Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion

Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas

Edited by

Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman

BRILL

CONTENTS

PART I

THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE: ISLAMIC CULTURE

PART II

CLASSICAL ARABIC SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

PART III

MUSLIM TRADITIONAL SCIENCES

THE DISTINCTION OF ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE IN AVICENNA'S METAPHYSICS: THE TEXT AND ITS CONTEXT[*]

Amos Bertolacci

In his groundbreaking monograph *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* and in many other magisterial essays, Dimitri Gutas has underscored the key role that metaphysics plays in Avicenna's philosophical system.[1] Gutas' account of metaphysics (as well as of the other main philosophical disciplines), in Avicenna's *œuvre* is based on a full fledged methodology resulting from the critical evaluation of the assumptions of previous scholarship, an insightful analysis of the fundamental texts, and a thorough reconstruction of their doctrinal and historical context. All scholars interested in Avicenna's metaphysics (not to say of his psychology, noetics and epistemology) and Arabic metaphysical speculation in general, can only be thankful to Gutas' pioneering research for having explored and mapped what had been, to a large extent, virgin territory and for having provided a solid, brilliant and comprehensive outline of the whole, thus paving the way to subsequent, more specific investigations.

As a sign of personal heartfelt gratitude and in the footsteps of Gutas' masterly approach outlined above, the present contribution wishes to provide the analysis of a crucial issue of Avicenna's metaphysics. The

[1] D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden: Brill, 1988). Cf. Id., "Ibn Ṭufayl on Ibn Sīnā's Eastern Philosophy," *Oriens*, 34 (1994), 222–41; "The Heritage of Avicenna: The Golden Age of Arabic Philosophy, 1000–ca. 1350", in *Avicenna and His Heritage*, eds. J. Janssens and D. De Smet (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 81–97; "The Logic of Theology in Avicenna," in *Logik und Theologie, Das* Organon *im arabischen und im lateinischen Mittelalter*, eds. D. Perler and U. Rudolph (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 59–72.

issue in question is the famous doctrine of the distinction of essence and existence, as expressed in Avicenna's masterpiece on metaphysics, the *Ilāhīyāt* (*Science of Divine Things*) of the *Kitāb aš-Šifāʾ* (*Book of the Cure*). The present paper will discuss the state-of-the-art, the most relevant textual evidence, and the main features of this doctrine in its context. Avicenna's distinction of essence and existence in created beings is well known: a triangle or a horse, for example, have a determinate essence (to be a three-sided geometrical figure, to be a four-legged solid-hoofed animal with flowing mane and tail, respectively), regardless of their existence in external reality or in the human mind. In the *Ilāhīyāt*, the doctrine in question represents the core element of the more general treatment, in chapter I, 5, of the primary concepts "existent" and "thing", and of their mutual relationship. Since "existent" and "thing" are *grosso modo* equivalent to the notions of "item having existence" and "item having essence" respectively, the account of their distinction (and connection) in this chapter encompasses, in its turn, the distinction of essence and existence.

1. *The Distinction of Essence and Existence: The Current State of Research*

The scholarship on this doctrine is abundant and has a long history, which cannot be accounted for in detail here.[2] Previous studies, however, show similar methodological and doctrinal assumptions worthy to be recalled briefly. With regard to method, the texts of Avicenna dealing with the distinction at hand have not been properly classified: in a few instances (the main texts on the issue), Avicenna deals with the distinction as such (there is one such case in metaphysics and

---

[2] The major study is now R. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003, henceforth: Wisnovsky [2003]). Among recent studies, see also Th.-A. Druart, "'Shay' or 'res' as Concomitant of 'Being' in Avicenna," *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 12 (2001), 125–42 (henceforth: Druart [2001]); P. Porro, "Universaux et *esse essentiae*: Avicenne, Henri de Gand et le «troisième Reich»," in *Le réalisme des universaux*, Cahiers de philosophie de l'université de Caen, 38–39, (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2002), 10–50; O. Lizzini, "*Wujūd-Mawjūd*/Existence-Existent in Avicenna: A key ontological notion of Arabic philosophy," *Quaestio* 3 (2003), 111–38; M. Rashed, "Ibn ʿAdī et Avicenne: sur les types d'existants", in *Aristotele e i suoi esegeti neoplatonici. Logica e ontologia nelle interpretazioni greche e arabe*, Atti del convegno internazionale, Roma, 19–20 ottobre 2001, eds. V. Celluprica, C. D'Ancona, and R. Chiaradonna, Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2004, 107–71 (henceforth: Rashed [2004]).

one in logic); elsewhere, on the contrary, he applies the distinction to specific topics (these further texts constitute additional or complementary evidence). Now, the hierarchy between primary and secondary texts has often been overlooked, with the effect that primary texts are read in the light of the secondary ones, rather than the other way round. Thus, the main text on the issue that is available in metaphysics has been investigated only cursorily, as if it were a complementary text; and so its structure and overall context have not been properly considered.[3] Likewise, the interrelated discriminations that Avicenna draws on this topic have often been effaced. Avicenna's distinction of essence and existence runs parallel to and grounds other distinctions, like that of "thing" and "existent", and that of a nature both in itself (like horseness *qua* horseness) and in its universality. Albeit interconnected, these distinctions are not equivalent to one another and should not be confused.[4] Finally, not all the available texts by Avicenna have been investigated; texts translated into Latin during the Middle Ages have been preferred to other, equally important texts, which (like the main text on the issue that is available in logic) still await being considered in order to get a complete picture of Avicenna's position.

Three main doctrinal outcomes are the result of such methodologies. First, among the concrete applications of the distinction of essence and existence, Avicenna's doctrine of universals has been selected as the vantage point for observing the distinction at hand. Now, since in the *locus classicus* of Avicenna's doctrine of universals, existence is mainly canvassed as external to essence, with much less emphasis on its stable link with this latter, Avicenna's *distinction* of essence and

---

[3] In *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5, for example, the pericope translated below as Text 1 has received the lion's share of attention.

[4] Confusion occurs, for example, if elements belonging to different distinctions are equated (taking for example essence as equivalent to "thing" and existence as equivalent to "existent"), or, more importantly, if a certain reading of the distinction of essence and existence in one of its specific occurrences is applied to the distinction of "thing" and "existent" in general. See, for example, A.-M. Goichon *La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'apres Ibn Sina* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937) (henceforth: Goichon [1937]), 141, n. 2: "C'est donc seulement au sens qui vient d'être précisé qu'Ibn Sīnā admet une distinction entre *la chose* et l'être, en d'autres termes entre *l'essence* et l'existence" (emphasis added); see also below, n. 28. The term "thingness" (*šay'īya*) that Avicenna adopts in order to assimilate the concepts of "thing" and essence (see Wisnovsky [2003], 161–72) presupposes the distinction of these latter two concepts: meaning "the fact of having an essence", "thing-ness" reduces the conceptual difference with regard to essence, that, on the contrary, "thing" (meaning "item having an essence") conveys.

existence has been taken as a doctrine of the *separation* between these two items, leaving aside the equally important aspect of their mutual *connection*. Adopting E. Gilson's expression, Avicenna's doctrine is commonly characterized as a theory of the "neutrality" or "indifference" of essence with respect to existence, or as a theory of the "pure essence" before its acquisition of existence.[5]

Second, since in Avicenna's doctrine of universals existence is not only external to, but also dependent on, essence, being occasionally described as an attribute of the latter, essence has been considered also as prior to existence, and existence conversely as posterior to essence.

Third, the ascription of priority to essence with respect to existence has affected the understanding of the related distinction of the primary concepts "thing" and "existent". The distinction of these two concepts has been interpreted in two main ways. (a) According to the majority of scholars, "thing" and "existent" have different intensions and the same extension, that is to say, they convey distinct meanings, but they refer to the same set of entities.[6] (b) According to other scholars, on the contrary, the intension of "thing" would not only be different from the intension of "existent", but also logically prior to it, insofar as "thing" functions as the subject of which "existent" represent some sort of attribute. Likewise, "thing" would have an extension wider than the extension of "existent", since it would apply to items (the pure essences before they receive existence) to which "existent" does not apply.[7]

---

[5] See E. Gilson, *L'être et l'essence* (Paris: Vrin, 1948, repr. 1972), 122; cp. A. De Libera, *L'arts des généralités, Théories de l'abstraction* (Paris: Aubier, 1999), 501. A. Hasnawi, "Aspects de la synthèse avicennienne," in *Penser avec Aristote*, ed. M. A. Sinaceur (Toulouse: Erès, 1991), 227–44, regards the distinction as an instance of what he calls "principe de clôture eidétique" (236–7).

[6] Goichon [1937], 141–2, n. 2: "Ailleurs, celui-ci [i.e. Avicenne] égale expressément l'extension du concept *shayʾ* à celle du concept *mawjūd*" (with reference to two passages of I, 5); Druart [2001], 125: "'being' and *shayʾ* are convertible…their meanings are distinct"; Wisnovsky [2003], 153: "thing and existent are identical extensionally but different intensionally: things are always existents, and existents are always things; to be a thing and to be an existent have different meanings (Avicenna)"; Rashed [2004], 110–1: "Avicenne souligne…la co-implication des statuts de 'chose' et d''existant'…l'existence effective…est à la fois inséparable et notionnellement distincte de la choséité."

[7] F. Rahman, "Essence and existence in Avicenna," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958), 1–16 (henceforth: Rahman [1958]): "…the concept of 'thing' or 'something'…has a much wider use. It is applicable not only to existent objects but

The doctrine at hand is certainly one of the most difficult found in Avicenna, whose understanding is hindered not only by its theoretical depth, but also by the imperfections of the Arabic edition of the *Ilāhīyāt*, and by the peculiarities of Avicenna's philosophical terminology.[8] In what follows, I underscore some aspects of this doctrine that scholarship just described has not sufficiently brought out. My first point is that the main text on the relationship of essence and existence in metaphysics is *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 (doctrine of the primary concepts or transcendentals) rather than *Ilāhīyāt* V, 1–2 (foundation of the theory of universals): within I, 5 Avicenna considers this relationship as such and in detail, whereas in V, 1–2, as well as elsewhere, he considers it cursorily in one of its particular applications. The texts dealing with the distinction of essence and existence that can be found outside metaphysics (like the main text on this issue in logic), confirm the priority of *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 over the other textual evidence available in metaphysics. Thus, *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 has to be considered before and independently of *Ilāhīyāt* V, 1–2, as well as of the other particular instances of the doctrine.

Second, in *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 Avicenna emphasizes with equal insistence not only the distinction but also the connection of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence. Thus speaking of "neutrality" or "indifference" of

---

also to essences…the word 'something' has the widest possible use…'something' itself is allied to a most general notion of being or 'is-ness'" (p. 7). According to Wisnovsky [2003], position (a) applies to *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 ("thing" and "existent" are intensionally different and extensionally equivalent), whereas position (b) is typical of other parts of the *Ilāhīyāt* and other works of Avicenna ("thing" is logically prior and extensionally wider than "existent", insofar as it functions as subject of predication of "existent", and, contrary to this latter, is applicable also to pure essences). Thus, Wisnovsky remarks that in *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5, "thing and existent are identical extensionally but different intensionally" (151–3), but also that "there are several discussions of essence and existence elsewhere in the *Ilāhīyāt* and in other works from Avicenna's middle period, which suggest that *shayʾ* …is at the very least logically prior to *mawjūd*, and perhaps even a broader category than *mawjūd*" (158–60).

⁸ In the Cairo standard edition of the *Ilāhīyāt*, momentous confusions of similar terms like "existent" (*mawǧūd*) and "existence" (*wuǧūd*), as well as many other incorrect readings, are frequent (see below, nn. 11–14, 26, 31–35, 42, and the list of corrections in A. Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's* Metaphysics *in Avicenna's* Kitāb al-Šifāʾ: *A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought* [Leiden: Brill, 2006], 483–558, (henceforth: Bertolacci [2006]). Moreover, Avicenna uses the same terms in both a non-technical and a technical sense: terms like *šayʾ* and *ḏāt* sometimes are used in a generic way, with the meaning, respectively, of "something" and "self", whereas some other times they are employed in the specific sense of "thing" as primary concept and "essence". I employ quotation marks to distinguish the technical from the non-technical use of terms.

essence with regard to existence may be appropriate (with some quali-
fications, as we shall see) for the relationship of essence and existence
that underlies the doctrine of universals in *Ilāhīyāt* V, 1–2, as well as
other metaphysical doctrines elsewhere, but it is less suitable for the
relationship of essence and existence *tout court* expounded in chapter
I, 5. In V, 1–2, Avicenna deals with the ontological underpinnings of
universality, which is the effect of the mental existence of an essence:
an essence is universal only when it exists in the mind, abstracted from
the many individuals that possess this essence. But mental existence is
only one of two types of existence that Avicenna envisages, the other
type being extra-mental existence. This being the case, the relationship
of essence and existence in the doctrine of universals is primarily the
relationship between essence, on the one side, and only one of the two
particular modes that existence can assume, namely mental existence
(vs. extra-mental existence). It is quite reasonable, therefore, that in V,
1–2 Avicenna approaches the issue from a different perspective from
the above and stresses the external character of existence with respect
to essence, since he is mainly considering existence according to one
of its particular modes, namely mental existence, not existence *tout
court*. In I, 5, on the contrary, he deals with existence generally taken
and provides us with a more comprehensive and balanced account.

Third, together with the attestations of the priority of essence over
existence that are proper to chapters V, 1–2, one finds in chapter I,
5 also hints of a different scenario. This chapter in a way confirms
that essence is prior to existence, since no ordinary conceptual item
can be known without knowing its essence, whereas it can be known
independently from the consideration of its existence; in another way,
however, it also indicates that existence is logically prior to essence,
insofar as the notion of the latter can be assimilated to that of former,
and that "existent" is logically prior to "thing", since the former is a
more "nuclear" concept than the latter. Likewise, chapter I, 5 does
not only attest that "thing" and "existent" have the same extension on
account of their universality, thus substantially confirming the view
(a) mentioned above; it also offers evidence, if read at the light of other
parts of the *Ilāhīyāt*, of the fact that "existent" functions in Avicenna's
metaphysics, contrary to view (b), as a concept more extensive than
"thing", since God can be considered as an "existent" which is not
a "thing".

The following pages will provide, first, a detailed analysis of Avicen-
na's account of the distinction of essence and existence, in the context

of the parallel distinction of "thing" and "existent", in chapter I, 5 of the *Ilāhīyāt* (section 2). Two main results will emerge: first, "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, are not only distinct from one another, but are also intimately connected with one another (section 3); second, "thing" and essence are not only prior to "existent" and existence, but also, in a way, posterior to them. On closer scrutiny, in fact, chapter I, 5 evidences a way of regarding existence as logically prior to essence (section 4), and of taking "existent" as more extensive than "thing" (section 5). After the analysis of chapter I, 5, other instances of the distinction in other passages of the *Ilāhīyāt* will be considered, pointing to their difference with respect to the main text (section 6). This survey will be complemented by the analysis of the distinction in other parts of the *Šifāʾ* and in other works by Avicenna, with special attention to the main text on the issue that can be found in the logic of the *Šifāʾ*: this text substantially confirms the picture emerging from the *Ilāhīyāt*, adding however some important qualifications (section 7).

2. *The Main Text in Metaphysics:* Ilāhīyāt *I, 5*

That *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 is the main text of Avicenna on the relationship of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, is evident from several points of view. In terms of content, in this chapter these two pairs of notions are not simply touched upon or applied to a certain theme, as happens elsewhere, but are also analyzed in detail, so that the exposition here is much more extensive than in the other texts. In terms of position within the overall work, moreover, this chapter occurs at the beginning of the *Ilāhīyāt* and precedes the resumptions of the same topic in the following portion of the work, so that many of the subsequent *loci* refer back explicitly to it. The main topics of chapter I, 5 can be outlined as follows:[9]

----

[9] *Aš-Šifāʾ, al-Ilāhīyāt* (1), eds. Ǧ. Š. Qanawātī and S. Zāyid (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-ʿĀmma li-Šuʾūn al-Maṭābiʿ al-Amīrīya, 1960); *aš-Šifāʾ, al-Ilāhīyāt* (2), eds. M. Y. Mūsā, S. Dunyā, and S. Zāyid (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-ʿĀmma li-Šuʾūn al-Maṭābiʿ al-Amīrīya, 1960). The division of the chapter into sections, and the titles given to each section, are mine (see *Libro della Guarigione, Le Cose Divine di Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)*, a cura di A. Bertolacci [Turin: UTET, 2007], 181–195). For a cursory analysis of this chapter, see Rahman [1958], 4–9; its overall English translation and systematic commentary is available in M. E. Marmura, "Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the Metaphysics of his al-Šifāʾ," in *Logos Islamikos*, Studia Islamica in Honorem G. M. Wickens, eds. R. M. Savory and D. A. Agius (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies,

Outline 1: Contents of *Ilāhiyāt* I, 5

[1] The primary concepts in general (pp. 29.5–30.2)
　　[1.1] "Existent", "thing" and "necessary" as primary concepts
　　　　(p. 29.5–6)
　　[1.2] The primary concepts as the first principles of the activity of
　　　　conceptualizing (pp. 29.7–30.1)
　　[1.3] Proof of the necessity of the primary concepts (p. 30.1–2)
[2] "Existent" and "thing" (pp. 30.3–32.5)
　　[2.1] "Existent" and "thing" cannot be defined: examples of
　　　　pseudo-definitions of "existent" and "thing" (pp. 30.3–31.2)
　　　　[2.1.1] "Existent", "thing" and "one" as primary and univer-
　　　　　　　sal concepts (p. 30.3–4)
　　　　[2.1.2] The primary concepts cannot be defined (p. 30.4–6)
　　　　[2.1.3] Examples (pp. 30.6–31.2)
　　[2.2] Distinction between "existent" and "thing" (pp. 31.2–32.2)
　　　　[2.2.1] First formulation (p. 31.2–9)
　　　　[2.2.2] Second formulation (pp. 31.10–32.2)
　　[2.3] "Existent" is an inseparable concomitant of "thing" (p. 32.3–5)
[3] Criticism of the opinion according to which "thing" can be abso-
　　lutely non-existent (pp. 32.6–34.9)
　　[3.1] A "thing" cannot be non-existent both in the mind and in
　　　　the external reality (p. 32.6–11)
　　[3.2] The absolutely non-existent cannot be enunciated (pp.
　　　　32.12–33.11)
　　　　[3.2.1] First argument (pp. 32.12–33.1)
　　　　[3.2.2] Second argument (p. 33.1–11)
　　[3.3] The absolutely non-existent cannot be known: only the non-
　　　　existent that does not exist in external reality but exists in
　　　　the mind can be known (p. 33.12–5)
　　[3.4] Explanation of the adversaries' error (pp. 33.16–34.9)
[4] Rejection of the opinion according to which "existent" and
　　"thing" are not equivalent to their synonyms, and the attribute of
　　a thing can be neither an existing thing nor a non-existing thing
　　(p. 34.9–14)

Avicenna's view on the relationship of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, is contained *in nuce* in parts [2.2] and [2.3] of the chapter, whose translation is provided in Text 1. Part [2.2] deals with the distinction of these concepts, part [2.3] with their connection. In part [2.2], "existent" and "thing" are distinguished by showing that each of them conveys a different notion, according to two consecutive formulations. Avicenna's general strategy is to clarify the meaning of "existent" and "thing" by associating them, respectively, with the notion of "existence regarding the fact of being established [in reality]" and the notion of "essence", stated to be different from each other (main point of the first formulation, [2.2.1]); and then to argue for the distinction of these two notions by means of the analysis of propositions: since statements connecting essence (as subject) with real existence (as predicate) are informative ("synthetical" in a Kantian sense), these two entities must be distinct from one another (main point of the second formulation, [2.2.2]). The two formulations differ from one another not only in content, as we are going to see, but also in emphasis: the first gives precedence to "existent" over "thing", whereas the second focuses primarily on "thing", leaving "existent" in the background. Section [2.3], finally, affirms that, notwithstanding their distinction, "existent" is inseparable from "thing", since things always exist in some way or another, and are always, therefore, existents.

Text 1: Avicenna, *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5, pp. 31.2–32.5 [pp. 34.50–36.83][10]
(= Outline 1 [2.2–3])

[*2.2 Distinction between "existent" and "thing", 2.2.1 First formulation*]

[a] We say that the notion (*maʿnā*) of 'existent'[11] and the notion of 'thing' are conceptualized in the soul as two [distinct] notions.

[b] 'Existent', 'established [in reality]' (*muṯbat*) and 'realized' (*muḥaṣṣal*) are synonyms [that signify] a single notion. We have no doubt that their notion is already present in the soul of the reader of this book.

[c] With 'thing' and its equivalents another notion is signified in every language. For every entity (*amr*) has an essence (*ḥaqīqa*) by means of which it is what it is. Thus the triangle has as [its] essence the fact of being triangle, and the whiteness has as [its] essence the fact of being whiteness.

[d] This is what we call sometimes 'proper existence' (*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ*). We do not mean by it the notion of existence regarding the fact of being established [in reality] (*wuǧūd iṯbātī*). For also by means of the term 'existence' many notions are signified, one of which is the essence according to which a thing is. That according to which [a thing] is, therefore, is like its proper existence.

[*2.2.2 Second formulation*]

[a] Let us go back [to the beginning]. We say to be clear that every thing has a proper essence, which is its quiddity (*māhīya*). Now, it is known that the proper essence of every thing is other than the existence that is synonymous with 'being established [in reality] (*iṯbāt*).'

[b] For, if you say: 'The essence so-and-so is existent in the concrete objects, or in souls, or absolutely (including [in this last case] the [previous] two[12]),' this [statement] has a meaning that is ascertained and comprehensible. If, on the other hand, you said: 'The essence so-and-so is the essence so-and-so,' or: 'The essence so-and-so is an essence,' you would have a useless redundancy speech. If you said: 'The essence so-and-so is a thing,' [this] would be again a statement that does not inform regarding what is unknown (even less informative would be your statement: 'The essence is a thing'), unless you mean by 'thing' 'existing [thing],' as if you were saying: 'The essence so-and-so is an existing essence.'

[c] When you say: 'The essence A is a thing, and the essence B is another thing,' this [statement] is correct and informative only because

---

[10] Numbers between square brackets refer to pages and lines of the critical edition of the Latin translation of the *Ilāhīyāt*: Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina, I-IV*. Édition critique par S. Van Riet. Introduction par G. Verbeke (Louvain-Leiden: Peeters-Brill, 1977); *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina, V–X*. Édition critique par S. Van Riet. Introduction par G. Verbeke (Louvain-Leiden: Peeters-Brill, 1980).

[11] *mawǧūd* (*wuǧūd* ed.)

[12] *yahummuhumā* (*yahummuhā* ed.)

you assume in your mind that [the essence B] is another determinate thing, different from this other thing [i.e. the essence A], as if you said: 'The essence A is a [certain] essence,[13] and the essence B is another essence.' Without, at the same time, this assumption [of difference], and this conjunction [of the essence B with the essence A], [this statement] would not be informative.

[d] With 'thing', therefore, this notion is meant.

[*2.3 'Existent' is an inseparable concomitant of 'thing'*]

[a] The concomitance (*luzūm*) of the meaning of 'existent'[14] does not separate itself (*lā yufāriqu*) from it [i.e. from the notion of 'thing'] at all (*al-battata*). On the contrary, the notion of 'existent' always (*dāʾiman*) accompanies it inseparably (*yalzamu*), since it [i.e. 'thing'] is either an existent in the concrete objects, or an existent in the estimative faculty and the intellect.

[b] Were it not so, it would not be a thing.

In the first formulation ([2.2.1]), Avicenna argues for the distinction between "existent" and "thing", announced in section [a], by adducing some synonyms of "existent" which are not synonyms of "thing", and connecting "thing" with a notion (having an essence) to which "existent" is unrelated. In section [b], "existent" is said to be a synonym of "established [in reality]", and "realized". Avicenna says that its meaning, as well as the meaning of its synonyms, is well-known, but he does not clarify the matter further. In section [d], however, he introduces the notion of "existence regarding the fact of being established [in reality]," a notion that is certainly related to "existent", insofar as it is the combination of "existence" and one of its synonyms. I call it "existence[1]". In the case of "thing" on the other hand, the synonyms do not receive special attention, since they have been already taken into account in the previous section of the chapter (see above, Outline 1 [2.1]).[15] Rather than being explained by means of synonyms, the notion of "thing" is analyzed and related in section [c] to the idea of having an "essence".[16] In section [d], however, the essence is named "proper existence" (*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ*), according to one of the many senses of existence, in distinction from the "existence regarding the fact of

---

[13] *inna ḥaqīqatan ā ḥaqīqatun* (*inna ḥaqīqatan ā* ed.)
[14] *mawǧūd* (*wuǧūd* ed.)
[15] Only one of them ("entity", *amr*) is mentioned *en passant* in section [c].
[16] The example of the triangle to elucidate the possess of an essence by the "thing" echoes the example chosen by Aristotle in *An. Post.* A, 1 to explain the necessity of a preliminary knowledge of the meaning of the expressions indicating the objects of teaching and science.

being established [in reality]" typical of "existent". I call it "existence²".
By "proper existence" Avicenna apparently means the concrete way of
existing proper to a determinate species of realities, conveyed by their
distinctive essence. Avicenna thus affirms a fundamental distinction
within existence:

Outline 2: The two meanings of existence in *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 [2.2.1d]

existence¹ = existence regarding the fact of being established [in reality]
existence² = proper existence = essence

This distinction of two meanings of existence can be found exclusi-
vely in the first formulation. The choice of linking both "existent" and
"thing" with two senses of the same notion (existence) is apparently
awkward and counter-productive, since it compromises the intended
distinction of the two concepts and makes a second, more straightfor-
ward formulation of the issue necessary; however it is surely intentio-
nal, given its background in Aristotle and previous Arab philosophers[17]
and the widespread presence of the notion of "proper existence", and
similar expressions, within the *Ilāhīyāt*.[18] As we are going to see, it is
highly significant (cf. below, section 4).

The second formulation ([2.2.2]) equates the distinction between
"thing" and "existent" to that between essence and existence¹, clarifying

---

[17] Both the idea that existence is said in many ways, and the denomination of
essence as "proper existence", have a remote background in Aristotle's doctrine of
being and essence (see, respectively, *Metaph.* Γ, 2, 1003a33: "Being is said in many
ways", and 1003b32–33: "the essence of everything…is from its very nature something
that is"; cf. Bertolacci [2006], 378. A link between essence, on the one hand, and
being or existence, on the other, was affirmed by al-Kindī (d. after 256/870)—see
the idea that an essence has its own being ("being of essence", *kawn ḏāt*) in *Falsafa
Ūlā, Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafīya*, ed. M. ʿA. Abū Rīda (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī,
1950–1953), vol. I, 41.3—and was neatly assessed by Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī (d. 363/974)—see
the expression "essential existence" (*wuǧūd ḏātī*), which is regarded as typical of his
"Platonization of Farabism", i.e. his failure to distinguish spatio-temporal existence
from entitative subsistence, and the ascription to essence of a kind of spatio-temporal
existence (Rashed [2004], 146–7). What is peculiar of Avicenna is the denomination
of essence as *proper* existence (a denomination possibly directed against Yaḥyā ibn
ʿAdī's Platonism).

[18] I, 1, p. 9.1 (*wuǧūd allaḏī yaḥuṣṣu*); I, 6, p. 37.18 (*wuǧūd allaḏī yaḥuṣṣu*); p. 41.16
(*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ*); p. 41.16–7 (*wuǧūd allaḏī yaḥuṣṣu*); II, 3, p. 74.14, 15 (*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ muta-
qawwim*); p. 75.3 (*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ yataqawwamu bi-hī*), p. 75.6 (*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ*); p. 75.7
(*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ yataqawwamu bihī*); III, 10, p. 159.17 (*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ*); VIII, 5, p. 350.2
(*wuǧūd ḫāṣṣ*); VIII, 6, p. 356. 9 [p. 413.84] (*ḫuṣūṣīyat wuǧūd*). The expression "proper
essence" is comparatively rare in Avicenna's works.

this second distinction with a more coherent terminology. In section [a], Avicenna calls the essence "proper *essence*" and "quiddity", and maintains that proper essence is different from existence[1]—this latter being named by means of an expression ("existence synonymous with 'being established [in reality]'") that is equivalent to the one already employed in the previous section to denote the concept "existent". The different terminology ("proper essence" instead of "proper existence") is probably meant to avoid any confusion between essence and existence[1], even though the fact that existence[1] is specified as the existence that is synonymous with "being established [in reality]" implies that a wider notion of "existence" is still implicitly present.

The distinction between essence and existence[1] is argued for by means of the analysis of five propositions in section [b]. Both this section and the following one ([c]) have no parallel in the first formulation:

Outline 3: Propositions in Text 1 [2.2.2b]

(1) "The essence so-and-so is existent in the concrete objects, or in the souls, or absolutely [i.e both in the concrete objects and in the souls, or: either in the concrete objects or in the souls]" = informative statement
(2) "The essence so-and-so is the essence so-and-so" = tautology
(3) "The essence so-and-so is an essence" = tautology
(4) "The essence so-and-so is a thing" = not informative, unless "thing" is meant as "existing [thing]" → (4a) "The essence so-and-so is an existing thing" = informative
(5) "The essence is a thing" = even less informative [unless "thing" is meant as "existing [thing]" → (5a) "The essence is an existing thing" = informative]

The distinction of essence and existence[1] is attested by the comparison of proposition [1] with propositions [2]–[3]. In proposition [1], the essence is said to be existent according to at least one of the two modes of existence[1], namely existence in external objects or in the mind, and this predication of existence results in being informative. This is so because the notion of the predicate ("is existent", namely "has existence") is not already contained in the notion of the subject ("essence"). In propositions [2]–[3], on the other hand, the notion of the predicate is identical, either completely or partially, with the notion of the subject, and these statements are therefore tautological. Propositions

[4]–[5] present the same opposition with regard, respectively, to the stated proposition [4a] and the unstated proposition [5a]; in these latter "existent" is not the entire predicate, as in proposition [1], but an adjective attached to it ("existing essence" or "existing thing").

In section [c] Avicenna adds a sixth proposition, which—albeit directly relevant neither to the distinction of essence and existence, nor to the clarification of the meaning of "thing"—aims at countering the possible objection that there are informative statements in which "thing" is predicated of "essence", without including existence.

(6) "The essence A is a thing, and the essence B is another thing" = informative, if "another" is understood not simply as "distinct", but as "different", and as expressing difference with regard to the previously mentioned "thing" → (6a) "The essence A is a [certain] essence, and the essence B is another essence."

Although in propositions [4]–[6] the terms "thing" and "essence" are sometimes used interchangeably,[19] these propositions also attest that "thing" and "essence" are, according to Avicenna, two distinct concepts. The very presence of proposition [4] as distinct from proposition [3] implies that "thing" and "essence" have, according to Avicenna, different meanings, since otherwise the former proposition ("The essence so-and-so is a thing") would be identical to the latter ("The essence so-and-so is an essence"). Accordingly, Avicenna states that proposition [3] is a mere tautology, whereas he says that proposition [4] is not informative ("it does not inform about what is unknown").

In section [2.3], Avicenna goes back to the relationship between "existent" and "thing". He makes clear that, despite the different meanings of these two concepts, and despite the distinction between existence[1] and essence, the concept of "existent" accompanies inseparably the concept of "thing". The infinitive *luzūm* and the verb *lazima* in section [a] attest that Avicenna regards "existent" as a *lāzim* of "thing", namely a notion that, albeit not being part of the essence of something is also not a bare accident, but something approaching the

---

[19] In proposition [4a] ("The essence so-and-so is an existing *essence*"), for example, the term "essence" takes the place of the term "thing" in proposition [4] ("The essence so-and-so is a *thing*"), which it modifies. Likewise, in the modified proposition [6a] ("The essence A is a [certain] *essence*"), "essence" takes the place of "thing" in proposition [6] ("The essence A is a *thing*").

status of a property.[20] In this section Avicenna strongly emphasizes the stability of the connection of "thing" and "existent". He says that this connection is not interrupted under any circumstance ("at all"), and that it is permanent ("always", section [a]). He also contends that, if a "thing" didn't exist, it wouldn't be a "thing" (section [b]). This suggests that existence (i.e. the fact of being an "existent") is a very peculiar inseparable concomitant of essence (i.e. the fundamental ingredient of a "thing") and approaches the status of a constitutive element.

3. *"Thing" (Essence) and "Existent" (Existence)* *Are Distinct from, but Inseparably Related to, One Another*

In chapter I, 5, Avicenna insists not only on the difference and the distinction, but also, with equal emphasis, on the connection between "thing" and "existent", essence and existence. *Prima facie*, Text 1 gives a different impression, since its two main sections argue extensively for the distinction of these items, whereas only the final, much shorter, section points at their connection. Moreover, the relationship of concomitance that Avicenna affirms between "thing" and "existent" in the third section is in a way uneven, since it implies that "existent" inseparably follows "thing", without entailing a similar concomitance of "thing" with regard to "existent". This unidirectional, rather than bidirectional, link might suggest a sort of unbalanced relationship between the two concepts.

This impression, however, is misleading. First of all, section [2.3] is not just an appendix of Text 1, as it might seem. It is rather the

---

[20] Further remarks on the concept of *lāzim* in general and on existence as *lāzim* of things can be found in the *Madḫal*, the reworking of Porphyry's *Isagoge* in the *Šifāʾ*. See *aš-Šifāʾ, al-Manṭiq, al-Madḫal*, eds. Ǧ. Š. Qanawātī, M. al-Ḫuḍayrī and A. F. al-Ahwānī (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Amīrīya, 1952), I, 11, p. 64, 4–9: "As under a *species specialissima* (*nawʿ al-anwāʾ*) there are universal subjects, although they are not species, like "secretary", "sailor", and "Turk" under "man", likewise it is not impossible that, above a *summum genus* (*ǧins al-aǧnās*) there are predicates that are not genera, but notions that are inseparable concomitants (*maʿānin lāzima*) shared by some of the *summa genera*, like existence and accidentality [*wa-l-ʿaraḍīya*; some mss. have instead *wa-l-waḥda* "and unity", see apparatus ad l. 9], and like some entities that are predicated of a certain number of highest genera (*aǧnās ʿāliya*), as you will understand later". The reference at the end ("as you will understand later") is to the reworking of the *Categories* (*Maqūlāt* II, 4), where Avicenna discusses the status of motion as an entity external to the categories and common to three of them (quality, quantity and space).

beginning of the lengthy discussion that Avicenna offers in the following part [3]. The view that Avicenna expounds and rejects in this part is tightly connected with section [2.3]: by postulating a disconnection between "existent" and "thing", this view represents the denial of the main tenet of section [2.3]. The same applies to the view discussed and rejected by Avicenna in part [7], according to which a same "thing" or essence can cease to exist at some point and start to exist again at a later point, namely, it can be brought back into existence or resuscitated. In other words, Avicenna continues to deal with the topic of section [2.3] in the following dialectical portion of chapter I, 5, which functions as a kind of *destructio*, up until the very end of the chapter, of some relevant opinions that go against the doctrine established in this section. Thus, from the point of view of extension, the treatment of the connection between "thing" and "existence", and essence and existence, in section [2.3] and in its continuation afterwards is in no way shorter than the treatment of their distinction in sections [2.1–2].[21]

Secondly, in a later passage of chapter I, 5 Avicenna contends that "thing" and "existent" are mutually concomitant, using a reciprocal form of the same verb *lazima* that he has employed to express the concomitance of "existent" with regard to "thing" in Text 1 [2.3a]:

Text 2: *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5, p. 34.9–10 [p. 39.37–9] (Outline 1 [4.1])

Now you have understood in what [the concept of] 'thing' differs from the concept of 'existent' and of 'supervening', even though ['thing' and 'existent'] accompany each other inseparably (*mutalāzimāni*).

This means that, in Avicenna's opinion, the relationship of concomitance does not simply apply to "existent" with respect to "thing", but also to "thing" with respect to "existent". The relationship between these two concepts emerges therefore as perfectly balanced, so that "thing" (and essence) cannot reclaim, in this respect, any priority over "existent" (and existence).

In other words, in chapter I, 5, the main text on the topic, Avicenna stresses, together with the separation, also the link between "thing"

---

[21] Section [2.3] is pivotal in the structure of chapter I, 5 in two respects. On the one hand, it connects to each other the two most extensive parts of this chapter, namely the second and the third. On the other hand, it marks the transition from the expositive portion of the chapter (parts [1]–[2]) to dialectical portion (parts [3]–[4] and [7]).

and "existent", and, implicitly, between essence and existence. The two aspects—distinction and connection—appear to be equally important for Avicenna. To pay exclusive attention to, or emphasize the relevance of, the former over the latter seems to be a patent transgression of Avicenna's explicit pronouncement on the issue.

4. *The Issue of Logical Priority*

The second formulation of the distinction of essence and existence[1] in Text 1 discloses an obvious sense in which essence is logically prior to existence: if I cannot know a triangle without knowing its essence, whereas I can know it without knowing its existence[1], it seems evident that essence possesses some kind of logical priority over existence[1]. The first formulation of the distinction, on the other hand, seems to envisage a more equal logical status both of essence with respect to existence[1], and of "thing" with respect to "existent", and even points to the priority of the latter concepts with respect to the former from the logical point of view. Let us therefore consider both formulations together.

What chapter I, 5 says about the intension (i.e. the conceptual content) of "existent" and "thing", existence and essence, can be summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Avicenna's Remarks on the Intension of "Existent" and "Thing" in
Ilāhīyāt I, 5

	"Existent"	"Thing"
synonymous with	"established" (*muṯbat*), "realized" (*muḥaṣṣal*) [2.2.1b] "supervening" (*ḥāṣil*) [3.2.1] (p. 32.18)	"entity" (*amr*), "what" (*mā*), "that which" (*allaḏī*) [2.1d]
conveys the notion of	existence regarding the fact of being established [in reality] (= existence[1]) [2.2.1d]	essence = proper existence (= existence[2]) ≠ existence regarding the fact of being established [in reality] (= existence[1]) [2.2.1d]
	existence synonymous with "being established [in reality]" (= existence[1]) [2.2.2a]	proper essence = quiddity ≠ existence synonymous with "being established [in reality]" (= existence[1]) [2.2.2a]

Two features are noteworthy. First, the meaning of "existent" is clarified only by means of synonyms in the first formulation (section [2.2.1b]; another synonym of "existent" is mentioned in section [3.2.1]). The cognate notion of existence[1] makes its appearance in the context of the explanation of the meaning of "thing", both in the first and in the second formulation (sections [2.2.1d], [2.2.2a]), but is not directly linked to "existent", although it is obviously related to it. The meaning of "thing", on the contrary, is not explained by means of synonyms (which are taken into account earlier in section [2.1d] to explain the impossibility of defining "thing"), but by reference to a different notion, that of "essence" and the synonyms of this latter ([2.2.1d], [2.2.2a]). In this regard, "existent" appears to be a concept "more primary", so speak, than "thing", since it is less amenable to being explained by different notions.

Second, in the first formulation of the distinction, essence is identified with a second meaning of existence, i.e. "proper existence" or existence[2] ([2.2.1d]; see above, section 2, Outline 2). This implies that, according to Avicenna, the concept of essence can be intensionally assimilated to the concept of existence[1], insofar as it also conveys the idea of existence. True, the notion of existence (= existence[2]) conveyed by the essence is not the same notion of existence (= existence[1]) conveyed by the concept "existent;" nonetheless, essence is reducible to the general concept of existence, of which existence[1] represents another instance. The concept of existence[1], on the contrary, is introduced by Avicenna with involvement of one of the synonyms of "existent" ("existence regarding the fact of being established [in reality]", [2.2.1d]; "existence synonymous with being established [in reality]", [2.2.2a]), but totally independently of the concept of essence.[22] In this regard, also existence appears to be a concept "more primary" than essence given that it is not assimilated to other alien notions.

How explain this ambivalent perspective within one and the same text? Two different senses of logical priority may be involved. Essence may be taken as prior to existence with respect to our knowledge of a knowable item like the triangle, since it is more fundamental than existence from the cognitive point of view. Absolutely speaking,

---

[22] Likewise, the intension of "existent" cannot be reduced or assimilated in any way to the intension of "thing"; see *Ilāhīyāt* III, 2, p. 103.8–9 [p. 114.19–20]: "["One" and "existent"] coincide, insofar as none of them signify the substance (*ǧawhar*) of anything, as you know." In this text, the term "substance" is obviously synonym of "essence".

however, i.e. independently from the role played by essence and existence as cognitive tools in the human mind, the domain of essence is not necessarily prior to the domain of existence, and this latter might even be assumed as more primary than the former.

5. *The Issue of Extension*

The extensional relation of "existent" and "thing" in the *Ilāhīyāt* is sufficiently clear. In section [1.3] of chapter I, 5, as well as elsewhere, both concepts, together with the other primary notions, are portrayed as universal:[23] their common universality seems to imply that they have the same extension. The co-extensionality of "existent" and "thing" is confirmed by passages like Text 2, where Avicenna states their co-implication. In the present section, I would like to emphasize two points: first, negatively, that "thing" is not more extensive than "existent" according to Avicenna; second, positively, that "existent" might be even viewed by Avicenna as more extensive than "thing". Chapters of the *Ilāhīyāt* other than I, 5 provide valuable indications in both these directions.

As to the first point, Avicenna in this work expressly declares that no concept is more universal than "existent":

Text 3: *Ilāhīyāt* I, 2, p. 14.6 [p. 14.55]:

There is nothing more common than 'existent'.

A statement like this clearly rules out the possibility of assigning to "thing" an extension greater than "existent".

Even more—and this is my second point—it would seem that, according to Avicenna, whereas every "thing" is an "existent" (i.e. it exists either in reality or in the mind, as we have seen), not every existent is a "thing". The reason is that for Avicenna there is at least a being (i.e. God, the Necessary Existent) that is properly an existent, without however being a "thing". But if this is the case, then "existent" is more extensive than "thing". Let us see more precisely why.

By gathering together Avicenna's scattered remarks in chapter I, 5, one gets the following description of "existent":

---

[23] Cp. I, 8, p. 54.13–4 [pp. 63.10–64.11]: "…since 'existent' is a nature that can be predicated of everything"; II, 2, p. 68.3–4 [p. 78.64–6], where Avicenna states that the fact of being an "entity" (*amr*)—a synonym of "thing" (see above, Table 1)—is "common" (*ʿāmm*), i.e. universal.

Existent$_{descr.}$: "The established [in reality] (/"The realized") according to some kind of existence[1]"

Likewise, on the basis of the aforementioned evidence, one can formulate the following description of "thing"[24]:

Thing$_{descr.}$: "That which (/Entity that /What) has an essence (/a quiddity)."

According to the distinction of essence and existence[1] established in Text 1, the description of "thing" proposed by Avicenna can be rephrased as follows:

Thing$_{descr.a}$: "That which has an essence *distinct from existence[1]*."

According to these descriptions, one can safely contend that, according to Avicenna, God is an "existent" but is not a "thing". God is an "existent" since God fully instantiates the aforementioned description of this concept.[25] But God, in Avicenna's view, does not have an essence distinct from existence[1], and therefore is not a "thing". The relevant statements on the matter occur in *Ilāhīyāt* VIII, 4. It is not clear whether in this chapter Avicenna endorses the thesis that God has no essence distinct from existence (in the sense of existence[1]), thus assuming a sort of coincidence of essence and existence in God, or the much stronger position that God has no essence at all.[26] Regardless

---

[24] See the similar descriptions in D. L. Black, "Avicenna on the Ontological and Epistemic Status of Fictional Beings," *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 8 (1997), 425–53 (at 450), and Druart [2001], 132.

[25] The concept "existent" is applied to God, for example, in VIII, 1, p. 327.5 [p. 376.6]; VIII, 3, p. 342.8–9 [p. 396.21–2].

[26] The issue is debated: see Goichon [1937], 177, 343–54; E. M. Macierowski, "Does God have a quiddity according to Avicenna?" *The Thomist* 52 (1988), 79–87; J. P. Rosheger, "Is God a 'What'? Avicenna, William of Auvergne, and Aquinas on the Divine Essence," in *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. Inglis (London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 277–96; R. Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation. Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 81–3. Avicenna's own words support both alternatives. Text 8 below, for example, supports the first alternative. Likewise, in a later passage of the same chapter VIII, 4 (p. 347.10–12 [p. 402.48–51]), Avicenna contends that the First has no quiddity at all, and opposes It to the other things having quiddities. That God has no essence whatsoever is congruent with Avicenna's subsequent contention in the same chapter that He has no genus, differentia and definition (*Ilāhīyāt* VIII, 4, pp. 347.17–348.5 [pp. 402.61–403.70]), and is repeated *expressis verbis* also later on in the *Ilāhīyāt* (IX, 1, p. 373.5 [p. 434.5]), and in other works by Avicenna (*Taʿlīqāt*, ed. ʿA. Badawī [Cairo: Al-Hayʾa al-Miṣrīya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1973], 37.4–7: "Don't you see that those who truly verify things (*al-muḥaqqiqīna*), in order to get the knowledge of the Necessary Existent by Itself, and of the fact that It is not a body, follow a different procedure? They say: The Necessary Existent by Itself does not have

of Avicenna's precise conception of the relationship of essence and existence in God, it seems clear that, in his perspective, God cannot be a "thing". For, according to the description of this concept provided before, a "thing" must possess an essence, and its essence must be distinct from existence[1]. Now, Avicenna's God does not meet at least one of these two requirements, namely the second, possibly even the first. God, therefore, is not a "thing" in Avicenna's view.

But, if this is so, then the extension of "existent" is greater than the extension of "thing". Having a broader scope than "thing", and being a more universal concept, "existent" is therefore prior to "thing" in extension. Thus, the universality in extension that Avicenna ascribes to both "existent" and "thing" in chapter I, 5 and elsewhere, and their co-implication that he maintains in Text 2, do not seem to entail an absolute extensional equivalence.[27] In other words, according to Avicenna, the concept of "thing" would be universal in comparison to all the other non-transcendental concepts, but less universal, so-to-speak than "existent"; conversely, the concept of "existent" would be co-extensive with the concept of "thing" in the majority of cases, but not in all.

6. *"Thing" and "Existent", Essence and Existence in Other Chapters of the* Ilāhīyāt

In the *Ilāhīyāt* Avicenna applies systematically the doctrine of the relationship of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, to many

---

a quiddity (*māhīya*); but every body has a quiddity and receives [its] existence from outside; therefore, the Necessary Existent is not a body"). Elsewhere in the *Ilāhīyāt*, on the contrary, Avicenna describes God's nature with expressions that seem to imply His possession of an essence: see, for example, *ḥaqīqat wāǧib al-wuǧūd* ("the essence of the Necessary Existent") in *Ilāhīyāt* VIII, 5, p. 349.11 [p. 405.7] (*ḥaqīqat* is replaced by *ḏāt* in the following lines), p. 349.17 [p. 405.18–9]; p. 350.3 [p. 406.23] (reading *ḥaqīqatu l-wāǧibi l-wuǧūdi* instead of *ḥaqīqatu l-wāǧibi l-wuǧūdu*).

[27] The relationship of unidirectional concomitance that Avicenna affirms between "existent" and "thing" in Text 1 [2.3b] is compatible with a scenario in which "existent" has a greater extension than "thing". What Avicenna says in this passage is that the status of "thing" implies the concomitance of "existent", since every "thing" is in fact an "existent", insofar as it possesses some kind of existence[1] either in the mind or in external objects. He does not contend, however, the reciprocal point, namely that the status of "existent" implies the concomitance of "thing", so that every "existent" would in fact possesses an essence and be therefore a "thing". This leaves the possibility open that, whereas all "things" are "existents", not all "existents" are "things".

different metaphysical areas, like the theory of substance, of universals, of causality, and of God's nature. Thus, the doctrine introduced and expounded in its complete and "pure" form in chapter I, 5 recurs in several other *loci* of the *Ilāhīyāt* in which it is summarized briefly, within a precise context and with a specific aim. To assess the extent of its resumption, the context in which it occurs, and the aim that Avicenna pursues is, of course, crucial. In general, of the two main points established in chapter I, 5—the distinction, on the one hand, and the connection, on the other, of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence—Avicenna insists in these passages particularly on the former, namely on the distinction between these items, for specific theoretical reasons that differ from case to case. In addition, he omits the hints as to the logical equivalence of "existent" and existence with "thing" and essence that can be found in chapter I, 5, and he adopts the perspective according to which "thing" and essence result in being prior to "existent" and existence. Accordingly, when he takes into account the relationship of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, he treats it mostly as a unidirectional relationship linking "thing" and essence, as first element of the relation, with "existent" and existence as second element.[28]

---

[28] According to Wisnovsky [2003], 158–60, in *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 Avicenna contends that neither "existent" nor "thing" is logically prior to the other, whereas in other passages of the *Ilāhīyāt* and in his other works he takes "thing" as logically prior to "existent". In this regard, Wisnovsky points to the fact that in some passages of the *Ilāhīyāt*, *Madḫal*, and *Ḥikma ʿarūḍīya/Naǧāt*, "thing" is portrayed as "a universally applicable subject of which one and existent may be predicated", and is "elevated above considerations of existence" (p. 159; see above, n. 7). Although one can envisage differently the doctrine of chapter I, 5 (see above, section 4), Wisnovsky is certainly right in stressing this doctrinal shift. It is worth noticing that in the texts discussed by Wisnovsky the term "thing" appears often with a non-technical, rather than technical, sense: it occurs either in the plural (*ašyāʾ*, "things"), in indeterminate expressions (*šayʾ min al-ašyāʾ*, lit.: "one among the things", i.e. "something"), or in correlative clauses (from a certain point of view, x is "a [certain] thing", from another point of view, it is "a [different] thing"), being occasionally replaced by terms like "notion" or "intentional object" (*maʿnan*). See *Ḥikma ʿarūḍīya*, Ms. Uppsala, Or. 364, f. 2v8–10 = *Naǧāt* I, 9, p. 514.16–9 (Text 1 in Wisnovsky [2003], p. 158): "But the nature of 'one' is among the accidents that accompany things (*al-ašyāʾ*) inseparably, and "one" does not constitute the quiddity of anything (*šayʾ min al-ašyāʾ*). On the contrary, the quiddity is a [certain] thing (*šayʾ*), either a man, or a horse, or an intellect, or a soul; then this [thing] is described as being one and existent (*mawǧūd*)". *Madḫal* I, 12, p. 65.8–12 (Text 3 in Wisnovsky [2003], p. 158): "We say…that each of the entities (*al-umūr*) that serve as an example of one of these five [predicables] in itself is a [certain] thing (*šayʾ*), whereas insofar as it is a genus, or a species, or a differentia, or a property, or a common accident, it is a [different] thing (*šayʾ*). Let us take an example of this from [the case of] the genus and say: 'animal' in itself is a [certain] notion (*maʿnan*), regard-

Not all the passages of the *Ilāhīyāt* in which the doctrine in question is taken up will be discussed here.[29] Four of them will be selected, since they show better than others the limitations of the doctrine in its concrete applications. The first of these is the famous pericope of chapter V, 1, in which Avicenna focuses on the distinction between essence and existence within his general introduction to the discussion of universals. In this text, Avicenna aims at distinguishing the nature or essence as such from the nature or essence as universal concept; universality attaches to a nature or essence only when the latter exists in the mind, for the mind is capable of connecting this nature with the many individuals that instantiate it. Thus the resumption of the doctrine of essence and existence from chapter I, 5 is quite minimal, pointing solely to their distinction.

Text 4: *Ilāhīyāt* V, 1, p. 196.7–16 [pp. 228.24–229.42]

[a] The universal *qua* universal is something (*šayʾ*), whereas, *qua* thing to which universality is consequent (*talḥaquhū*), it is something [else] (*šayʾ*).[30]

[b] The universal *qua* universal is what is signified by one of these definitions [i.e. the definitions of "universal" mentioned before Text 4].

[c] If it [i.e. the universal] is a man or a horse, there is another notion, different from the notion of universality, namely horseness. For the definition (*ḥadd*) of horseness is not the definition of universality, nor does universality enter into the definition of horseness. For the definition of horseness does not require universality.[31] Rather, universality occurs [accidentally] (*taʿriḍu*) to it.

[d] For [horseness] in itself is nothing other than horseness. In itself, it is neither one nor many, neither existent (*mawǧūd*) in the concrete objects nor in the soul, neither one of these [things][32] in actuality nor [one of them] in potentiality, so that they would enter in [the notion] of horseness. *Qua* horseness, it is only horseness.[33]

---

less whether it is existent in the concrete objects or conceptualized in the soul, and in itself it is neither common nor proper". One may wonder, therefore, whether in these texts Avicenna is dealing with the primary concept "thing", or is referring generically to "items" or "entities" in a non-technical sense.

[29] Besides the texts discussed in the present section, see also *Ilāhīyāt* I, 2, p. 13.8–12 [pp. 12.30–13.36]; I, 7, p. 45.9–11 [pp. 51.92–52.95]; II, 2, p. 70.5–8 [p. 81.19–22]; II, 4, pp. 82.1–2 [p. 94.69–71]. The proof of the fact that God is not a substance (VIII, 4, pp. 348.6–349.6 [pp. 403.74–404.1]) is based, among other tenets, on the idea that substantiality, taken as a genus, implies a distinction of essence and existence that cannot be found in God (pp. 348.17–349.6 [p. 404.90–01]).

[30] Noteworthy is the non-technical use of "thing" in this section.

[31] *al-kullīya* (*ḥadd al-kullīya* ed.)

[32] *wa-lā šayʾ min ḏālika* (*wa-lā fī šayʾ min ḏālika* ed.)

[33] *min ḥaytu huwa farasīya farasīya faqaṭ* (*min ḥaytu huwa farasīya faqaṭ* ed.)

[e] Rather, unity is an attribute that is joined (*taqtarinu*) with horseness, so that horseness, with this attribute, is one. Likewise,[34] together with this attribute, horseness has many other attributes that supervene on it (*ḏāḫila ʿalayhi*). Thus, horseness, insofar as it corresponds in definition to many things, is common [i.e. universal], whereas, insofar as it[35] is taken with ostensible properties and accidents, it is proper [i.e. particular]. But horseness in itself is only horseness.

The distinction of essence and existence surfaces in section [d]. The specific essence taken into account here is horseness,[36] whereas existence (in the sense of existence¹) is mentioned according to its two main types, namely existence in the concrete objects, i.e in external reality, and existence in the soul. Avicenna insists on the separation of essence and existence, and contends that existence in external objects or in the mind, together with other extrinsic features like oneness and multiplicity, does not enter into the notion of horseness, i.e. it is not constitutive of this latter. Avicenna gives no indication as to what kind of connection takes place between essence and existence. In particular, he uses in section [d] none of the verbs employed in sections [a], [c] and [e] to characterize the relationship between essence, on the one hand, and universality and unity, on the other ("to be consequent", "to occur accidentally", "to be joined with", "to supervene").[37]

Further aspects of the relationship of essence and existence can be gained from the other texts dealing with the issue. Thus, the same point of Text 4 is repeated, with additional details, in a shortly posterior passage of chapter V, 2.[38]

Text 5: *Ilāhīyāt* V, 2, p. 207.10–2 [p. 239.68–71]

[a] To the nature (*ṭabīʿa*) of man, insofar as he is a man, is consequent (*yalḥaquhā*) the fact of being existent (*mawǧūda*), although being an existent is neither [identical to] being a man, nor does it enter in it.

[b] Together with existence (*wuǧūd*), to [the nature of man] is sometimes consequent (*qad talḥaquhā*) this universality [about which we are speaking], although this universality does not exist except in the soul.

---

[34] *wa-kaḏālika* (*kaḏālika* ed.)

[35] *wa-bi-annahā* (*wa-li-annahā* ed.)

[36] Although terms like *ḥaqīqa* or *māhīya* (used in Text 1) do not occur in Text 4, the fact that horseness is regarded as an essence is attested by the presence of the term *ḥadd* ("definition"), i.e. the formula expressing the essence or quiddity, in section [c].

[37] None of these verbs was used in Text 1.

[38] See Goichon [1937], 90.

The particular essence (called "nature", *ṭabī'a*) considered in this text is humanity. This text complements the previous one, insofar as Avicenna mentions the type of relation occurring between essence and existence by means of the verb "to be consequent" (*laḥiqa*), one of the four verbs used to express the relationship of essence with universality and unity in Text 4.[39] What is more, Avicenna stresses the separation between essence and existence, saying that the fact of being an existent is neither identical to nor constitutive of humanity. The case of universality taken into account in section [b] is only partially similar to that of existence, since universality, as Avicenna remarks, regards only one type of existence, i.e mental existence.

The relationship of "thing" and "existent" is taken into account in a passage of chapter VI, 5, dealing with the doctrine of causality. Avicenna uses the distinction of these two concepts, and of essence and existence, to answer the question how the final cause can be, at the same time, the first among the four causes in the order of importance, and the last among them in the order of the concrete realization. He contends that the final cause is first in the order of essence (it is the first of the causes, if these latter are regarded simply as causes), but last in the order of existence (it is the last of the causes, if these latter are regarded as existents).

<div align="center">Text 6: Ilāhīyāt VI, 5, p. 292.2–5 [p. 336.85–7]</div>

[a] There is a distinction (*farq*) between 'thing' and 'existent' (although 'thing' is not but an 'existent'), as there is a distinction (*farq*) between an entity (*amr*) and its inseparable concomitant (*lāzim*).

[b] You have already learnt and verified this [distinction].

[c] Consider it again in the case of man. For man has an essence (*ḥaqīqa*), which is its definition (*ḥadd*) and quiddity (*māhīya*), regardless whether [his] existence is proper [i.e. particular] or common [i.e. universal], in the concrete objects or in the soul, and whether it is one of these in potentiality or in actuality.

Avicenna stresses in this text the distinction more than the connection of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, as section [a] declares from the very outset. In section [a], the connection of "thing" and "existent" is alluded to parenthetically by its saying that "thing" is not

---

[39] Marmura [1984] translates this verb as "to be attached". Among the aforementioned verbs, *laḥiqa* is the most similar in meaning to *lazima*, occurring in Text 1 and Text 6.

but an "existent", a statement that calls to mind "Were [the thing] not [an existent], it would not be a thing" in Text 1 [2.3b]. In the same section, the status of "existent" as inseparable concomitant (*lāzim*) of "entity" (*amr*), one of the synonyms of "thing" (see above, Table 1), is also recalled. Section [b] is an explicit reference to Text 1. The distinction of essence and existence in section [c] is argued for by pointing at the extraneousness of existence in each of its possible manifestations (particular or universal, extra-mental or mental, potential or actual) with regard to "essence", "definition" and "quiddity".[40] It is important to notice that in this regard Avicenna does not say that essence is independent from existence *tout court*, but only from the given manifestations that this latter can assume.

Finally, in chapter VIII, 4, Avicenna wants to show that the First Principle (the Necessary Existent)[41] has no quiddity, namely essence, other than that-ness (*annīya*), namely existence (no essence at all). In order to do so, he points out that the distinction of essence and existence in the things to which this distinction applies requires the presence of a cause that "mediates" between essence and existence by conferring existence to essence. However, since the First Principle has no cause, It cannot rely on a cause conferring existence to Its essence, and cannot therefore be affected by any distinction of essence and existence.

Text 7: *Ilāhīyāt* VIII, 4, pp. 344.10–1 ([a]); 346.13–347.2 ([b])
[pp. 398.83–399.84; 401.33–6]

[a] The First has no quiddity (*māhīya*) other than that-ness (*annīya*). You have already known, at the beginning of this our clarification, the notion of "quiddity", and that by which it is distinct (*tufāriqu*) from that-ness in the things in which it is distinct from it. […]

[b] We say: that-ness and existence are two things that occur accidentally (*ʿāriḍāni*) to the quiddity.[42] Therefore, either they accompany it inseparably (*yalzamuhā*) on account of [the quiddity] itself, or on account of something external. But it is impossible that this happens on account of the quiddity itself, since what follows [something else] does not follow except [something] existent; in this case, therefore, quiddity would have an existence before its existence, which is impossible.

---

[40] The "existence that is proper" mentioned by Avicenna here is not the "proper existence" of Text 1, namely the essence; it is rather the existence that is particular, as opposed to the existence that is common, i.e. the universal existence.

[41] VIII, 4, p. 343.9 [p. 397.53–4].

[42] *al-annīya wa-l-wuǧūd ʿāriḍāni li-l-māhīyati* (*al-annīya wa-l-wuǧūd law ṣārā ʿāriḍayni li-l-māhīyati* ed.)

[Therefore they accompany inseparably the quiddity on account of something external, i.e. a cause].

[c] We say: everything having a quiddity other than that-ness is caused. For you know that that-ness and existence, with regard to the quiddity that is external to that-ness, do not have the status of a constitutive entity, but are among the inseparable concomitants (*lawāzim*).

Text 1 is recalled in section [c] ("For you know that..."), and possibly also in section [a] ("You have already known...").[43] Of Text 1, section [a] recounts the distinction between essence and existence, named respectively "quiddity" (*māhīya*) and "that-ness" (*annīya*). In section [b], the connection of essence and existence is described by means of the participle of the verb "occur accidentally". The accidentality mentioned here, however, has to be understood as logical, rather than metaphysical, as its immediate replacement with the idea of inseparable concomitance in sections [b] and [c] makes clear.[44] Section [c] explains the logical accidentality of existence with respect to essence, stressing the status of that-ness and existence as other, external, and non-constitutive with respect to quiddity and essence, and their condition of being inseparable concomitants of the quiddity and essence.

If we compare these other texts of the *Ilāhīyāt* on the relationship of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, with the main text on the issue, namely chapter I, 5, we notice three important points. First of all, Avicenna is expounding in all cases the *same* doctrine, i.e. a coherent and already established theory, as witnessed by the references to chapter I, 5 in Texts 6 and 7. This attests to the consistency of his overall account and corroborates the status of I, 5 as the main text on the topic. Second, in all these other texts Avicenna recounts only *a part* of chapter I, 5: the texts discussed here repeat various aspects of

---

[43] The terminology of section [a], and the expression "the beginning of this our clarification" occurring at its end, might refer to the beginning of the *Šifāʾ*, i.e. to its logical part, rather than to the beginning of the *Ilāhīyāt*. See *Madḫal* I, 5, p. 29.11–3, where Avicenna opposes "quiddity", on the one hand, and "individual that-ness" (*annīya šaḫṣīya*), namely the concrete existence of an individual, on the other (the term *annīya* here, however, might also be read as *ayyīya*, "distinctive quality"). See also the passages of *Burhān* discussed by A. Hasnawi, "*Annīya* ou *Innīya* (essence, existence)," in *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle, Publié sous la direction d'A. Jacob*, vol. II: *Les notions philosophiques* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), 101–2 (at 101b).

[44] "To occur accidentally" is one of the verbs employed in Text 4 (see above, n. 37). The Arabic of Text 7 [b] presents many variants in the manuscripts. In the reading adopted in the Cairo edition (see above, n. 42), the status of that-ness and existence as entities that occur accidentally to the quiddity, is an hypothesis to be discarded ("were that-ness and existence two things occurring accidentally to quiddity").

chapter I, 5 (significantly the *locus classicus* of chapter V, 1 is the more scanty in this regard), but none of them reproduces all the motives of this chapter. Thus, Avicenna summarizes the second formulation of the distinction in Text 1 [2.2.2] (in all texts), and the brief account of the relationship of "thing" and "existent" in section [2.3] (in some texts), whereas he skips the first formulation of the distinction in section [2.2.1], and the additional considerations on the relationship of "thing" and "existent" after Text 1. Consequently, all hints to the logical priority of existence and "existent" with respect to essence and "thing" in the first formulation are neglected. As in the second formulation, the distinction between these two pairs of concepts, rather than their intimate connection, is underscored; where their relationship is discussed, "existent" and existence are invariably characterized as attributes of "thing" and essence, not vice versa. This happens because Avicenna's specific goal in these passages is to distinguish a certain nature from its universality (Texts 4–5), to distinguish the rank of importance of the causes from the rank of their concrete existence, in order to explain the peculiar status of the final cause (Text 6), and to distinguish God as the only being, in which essence is identical to existence from all the other caused beings, in which essence is other than existence (Text 7). Thirdly, these texts do not disprove the features of chapters I, 5 that they do not recount, namely the suggestion that Avicenna in *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 would be alluding to the dependence—both intensional and extensional—of essence and "thing" on existence and "existent", and would be assuming a reciprocal, bi-directional connection of these two pairs of concepts. These features far from being contradicted, simply lie outside the limited scope of investigation proper of these texts.

7. *The Main Text in Logic*: Maqūlāt *II, 1*

The distinction of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, occurs in many other *loci* of the *Šifāʾ*, as well as in other works by Avicenna. Scholars regard Avicenna's position in these different works as substantially coherent, although signs of evolution in Avicenna's understanding of the distinction are detected.[45] This wide and multiform

---

[45] Goichon [1937], 131, sees an increasing importance ascribed by Avicenna throughout his career to the distinction, this latter remaining however substantially unmodified. The evolution that Wisnovsky [2003], 173–80, traces in Avicenna's standpoint on essence and existence regards, on the one hand, the late application of the

textual evidence cannot be analyzed in detail here. A pericope of Avicenna's reworking of the *Categories* (*Maqūlāt*) in the *Šifāʾ*, however, deserves special attention. On account of its doctrine and terminology, this text can be regarded as the anticipation in logic of Text 1, and thus as the first comprehensive formulation of this topic in the concrete arrangement of the *Šifāʾ*. Despite its importance, this text has never been perused or even noticed, to the best of my knowledge, before. It resembles Text 1 in many respects and thus confirms the priority of *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 over the other textual evidence available in Avicenna's metaphysics.

Text 8: *Maqūlāt* II, 1, pp. 61.2–62.4

[a] Even if [existence] were univocal, it would not be a genus, since it does not signify a notion intrinsic to the quiddities of things, but an inseparable concomitant (*lāzim*) of them.

[b] Therefore, when you conceptualize the notion of triangle, and relate it to shape-ness (*šaklīya*) and existence, you find that shape-ness is intrinsic to the notion of triangle, so that it is impossible to comprehend that triangle is triangle without [thinking] beforehand [that] it is necessarily a shape. When you conceptualize the notion of triangle, therefore, you cannot avoid conceptualizing that it is a shape first of all; on the contrary, it is not necessary that you conceptualize, at the same time, that it is existent. In order to conceptualize the quiddity of triangle, you don't need to conceptualize that it is existent, as you need to conceptualize that it is a shape. The shape belongs to triangle insofar as it is a triangle, and enters into its constitution. Triangle, therefore, is constituted by it [also] externally, in the soul, and in every other condition. As to existence, it is an entity by which the quiddity of triangle is not constituted. Hence you can comprehend the quiddity of triangle, while being uncertain about its existence, until you get the demonstration that it is an existent, or a possible existent, in the first figure of Euclid's book.[46] You cannot do the same with shape-ness. What is like shape-ness is one of the notions that constitute the quiddity, whereas what is like the existence does not constitute the quiddity.

[c] Even if existence did not separate itself from triangle in your mind either, it would nonetheless be an entity consequent (*lāḥiq*) on the triangle externally.

[d] Therefore, it is impossible to seek what is the thing that makes triangle a triangle or a shape, whereas it is not impossible to seek the

---

distinction to the context of causality, and, on the other hand, the shift in the designation of the essence from "thingness" in the *Šifāʾ* and *Naǧāt* to "quiddity" in the *Išārāt* (see also, above, nn. 7, 28).

[46] See *Elements*, book I, where the triangle is the first geometrical form taken into account.

thing that makes triangle existent in the mind or externally. What is essential to something does not belong to it in virtue of a cause external to its essence. What occurs in virtue of an external cause is neither constitutive [of the quiddity] nor essential (although also an accidental [item] sometimes takes place not in virtue of a cause external to the quiddity, but is necessitated and entailed by the quiddity). What is not necessitated by the quiddity, and can occur on account of something external providing it, is not constitutive of the essence.

[e] The genus is among the notions that resemble the form, insofar as, by means of it, the notion [of something] becomes a notion, and the quiddity [of something becomes] a quiddity. Existence, on the contrary, is an entity that is consequent (*yalḥaqu*) upon the quiddity, sometimes in the concrete objects, sometimes in the mind.

Significantly, the example used here to indicate the item having quiddity or essence is the same as in Text 1 (the triangle). The distinction of essence and existence is expressed by the idea that existence is external to, and not constitutive of, the essence of triangle (sections [a]–[b], [d]), and by the idea—original with regard to chapter I, 5—that the existence of triangle is caused, whereas its essence is not (section [d]). This reference to causality represents a new ontological/metaphysical argument in support of the priority of essence over existence, otherwise expressed by saying that existence "accompanies inseparably" (*lazima*, section [a]) and "is consequent upon" (*laḥiqa*, sections [c], [e]) essence. Considerations on the extension of essence and existence are absent. Noteworthy also is Avicenna's reference to mental states (the acts of "conceptualizing", "comprehending", "to be uncertain"), in order to argue for the distinction of essence and existence in sections [b]–[c].[47] Thus, in comparison with Text 1, the distinction is defended here by means of an epistemological approach, quite appropriate to the logical context, rather than by the linguistic method adopted in the *Ilāhīyāt*. This might indicate that according to Avicenna the distinction is "mental" rather than "real". Avicenna's general aim also in this case, as in the other passages of the *Ilāhīyāt*, is a distinction, namely the proof of the fact that existence is not a genus (this latter being part of essence). As in the other passages of the *Ilāhīyāt*, therefore, he mentions both the distinction and the connection, but he insists on the distinction, more than on the connection, of essence and existence.

---

[47] One may wonder how essence can be distinguished from existence in the unreal case envisioned in section [c]. One may think of two distinct conceptual acts, like the ones by means of which we understand the concepts of "soul" and "body".

Conclusion

The aim of the previous pages was to contextualize more precisely Avicenna's doctrine of essence and existence, in order to show its complexity and elucidate its constituents. Avicenna's actual account of this doctrine appears to be multifaceted and more complex than it is usually described in secondary literature. In particular, I have tried to supplement the scholarship on this doctrine in three main respects. First, I have strived to redirect attention to the most important text by Avicenna on the distinction at hand, namely chapter I, 5 of the *Ilāhīyāt*. A careful examination of this chapter discloses two further aspects in which secondary literature appears unbalanced: it too harshly portrays the distinction of essence and existence as a sort of radical separation between these two items; and it is one-sided in ascribing to essence priority over existence, while also attributing to the concept of "thing" an analogous priority, both intensional and extensional, with regard to the concept of "existent". In all these respects, scholarship to date relies on Avicenna's doctrine of universals in *Ilāhīyāt* V, 1–2, paying relatively less attention to his doctrine of the primary concepts or transcendentals in *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 (section 1 above).

The analysis of *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 provided here (section 2 above) discloses a different scenario. The distinction of essence and existence, "thing" and "existent", in this chapter does not appear as a sharp dichotomy. On the contrary, Avicenna stresses and defends against opposite views the inseparable connection between "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, portraying this link as mutual and as required for the status of "thing". This being the case, essence can hardly be said to be "neutral" or "indifferent" towards existence in general, although it may be loosely linked to particular instances of existence, such as its existence in the mind as a universal concept. On account of this, Avicenna's doctrine deserves to be labelled "*relationship* of essence and existence", rather than "*distinction* of essence and existence", as it is usually called (section 3 above). Essence and existence, "thing" and "existent", have different intensions, and essence and "thing" are surely prior to existence and "existent" from a cognitive point of view; according to an absolute consideration, however, existence and "existent" are intensionally *prior* to essence and "thing", since the meaning of essence is expressed also by a particular sense of existence ("proper existence" or existence[2]), and "existent" is not susceptible to being explained by means of a different notion, such as by the notion of

essence in the case of "thing" (section 4 above). Moreover, "thing" and "existent" are *grosso modo* co-extensive, but do not have exactly the same extension, insofar as the extension of "existent" encompasses an item that the extension of "thing" does not include; every "thing" is also an "existent", but not every "existent" is also a "thing", since God, not having an essence distinct from existence, is an "existent" without being a "thing" (section 5 above). Avicenna's view of the relationship of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, expounded in *Ilāhīyāt* I, 5 is recounted in many other *loci* of this work (section 6 above), as well as elsewhere (section 7 above). All the available textual evidence points at a single, coherent doctrine, although the distinctive aspects of chapter I, 5 are not recounted in the additional texts; these texts thus ground and corroborate the aforementioned *versio vulgata*.

In chapter I, 5 (the main text on the issue), in other words Avicenna's discussion of the relationship of "thing" and "existent", essence and existence, appears to be motivated by a peculiar intention: to stress that "existent" and existence are, at least in some respects, logically prior and more universal than "thing" and essence, and to safeguard this tenet in the context of a doctrine that, in fact, points in the opposite direction. This emphasis on the primacy of "existent" and existence represents a unique case among the various treatments of essence and existence in Avicenna's *œuvre*. If we consider that in the previous chapters of the *Ilāhīyāt* Avicenna has proved that "existent" is the subject-matter of metaphysics, and that in the same context he is equally subordinating to "existent", in different ways and respects, also the other primary concepts taken into account in the *Ilāhīyāt* ("necessary" is defined in term of "existence" in I, 5; both "necessary" and "one" are described as properties of "existent" in I, 2), this tendency to underscore the priority of "existent" with respect to "thing" appears to be part of a general strategy that aims at showing that "existent" is the first and most universal among the primary concepts, and that hence it solely deserves to be the subject-matter of the first and most universal science.[48]