investigation is of things concomitant to its subject, not of its principles” (*Šefāʾ*, *Metaphysics*, p. 14).

In the endeavor to resolve this problem, Avicenna maintains that “theoretical inquiry of the principles is also an investigation of the concurrent concomitants (*ʿawāreż*) of this subject.” For, being a principle is not a defining characteristic of “the existent.” He then adds a qualification: The principle sought after is not the principle “of the whole of existence.” Otherwise the principle would be a principle of itself. The principle that is sought after is hence the principle of the existent that is caused. God, to paraphrase Avicenna, can not be the principle of His own existence, but is the principle and cause of all other existents.

This brings us to the ultimate quest, ultimate principle sought after in metaphysics, the existence of God. This existence, Avicenna asserts, is not self-evident, but has to be demonstrated. Furthermore, its demonstration belongs solely to metaphysics, not to any other theoretical science. Assertions relating to God’s existence in the Physics of the *Šefāʾ*, he states, were out of their place, put there only to whet the reader’s appetite. As indicated earlier, Avicenna offers not only a rational proof for God’s existence, but also a rational deduction from this existence of the world’s existence and order. Proof and deduction, however, employ the distinction between essence and existence, for which Avicenna is noted. This distinction underlies his very significant theory of universals, as well as his theory of efficient causality. For this reason, before turning to the proof of God’s existence, it is perhaps best to begin with this distinction as it relates to his theory of universals and also say something supplementary about his theory of efficient causality.

The essence-existence distinction. For Avicenna, the distinction between essence and existence applies to all existents, actual and potential, other than God. At the heart of this distinction is the theory of the essence, quiddity, or nature of such existents considered strictly in itself. An essence, Avicenna states, may exist in external reality, associated with circumstances peculiar to that reality. These circumstances associate with it to form a particular existent. The essence may also exist as a concept in the mind where in this mental existence it also is associated with circumstances peculiar to this existence—for example, circumstances that render it a subject or a predicate. But, he maintains, there is also “a consideration of the essence inasmuch as it

is that essence, without being related to the two [kinds of] existence" (*Šefāʾ*, *Isagoge*, p. 15). In itself, or as such, the essence does not include the idea of existence, whether this is external or mental existence. Existence is not a defining characteristic of essences. From what a thing is, it can not be inferred that it exists.

According to Avicenna, the quiddity (or essence) considered simply as a quiddity, excludes not only the idea of existence, but also the concomitants of existence, unity and plurality. Thus in his typical example of "horseness" as a quiddity considered in itself, he states that "it is neither one nor many, exists neither externally nor in the soul." Moreover, he maintains, the quiddity considered in itself excludes the ideas of universality and particularity. In short, the quiddity as such excludes the ideas of existence, unity, plurality, particularity, and universality.

Avicenna uses this concept of the quiddity considered in itself and the distinction between essence and existence that it carries with it to resolve two problems pertaining to universals. The first is a logical problem that has to do with the predication of a quiddity of a subject. If the quiddity as such included universality and particularity, the results would be odd indeed. For then universality or particularity (but not both, since they are mutually exclusive) would form part of the very definition of the quiddity. To use his example, if animality includes universality in its very definition, then we can not predicate it of a particular animal. If, on the other hand, particularity is included in the definition of animality, then this would not merely exclude its predication of a universal subject, but of any individual other than the one specified in the quiddity's definition.

The answer Avicenna finds is in the concept of a quiddity which, when considered in itself, is devoid of the notions of universality and particularity. Universality and particularity are then added to it when it is conceived in the mind. This brings us to Avicenna's important theory of the universal, which for him is always a concept in the mind. The quiddity as such is not a universal. It is, however, a component of the universal. For the universal is compounded of two things, the quiddity as such and universality, that quality that renders the quiddity predicable of many instances. The general framework of this theory is Aristotelian. But Avicenna introduces refinements and the distinction between the quiddity as such and universality. He also adds to it a Neoplatonic dimension by maintaining that quiddities have existence in the celestial intelligences, as well as in the particulars of sense and

in the human minds.

The second problem relating to universals which Avicenna strove to resolve is metaphysical. This is the problem of the one and the many, in an Avicennian context. How can the selfsame quiddity be "found in many," to use his own words, and not be many? To answer this, Avicenna again invokes the concept of the quiddity considered as such. For although a quiddity can exist in external reality associated with particular circumstances, rendering it in this association an individual, it can be considered in itself, for what it is, in dissociation from these circumstances. When thus considered, it excludes the ideas of unity and plurality: These become totally inapplicable to it. Thus if one asks whether a quiddity like humanity is one or many, Avicenna's reaction to such a question is that "there is no need for a reply because inasmuch as it is the defining identity (*howīya*) of humanity it is other than the two alternatives. In the definition of that thing, there is nothing except humanity alone" (*Šefāʾ*, *Metaphysics*, pp. 197-98).

If, then, existence (and its concomitants) are extraneous to the quiddity as such, the quiddity is existentially neutral, so to speak. There is nothing in it to tip the balance in favor of its existence rather than its nonexistence. Its existence and non-existence are equally possible. That a quiddity which in itself is only possible in fact exists calls for explanation. The explanation that Avicenna offers includes his establishing a premise necessary for his proof of God's existence. This is the premise that the existent that in itself is only possible is causally necessitated by another existent. The argument to establish this premise, as will be shortly seen, is a metaphysical argument. It is, however, complemented by an epistemological argument (which was later adopted by Latin scholastics) that should be noted. This is the argument from the observation of regularities in nature. Avicenna is only too well aware that such observation alone is insufficient to establish the principle of necessary causal connection. Such observation, he asserts, leads only to concomitance. Something else is needed. This is hidden premise (*qīās ḵafīy*) to the effect that if the regularities were accidental or coincidental they would not have happened always or for the most part (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 2.5.156b.10-16). From this he concludes that these regularities are the necessary outcome of inherent essential casual properties in things. It should be added that Avicenna subscribes to the four Aristotelian causes. Unlike Aristotle, however, he does not confine efficient causality to the production of motion, but maintains that, as with God in producing the world, it is productive of

existence itself.

God's existence and the world's emanation. Demonstrating God's existence, His utter oneness and the manner of the world's emanation from Him are the high points of Avicenna's metaphysical endeavor. The proof he offers is his proof from contingency, noted for its a priori character, that is, for its total dependence on reason. Thus, he does not argue for the contingency of things on the basis of our observation of change in the world. For the concept of the possible is either a primary concept, immediately intuited by the mind, or rationally derived from a primary concept, immediately intuited by the mind, the concept of the necessary. It is also a metaphysical proof, as distinct from a proof in *Physics*. Thus it is not based on the observation of motion in the world, leading ultimately to the Prime Mover. It is not in any sense a proof that infers God's existence from the observation of His handiwork. On this Avicenna is explicit. After giving one version of his proof from contingency, for example, he writes: "Reflect on how our proof for the existence and oneness of the First and His being free from attributes did not require reflection on anything except his existence itself and how it did not require any consideration of His creation and acting, even though the latter [provide] evidential proof (*dalīl*) for Him. This mode, however, is more reliable and noble, that is, where when we consider the state of existence, we find that existence inasmuch as it is existence bears witness to Him, while He thereafter bears witness to all that comes after Him in existence" (*Ešārāt*, p. 482).

Although Avicenna gives closely related but somewhat different versions of the proof, they all share its a priori character. Underlying these versions is Avicenna's theory that there are primary concepts, those of "the existent," "the thing," and "the necessary," that are rationally intuited without the need for perceptual experience of the external world. These parallel the self-evident propositional logical truths that, again, are purely rational. The versions of the proof also share basically the same structure. An existent in itself is either necessary or only possible. If necessary, then this is the existent we are seeking, God. If only possible, then it can be demonstrated that such a contingent being ultimately requires the existent that is necessary in Himself. In either case, there must be an existent necessary in Himself, the one God.

The version of the proof in the *Metaphysics* of the *Šefāʾ*, although it is dispersed in different places in this work and has to be reassembled, remains the most detailed and comprehensive. It is also the one that argues explicitly for the causal premise presupposed in the other versions. The proof in this version

can be summed up as follows. Existents are either such that their existence is in itself necessary or only possible. If we suppose an existent that in itself is necessary, then, it can be shown that it would not be caused, would necessarily be one, unique and without multiplicity in its being. If we suppose an existent that in itself is only possible, then it can be shown that it would require for its existence the existent that is necessary in Himself. For an existent that in itself is only possible can equally exist or not exist. Why, then, if we suppose it to exist, should it exist at all? An external cause would be needed to explain why it had been "specified" with existence rather than non-existence. Now if in relation to the supposed cause, the existence of the contingent is not "necessitated," then it would remain purely possible and no explanation for its existence would have been given. Another cause would have to be posited and if this is not a necessitating cause, yet another, and so on ad infinitum. Even if, for the sake of argument, the infinity of such causes is allowed, they would still not explain why the contingent exists. Hence, since we have supposed it to exist, then the extraneous cause would have to necessitate it. In other words, Avicenna is arguing not merely that if the contingent exists, it must have an extraneous cause, but that this extraneous cause necessitates its existence. Thus the existence of such a contingent, while in itself only possible, would be necessary through another.

The cause that necessitates its effect, for Avicenna, is the essential cause. It is the accidental cause that precedes its effect in time and as such a chain of accidental causes and effects can be infinite. A chain of such accidental causes would not constitute an actual infinite. Not so with the chain of essential causes and their effects. The essential cause coexists with its effect, its priority to the effect being ontological not temporal. A series of coexisting causes and effects can not be infinite. For the infinite they would constitute would be an actual infinite, which, for Avicenna, is demonstrably impossible. The chain must have a first cause, the existent necessary for Himself, God.

That Avicenna also wishes to "infer" the existence of the world and its order (though not in all its detail) from God's existence, in the way in demonstration the effect is inferred from the cause, is clear from the following statement of intention early in the *Metaphysics* of the *Šefāʾ*: "It will become clear to you anon through an intimation that we have a way of proving the First Principle, not by the method of evidential inference (*estedlāl*) from the things perceived by the senses, but by way of universal rational premises that render it necessary that there is for existence a principle that is necessary in its

existence, that makes it impossible for this principle to be in any way multiple, and makes it necessary that the whole is necessitated by Him according to the order possessed by the whole. Because of our incapacity, however, we are unable to adopt this demonstrative method which is the method of arriving at the secondary existents from the primary principles and the effect from the cause, except with some groupings of the ranks of existing things, not in detail" (*Šefāʾ*, *Metaphysics*, p. 21).

There can be little doubt that the "groupings of the ranks of existing things" in the last sentence above refers to the celestial triads which, according to Avicenna, emanate from the first intelligence that proceeds directly from God. In explaining this emanative scheme, he employs the concepts of the necessary in itself, the necessary through another, and the possible in itself, the latter two being the consequence of his essence-existence distinction.

God, according to Avicenna, undergoes an eternal act of self-knowledge, resulting in a necessitated effect, a first intelligence. Involved here is the principle that from the one only one proceeds. The first intelligence then encounters the three facts of existence: (1) God's being necessary in Himself; (2) its own existence as necessitated; (3) its own existence as in itself only possible. It conceives each of these facts of existence. Since from the one only one proceeds, each of these three acts of cognition produce one existent—hence the triads. Its act of knowing (1) produces another intelligence; of knowing (2) a celestial soul; of (3) a celestial body, the outermost sphere of the universe. The second intelligence undertakes a similar cognitive process resulting in the emanation from it of the sphere of the fixed stars. This cognitive activity is repeated by successive intelligences, giving rise to successive triads. The bodily components of these triads include the planetary spheres and the spheres of the sun and the moon. The last of the celestial intelligences is the Active Intellect, from which our world of generation and corruption emanates. In each of the celestial triads, the intellect acts as the teleological cause of that triad: The soul within the triad desires the intellect, causing the eternal circular motion of the third component of the triad, the celestial sphere. It should be added that the emanative process is eternal. God, the eternal necessitating cause, ever in act, necessitates the existence of an eternal effect, the world.

Divine knowledge, providence, and prophethood. The world thus emanates from God as a consequence of His self-knowledge. This self-knowledge entails His knowing Himself as the cause of all existents, and hence knowing the

consequent effects of His causality. Avicenna states that in this way God knows all particular existents, but "in a universal way." This type of knowing the particular also belongs to the celestial intelligences, as distinct from the celestial souls that know particulars in their particularity. To understand what knowing the particular "in a universal way" means, one must consider a peculiarity of the Avicennian celestial triads.

This peculiarity, a consequence of the principle that from the one only one proceeds, consists in the fact that in this system each existent in each of the celestial triads is the only member of its species. This is in total contrast with the existents in the terrestrial world, where a triad of existents may be said to continue. But this would be a triad of kinds only, not of individuals each of which is the sole member of its species. Thus there are numerous human intellects of a species, numerous souls and numerous bodies of various species. Now Avicenna holds that divine knowledge is conceptual, eternal, and changeless. Its object is the universal. In the case of the celestial triads, God knows the species of each individual of the triad and, moreover, that each individual is the only member of that species. In this sense, knowing the universal species means knowing the one member of this species. This applies also to celestial events like eclipses whose occurrences are mapped out eternally for God, so to speak, without this involving any change in Him. This is also possible because the event is related to individuals that are the only members of their species. When it comes to the terrestrial world, where the individual is not the only member of its species, God (and the celestial intelligences) knows only the kinds of existents, not their individual members. Of the celestial beings, only the souls in the triads know the particulars of the terrestrial world as particulars. These souls are instrumental in causing particular temporal events in the terrestrial world. Not only do they know the particulars in this world as particulars, but have fore-knowledge of future terrestrial temporal events.

Closely associated with Avicenna's doctrine of divine knowledge is his doctrine of divine providence. He writes: "Providence consists in the First's knowing in Himself [the mode] of the good order, in His being in Himself a cause of goodness and perfection in terms of what is possible, and in His being satisfied with [its having the order] in the manner that has been mentioned. He would then conceive the good order in the best possible manner. Consequently, what He conceives in the best possible manner would emanate from Him in the manner—in terms of what is possible—that is most completely conducive to

order" (*Šefāʾ*, *Metaphysics*, p. 415).

This is not to deny the existence of evil which enters the world of generation and corruption, associated with terrestrial matter and potency. In a detailed analysis of the different types of mundane evils, moral and physical, Avicenna maintains that they affect individuals, not the species and that, although numerous, they are not predominant. Most evils are accidental consequences of what produces the greater good. Fire, for example, is basically beneficial, but on occasion harms individuals. Could not God then have created the world free from such harm, such evil? Not this type of world, Avicenna answers, since then, to take the example of fire, he would have to create a fire that neither warms nor burns, a contradiction. A world free from evil is possible in a different mode of existence. But the creation of such a world would exclude the creation of ours which, though not without evils, would have greater good than the former. For Avicenna, this is the best of all possible worlds.

Political philosophy. The concept of divine providence relates Avicenna's metaphysics to his political philosophy. This political philosophy, essentially Farabian, rests on the theory of prophethood and revelation. The law, revealed through prophets, is not only necessary for the existence of human society, but for the very survival of man. It consists of the truths of theoretical and practical philosophy, conveyed, however, in language which the vast, non-philosopher, majority of humanity can understand. This is the language of the particular example, instead of the abstract universal concept, of the image and the symbol. Without prophets and the law they reveal the good order will not be realized in the terrestrial world of men. The existence of the law-revealing prophet is the necessary consequence of God's knowledge of the good order, an expression of His providence.

The appearance of prophets on the historical scene, however, is very infrequent. This has practical implications regarding the setting down of institutions and traditions to ensure the continuance of the good order once the prophet is gone. But the infrequency of the appearance of prophets has a metaphysical side, a metaphysical explanation involving Avicenna's doctrine of the human soul. This soul, individual and immaterial, emanates from the celestial intelligences. It is created with the body, but not imprinted in it. Its association with the body is conditioned by the material compositions that receive it. These compositions vary and their variance determines the quality of the souls that are created with them. The bodily composition that induces the reception of a prophetic soul, which is the highest quality of human souls,

occurs very infrequently, Avicenna tells us. This soul is endowed with exceptional cognitive powers. Some prophetic souls receive symbolic knowledge directly from the celestial souls. Others (of a still higher rank) receive from the Active Intellect all or most of the intelligibles instantaneously. These intelligibles are then conveyed in the language of imagery, example, and symbol understood by all.

In the hierarchy of existents, the prophet stands highest in the world of generation and corruption. In Avicenna's cosmology he is, in effect, a link between the celestial and terrestrial worlds. It is perhaps no accident that Avicenna concludes the *Metaphysics*, which is the last part of the encyclopedic *Šefāʾ*, with the following words: "If one combines with justice speculative wisdom, he is the happy man. Whoever, in addition to this, wins the prophetic qualities becomes almost a human god. Worship of him, after worship of God, becomes almost allowed. He is indeed the world's earthly master and God's deputy in it."

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