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THE EXTENSION OF REALITY

THE EMERGENCE OF MIND-INDEPENDENT REALITY IN POSTCLASSICAL ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. Avicenna's distinction between external existence and mental existence is seminal to logic and philosophy in the Islamic tradition. This article examines philosophers who depart from Avicenna's external-mental existence framework. They view the former as failing to support a general analysis of reality and truth, as mental existence is neither necessary nor sufficient for analyzing propositional truths, i. e., true propositions are true irrespective of "the very existence of minds" and "the perceptual acts of perceivers." They propose that Avicenna's semantics for categorical propositions needs revision, as there are true metathetic and hypothetical propositions, i. e., subject terms need not exist – in external reality or in a mind – for such propositions to be true. This counter-Avicennan current of thought articulates a third distinction in the analysis of reality, which focuses on the mind-independent nature of propositional content – particularly propositions with empty, hypothetical, or impossible subject terms – as a way to think generally about reality, in contrast to the Avicennan emphasis on the existential status of terms and essences. Notably, the analysis of mind-independent reality is supported by a novel semantics of "real" (*ḥaqīqī*) categorical propositions, which avoids external and mental existence conditions.

Résumé. La distinction d'Avicenne entre existence externe et existence mentale est fondamentale pour la logique et la philosophie de la tradition islamique. Cet article examine les philosophes qui s'écartent du cadre d'existence externe-mentale d'Avicenne. Ils considèrent que la première ne permet pas de soutenir une analyse générale de la réalité et de la vérité, car l'existence mentale n'est ni nécessaire ni suffisante pour analyser les vérités propositionnelles, c'est-à-dire que les propositions vraies sont vraies indépendamment de «l'existence même des esprits» et des «actes perceptifs des percepteurs». Ils soutiennent que les conditions de vérité d'Avicenne doivent être révisées, car il existe de vraies propositions métathétiques et hypothétiques, c'est-à-dire que les termes sujets n'ont pas besoin d'exister – dans la réalité externe ou dans un esprit – pour que de telles propositions soient vraies. Ce courant de pensée contraire à celui d'Avicenne articule une troisième distinction dans l'analyse de la réalité. Ils se concentrent sur la nature indépendante de l'esprit du contenu propositionnel – en particulier les propositions avec des termes sujets vides, hypothétiques ou impossibles – comme moyen de penser la réalité de manière générale, contrairement à l'accent mis par Avicenne sur le statut existentiel des termes et des essences. Notamment, l'analyse de la réalité indépendante de l'esprit est soutenue par une nouvelle sémantique des propositions catégoriques «réelles» (*ḥaqīqī*), qui évite les conditions d'existence externes et mentales d'Avicenne.

Impossibilities are divine realities
(Dāwūd al-Qaysarī, d. 1350).¹

The proponents of *kalām* reject mental existence and restrict *existence* to that which obtains in external reality. They view the existence of mentally held objects in terms of *reality itself* (*nafs al-amr*), which is similar to the relation between “the rising of the sun” and “the existence of day” (Isma‘īl Gelenbevī, d. 1791).²

Avicenna’s distinction between mental existence and external existence is seminal to later Islamic philosophy. The distinction had broad application in philosophical and logical analysis, and most thinkers in the postclassical tradition adopt some version of it.³ In logic, Avicenna states, “It is impossible to assert of a non-existent subject that it has an existent [property], so every subject term in an affirmative proposition has existence *in re* or *in the mind*.”⁴ That objects have existence *in re*, i. e., in concrete or external reality (*al-wuğūd al-ḥariğī*), is clear enough. As for existence in the mind or “mental existence” (*al-wuğūd al-dihni*), philosophers that accept Avicenna’s distinction argue in support of the latter for several reasons, including to account for possible but nonexistent objects, i. e., things that are nonexistent in external reality but can exist. Possible nonexistents are to be distinguished from *impossible* nonexistents in virtue of the fact that the latter cannot exist in external reality or, even, in the mind. Impossible objects, as such, cannot serve as subjects of affirmative predications. This was one prevailing approach to the analysis of reality and truth for the followers of Avicenna.

¹ Dāwūd al-Qaysarī, *Maṭla‘ ḥuṣūṣ al-kalim fī ma‘ānī Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. Šayḥ ‘Āšim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2012), p. 59.

² Isma‘īl Gelenbevī, *Rasā’il al-imtihān* (Istanbul: al-Maṭba‘a al-‘Āmira, 1262 [1846]), p. 162.

³ Seyed N. Mousavian, “Avicenna on Talking about Nothing,” in C. T. Thörnqvist and J. Toivanen (eds.), *Forms of Representation in the Aristotelian Tradition*, vol. 3: “Concept Formation” (Brill, 2022), p. 141–77; Allan Bäck, “Avicenna on Existence,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), p. 351–367; Damien Janos, *Avicenna on the Ontology of Pure Quiddity* (De Gruyter, 2020), p. 171–188; p. 202–221; Fedor Benevich, “The Reality of the Non-Existent Object of Thought,” *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, 6 (2018), p. 31–61; Deborah L. Black, “Mental Existence in Thomas Aquinas and Avicenna,” *Mediaeval Studies*, 61 (1999), p. 45–79; and sources cited below.

⁴ Avicenna, *Al-šifā’*: *Al-mantiq*, vol. 3: *Al-‘ibāra*, ed. by M. al-Ḥudayrī (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-‘Arabī, 1970), p. 79.

This article examines an analysis of reality that sharply contrasts with the Avicennan view of mental and external existence. Beginning in the late 13th century, a counter-tradition of thought on the analysis of reality emerges. Philosophers begin to argue that the mental-external existence framework of Avicenna fails to support a general analysis of reality and truth. They hold that “most errors arise solely from the conflation of propositions ‘themselves’ (*ḥukm al-anfus*) with assertions about external existence or mental existence.”⁵ They propose to distinguish a third category of analysis beyond external and mental existence conditions. How these thinkers understood the latter distinction is studied below.⁶

Proponents of the Avicennan view took the distinction between external existence and mental existence to be fundamental and exhaustive. The Avicennan philosopher, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274), states: “Existence divides into external existence and mental existence, otherwise reality would be [made] void” (*wa-illā baṭalat al-ḥaqīqa*).⁷ Later commentators interpreted Ṭūsī’s statement as concerning propositional truths and their truthmakers. They reasoned that since external existence cannot account for true propositions with empty subject terms (e. g., “The heptagonal house is seven-sided” or “The partner of God is impossible”), mental existence is needed to secure the truth of such propositions.⁸

⁵ Šams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *Al-ma‘ārifi fi šarḥ al-Šaḥā‘if* (Insights: A Commentary on “The Leaves”), vol. 1, p. 446.

⁶ There have been several studies on aspects of reality and truth in the postclassical tradition. The following adds to this literature by focusing on the philosophical and logical motivations of the critics of the Avicennan approach, which have been overlooked. See, for example, İhsan Fazlıoğlu, “Between Reality and Mentality: Fifteenth Century Mathematics and Natural Philosophy Reconsidered,” *Nazariyat: Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences*, 1 (2014), p. 1–39; Hasan Spiker, *Things as They Are: Nafs al-Amr & the Metaphysical Foundations of Objective Truth* (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Foundation, 2021); Moiz Hasan, “Foundations of Science in the Post-Classical Islamic Era: The Philosophical, Historical, and Historiographical Significance of Sayyid al-Šarīf al-Jurjānī’s (d. 1413) Project,” Ph. D. dissertation (University of Notre Dame, 2017), p. 105–212; Syed M. Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the World-view of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), p. 177–331; Ibrahim Kalin, *Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra on Existence, Intellect, and Intuition* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 118–180.

⁷ ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Qūšǧī / Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ Taǧrīd al-‘aqā‘id* (Commentary on “The Abstract of Beliefs”) (Qum: Rā‘id, 2014 [1393]), p. 122.

That is, although the objects of such terms fail to exist in external reality, they can be taken to “exist in the mind” so that such propositions can be read as true. Ṭūsī’s phrase, “reality would be made void,” thus meant that “if existence were limited to external [existence]” true propositions would be “made void,” i. e., read as false. For the Avicennan philosophers, then, mental existence – understood in one way or other – is required to account for truths that fail to hold under external existence conditions. We can call this view, where mental existence is a necessary and sufficient complement to external existence conditions, the doctrine of mental-and-external existence (or MEE). On this view, propositional truths, and problems of existential import, are addressed by the Avicennan ampliation of existence – rather than, say, a deeper analysis of the underlying semantics or conceptual-formal nature of propositions.⁹

Against the Avicennan analysis of reality within a twofold distinction of *existence*, philosophers in an opposing tradition articulate a third category of truth, which they variously term “reality itself” (*nafs al-amr*), “the real” (*al-ḥaqīqī*), and “actuality” (*al-wāqī*).¹⁰ Philosophers in this camp view *reality itself* as analyzable independently of external existence and mental existence. Commenting on Ṭūsī’s text noted above, ‘Alā al-Dīn al-Qūshgī (d. 1474), the philosopher and astronomer, argues

⁸ Ṭūsī’s commentator, al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325), spells out MEE as defined below: “... because we make affirmative assertions of subjects that are nonexistent *in re*, and the existence of an attribute requires the existence of the subject of attribution. Since [the subject in this case] is nonexistent *in re*, it must therefore be existent in the mind.” *Kaṣf al-murād fī šarḥ Taḡrīd al-i‘tiqād*, ed. by Ḥasan Ḥasanzādah al-‘Amulī (Qum: Mu‘assasat al-Našr al-Islāmī, 1433 [2011 or 2012]), p. 39.

⁹ For Ṭūsī, for example, mental existence is reified into an eternal, immaterial mind or truthmaker, namely, the “Active Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-fa‘cāl*). He does this in part to account for criticisms of mental existence understood as individual forms existing in individual human minds or cognitive faculties, as discussed below.

¹⁰ I translate the term, *nafs al-amr*, as “reality itself.” There are several reasons for this choice. First, the term or the concept is meant to be existence-neutral in the contexts below. *Amr* as “reality” is aptly existence-neutral. Moreover, the term, *nafs*, understood as “itself,” in its emphatic appositive use in Arabic, bears important classical *kalām* background, as discussed below. For *nafs al-amr*, Fazhoḡlu suggests “the fact of the matter.” Spiker offers “things as they are,” which applies to entities or objects like Platonic forms or the “immutable archetypes” of certain interpretations of Akbarian thought. I avoid “things” and “facts” for reasons clarified below. The concept applies not only to distinct *entities* or *objects* but a broader notion of reality and truth, including propositional truths, states, experiences, and even impossibilities as “realities” (i. e., realities need not be grounded in terms and objects even if they can be analyzed or logically decomposed as such). Note that proponents of MEE will also use the term, *nafs al-amr*, but often with an emphasis on how it ultimately requires mental existence or existence in an immaterial intellect.

against the standard Avicennan reading of MEE:

It will not help the [Avicennan] philosophers to posit mental existence [as a complement to external existence] ... because we know with certitude that “The co-existence of two contradictories is absurd,” and that “The partner of God is impossible,” *even if there did not exist a mind or a cognitive faculty*.¹¹

Qūšgī highlights a critical question for philosophers in the counter-Avicennan current: How can we think of truth and reality independently of the *very existence* of minds – and not just independently of particular cognitive conditions or faculties? Philosophers in this line argue that mental existence is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition (*lā yuštaraṭ; lā yakfī*) for analyzing truth and reality since true propositions are true irrespective not only of external existence but also of mental existence, i. e., the very existence of minds in the world. This counter-MEE camp sees Avicennan mental existence as falling prey to forms of psychologism. Their criticisms of MEE are rather clear and compelling as the following shows. But how are we to understand the approach of this counter-MEE current of thought? Is it essentially a skeptical stance or did it provide an alternative framework for the analysis of truth?

In the epigraph above, Gelenbevī alludes to a way of analyzing reality and truth that contrasts with the Avicennan emphasis on mental existence. The former suggests that what is taken to be true in the mind can be viewed as analogous to a kind of semantic-conditional relation or implication (*mulāzama*). The following discussion shows that post-classical thinkers rely on a set of formal concepts to articulate a view of *mind-independent reality* on semantic-linguistic terms (which can be called MIR). There are two clusters of concepts that give MIR philosophical teeth. First, philosophers in this camp emphasize a strong notion of mind-independent reality, analyzing a concept or proposition “as if” there were no minds in the world and “irrespective even of the act of supposition or rational consideration” (*farḍ fāriḍ / iʿtibār muʿtabir*).¹² Second, and more significantly, the concept of mind-independent reality is made perspicacious through a novel analysis of the semantics and truth conditions of categorical propositions. Philosophers in this camp focus on *propositional* truths – particularly propositions with empty, hypothetical, or impossible subject terms – as a way to think more generally about reality and truth. This contrasts with the Avicennan emphasis on the existential status of terms, essences, and objects of knowledge and cog-

¹¹ Qūšgī / Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ Taḡrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 140.

¹² Saʿd al-Dīn Taftāzānī, *Šarḥ al-Maqāšid* (A Commentary on “The Aims”), ed. by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmayra (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1419/1998), vol. 1, p. 391–392.

dition. Critically, thinkers in the MIR camp define or test “reality itself” with the truth conditions of “real propositions” (*al-qadāya al-ḥaqīqiyya*), as introduced by Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210).¹³ Whereas Avicennans defend a MEE-based reading of real propositions by adding stronger and stronger requirements of mental existence, including positing the Active Intellect as an eternal, immaterial truthmaker, the counter-Avicennans stress a hypothetical-semantic account of real propositional truths.

The above set of distinctions informing a mind-independent and existence-independent analysis of reality is articulated in post-12th-century Ašʿarite sources, from al-Samarqandī (d. 1302) to Gelenbevī (d. 1791). These postclassical discussions heavily draw on classical *kalām* concepts, particularly from debates between Muʿtazilites and Ašʿarites on several problems, including (1) the status and “thingness” of the nonexistent object; and (2) the nature of language and meaning. Moreover, in support of their approach to the analysis of reality and truth, postclassical thinkers invoke logical distinctions made by Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, as noted. Accordingly, I begin in section 1 with the question of the nonexistent in classical Ašʿarite and Muʿtazilite sources. Section 2 briefly addresses the status of mental existence and existential import in Avicenna and Rāzī. Section 3 examines the articulation of MIR in post-12th-century sources of *kalām* and philosophy.

1. THE CLASSICAL AŠʿARITE ANALYSIS

In classical works of *kalām* (roughly pre-1200), the debate regarding whether a nonexistent object is a “thing” (*šayʿ*) appears as a problem local to *kalām* and not expressly related to fundamental questions of logic and metaphysics. In our postclassical sources of philosophical *kalām*, important connections are made between the classical problem and questions such as existential import and mental existence. Some aspects of these connections are explored by Fedor Benevich in a recent article. The former argues that three views can be discerned in the postclassical tradition regarding the status of nonexistent objects: (A) a (Basrian) Muʿtazilite view that every possible nonexistent object is externally real or a “thing” (*šayʿ*);¹⁴ (B) an Avicennan position that a

¹³ *Al-qadāya al-ḥaqīqiyya* is usually translated as “essentialist” propositions. Below, I discuss why “real” or “realist” propositions is a more apt translation.

¹⁴ Benevich focuses on a specific Muʿtazilite view or position regarding the mental status of nonexistent objects. The following discussion focuses on the general Basrian thesis that the “thingness” or reality of the nonexistent concerns *possible* objects as

possible non-existent thing *exists* in the mind; and (C) Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's position, which he characterizes as reducing non-existent objects of thought to "real extramental objects."¹⁵ I focus in this section on (A) and (B), and will return to (C) in section 2 of the article. Benevich concludes,

All three views share the common trend to ascribe some reality to all objects of thought, which we might interpret as *ontological permissivism*... The two main reasons for the ontological permissivism were: (1) a specific theory of knowledge and thought which claims that when thinking we build a relation or connection to the objects of thought; (2) a specific theory of predication, which claims that predicates occur in their subjects, which entails that subjects have to be real in some sense.¹⁶

Against this picture of the postclassical landscape, we find that the postclassical sources discussed below explicitly reject both reasons for an ontologically inflationary account: they reject (1) in virtue of their arguments that truths can be considered independently of mental existence or *the existence of minds* altogether; and they reject (2) because, against the "prevailing" Avicenna view (*al-maṣhūr*), they deny the usual requirements of existential import on the MIR reading. To be sure, proponents of MIR will reject these claims precisely to avoid the kind of "ontological permissivism" suggested above.¹⁷ To better contextualize the postclassical arguments in this regard, we are well served to revisit some philosophical elements that have been overlooked in the classical debate.

In addition to the three views highlighted above, it is worth noting a fourth view regarding the status of nonexistent objects in classical sources: (D) an Aṣḥarite approach to nonexistents and reality. The early Aṣḥarites develop arguments against the Muʿtazilite position (A) that the nonexistent object is *real*, that is, the view that the nonexistent is a "thing" (*ṣayʾ*) and is "actual" (*tābit*).¹⁸ Both the Aṣḥarites and Muʿ-

opposed to *impossible* objects, be it objects of thought or objects of an efficient cause or power.

¹⁵ Benevich, "The Reality of the Non-Existent," p. 57.

¹⁶ Benevich, "The Reality of the Non-Existent," p. 57.

¹⁷ Spiker has underscored the "ontological parsimony" of these thinkers but views it as chiefly skeptical and "reductivist;" he sees the Aṣḥarite theory as eschewing (*falsafa*) metaphysics altogether; see *Things as They Are*, p. 87. See conclusion for further discussion.

¹⁸ ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ġuwaynī, *Al-ṣāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. by S. al-Naṣṣār (Alexandria: Munṣaʾāt al-Maʿārif, 1969), p. 124; Robert Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 145–153; Richard Frank, "Al-maʿdūm wa-l-mawjūd: The Non-Existent, the Existent and the

tazilites agree that the nonexistent object, or *ma^cdūm*, cannot be described as an “existent” (*mawǧūd*) or as having the attribute of existence (*wuǧūd*).¹⁹ So the debate centered on the terms “thing” (*šay^c*) and *tābit*, the latter having a range of meanings from existence to possessing some external reality or actuality. Note that these discussions emerge prior to the assimilation of the Avicennan view of mental existence within *kalām*.

Against the Mu^ctazilite view, the Aš^carites held that one does not refer to a nonexistent object as a thing or as having reality in any way. Rather, the nonexistent object is pure nullity (*nafī maḥd*) or “nonexistent without qualification” (*ma^cdūm muṭlaq*), whether the nonexistent is considered to be possible or impossible.²⁰ This terminological difference between the two camps underscores a deeper division regarding how to analyze (nonexistent) reality.

There are two distinctions in this regard that form a conceptual fault line dividing Aš^carite and Mu^ctazilite views well into the postclassical period. First, the Mu^ctazilites distinguish between the reality or thingness of *possible* nonexistent objects and the pure nullity of impossible objects or, as Frank calls them, “imaginary” concepts or impossibilities (e. g., partner of God).²¹ The Mu^ctazilites applied the term “nonexistent” (*ma^cdūm*) strictly to possible things, i. e., items that can come to exist and can be an object of an agent-cause.²² Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 1025) states, “It is true of every nonexistent that its generation is possible in some manner, and that is the way to [have] knowledge of it. Because if we do not permit its generation in relation to an agent cause (*al-qādir*), we would know that it is a *nonexistent*.”²³ That is, according to ‘Abd al-Ġabbār, we ascribe reality to possible nonexistents as opposed to impossible concepts on the following ontological grounds: possible nonexistents, unlike impossible items, are potential objects of an autonomous agent’s power (*qudra*).

Possible in the Teaching of Abū Hāshim and His Followers,” *Mélanges de l’Institut dominicain d’études orientales*, 14 (1980), p. 191–194; Richard Frank, “The Non-Existent and The Possible in Classical Aš^carite Teaching,” *Mélanges de l’Institut dominicain d’études orientales*, 24 (2000), p. 2–3.

¹⁹ Frank, “*Al-ma^cdūm wa-l-mawjūd*,” p. 191–194; Ġuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 124.

²⁰ Ġuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 133.

²¹ Frank, “*Al-ma^cdūm wa-l-mawjūd*,” p. 188–189; 208.

²² Frank, “*Al-ma^cdūm wa-l-mawjūd*,” p. 190.

²³ ‘Abd al-Ġabbār b. Aḥmad al-Asadabādī, *Al-muǧnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl* (Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Iršād al-Qawmī, al-Idāra al-‘Āmma li-l-Thaqāfa), vol. 4, p. 247.

This ontological distinction between possible nonexistent objects and impossible concepts in the Muʿtazilite view is related to a second distinction of significance: possible nonexistents relate to proper or real objects of *knowledge* whereas impossible objects do not. As ʿAbd al-Ġabbār suggests above, the possible nonexistent is an object of knowledge insofar as it is a conceivable object of an agent’s power. But the impossible object is not a conceivable object of knowledge according to this Basrian view. ʿAbd al-Ġabbār, for example, states that knowledge of a second eternal being, i. e., partner of God, is “knowledge without an object.”²⁴ This distinction made by ʿAbd al-Ġabbār is defended by Ibn Mattawayh (fl. cir. 11th century). Ibn Mattawayh informs us that knowledge divides into that which has an object and that which has no object, “and the difference between the two becomes clear if there is something to which it is possible to point to in terms of [possible] *nonexistence or existence* ... so knowledge that there is no second [God] but God and that bodies do not possess persistence *is knowledge without an object* [i. e. due to their being impossible to exist].”²⁵ He notes that it is impossible that the latter things are “nonexistent,” i. e., in the strict sense that they are counted as “things” and have actuality (*tubūt*) “otherwise it would be possible for them to exist in some way...”²⁶ Ibn Mattawayh takes such impossible terms to signify a concept or an instance of “knowledge” that an individual possesses which has *no* corresponding object of knowledge (*maʿlūm*).²⁷ These statements suggest that some Muʿtazilites divide objects according to an actualism defined by their school ontology: items rejected in their ontology are impossible and not proper objects of knowledge.²⁸ I set aside important questions about this view.²⁹

²⁴ ʿAbd al-Ġabbār, *Muġnī*, vol. 4, p. 247–248.

²⁵ Ibn Mattawayh, *Al-taḍkira fī aḥkām al-ġawāhir wa-l-aʿrād*, ed. by D. Gimaret (Cairo: al-Maʿhad al-ʿIlmī al-Faransī liʾl-Āthār al-Šarqiyya biʾl-Qāhira, 2009), vol. 1, p. 621. Below, we will see that Avicenna makes a similar point regarding the condition of “pointing to” nonexistent possible objects.

²⁶ Ibn Mattawayh, *Taḍkira*, vol. 1, p. 621.

²⁷ This seems to be what Frank means by what is purely “imaginary” in the Muʿtazilite view, i. e., impossible items are not correlated to real (nonexistent) objects of knowledge. Frank, “*Al-maʿdūm wa-l-mawjūd*,” p. 189–190.

²⁸ The Muʿtazilites view not only a second eternal being as an impossible object but include the Ašʿarite view of divine attributes and the notion that bodies have persistence (*baqāʾ*). Ibn Mattawayh, *Taḍkira*, vol. 1, p. 621; ʿAbd al-Ġabbār, *Muġnī*, vol. 4, p. 247–248.

²⁹ For example, it is unclear whether a nonexistent’s being an object of knowledge is more primary or basic than being an object of an agent’s power. “Partner of God,” for example, is not an object of power by definition. This suggests that the two grounds

According to this Basrian-Mu^ctazilite view, then, the causal-ontological division between real possible nonexistents and impossible items parallels an epistemological-psychological distinction where nonexistent things have corresponding real objects of knowledge but impossible things do not. As Frank states, the Mu^ctazilites view the possible nonexistent “not, as the Aš^carites would have it, a pure negation (*nafy širf*), for the possibility of the possible is in fact real (*tābit*) and for this reason it is distinguishable from the purely imaginary as something (*tode ti*) that is really and in fact correlated to the agent’s power of efficient causation, and, thereby, a real object of knowing.”³⁰ It can be noted that the Mu^ctazilite distinction will parallel a distinction we find in Avicenna between possible and impossible objects in mental existence.

The Aš^carites oppose the above Mu^ctazilite view on several fronts. First, they view a nonexistent object, whether possible or impossible, as nullity or nonexistent without qualification.³¹ The simplicity of the latter position has however lead to overlooking important aspects of their analysis. I limit the discussion to elements that directly relate to the postclassical sources discussed below.

Regarding the Basrian-Mu^ctazilite view that every nonexistent is a thing and that a thing is an object of knowledge, Ğuwaynī states:

TEXT 1. If you say every known object is a thing, then what do you say regarding one who knows that “There is no *partner to God*” or that “*Two contraries cannot co-exist*?” Does his knowledge of such [statements] have an object of knowledge?³²

Ğuwaynī then draws out the consequences of this. If they say that both are “known” – i. e., are objects of knowledge on their definition – then they assert that such concepts are *real* things (that is, specifically the items in italics above). To respond to such objections, Abū Hāšim, according to Ğuwaynī, invents the view that knowledge of such impossible objects is a “kind of knowledge without an object” (the view noted above), which, according to Ğuwaynī, is the “pinnacle of ignorance.”³³ Note that the argument and two examples above will be restated in postclassical

are distinct. But on what basis, then, do the Mu^ctazilites distinguish possible nonexistents from purely impossible items? And how do they account for true statements such as, “The partner of God does not exist?” Ğuwaynī raises these and other objections in *Šāmil*, p. 127–128.

³⁰ Frank, “*Al-ma^cdūm wal-mawjūd*,” p. 207.

³¹ Frank, “The Non-Existent and the Possible,” p. 2–3.

³² Ğuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 127–128.

³³ Ğuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 128.

Aš'arite discussions in the context of existential import (e. g. Text 21). In the classical tradition of *kalām*, the terms in italics usually occupy the role of the noun phrase (*al-mubtada'* / *musnad ilayhi*). However, they will be formally expressed as quantified "subject terms" of categorical propositions in the postclassical tradition. Rāzī will provide a way to formulate true affirmative categorical proposition with the above examples of nonexistent subject terms.

Ĝuwaynī's approach centers on two points that will be of significance to our discussion. First, he argues that the objects of knowledge need not be *existent* for us to formulate *true* statements. Second, we can account for the reality of possible things in virtue of a "suppositional" or semantic account of assertions. Frank has highlighted both aspects of the Aš'arite view. In response to the Mu'tazilite argument that the possibility of the possible indicates its reality, Ĝuwaynī states that one need not call possible nonexistents real (*tābit*) but, rather, he states, "Why do you deny that the difference between the two objects of knowledge reduces to (*ruġū'*) the fact that the supposition (*taqdīr*) of the existence of one of the two [kinds of] nullities is possible, namely the possible nonexistent, and that it is not possible to suppose the existence of the second, namely, the impossible."³⁴ In other words, such objects of knowledge can obtain and be true without the existence of their components. Ĝuwaynī relies on a notion of supposition, where a possible nonexistent object need not be viewed as existent or real to "distinguish" between two items. The ontological import of such terms is posterior to this central distinction. He notes that the opponents may object that making such a "distinction without affirming the reality" of the possible nonexistent is far-fetched, since it is the *real* distinctness of things that allows us to distinguish between possible nonexistents. To this, he provides a reductio argument that states that this suggests that "the impossible nonexistent should [also] be taken as a [real] entity," as we can distinguish between different impossible objects of thought. That is, if distinguishability entails the ontological reality of the items in question, then distinguishing, say, square circles from two-sided triangles implies the reality of both concepts.

Ĝuwaynī's point regarding "reducing" the question to what can be stated *suppositionally* is restated in various ways against the Mu'tazilite view. With respect to the verse from the Quran, "The quake of

³⁴ Ĝuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 133. This seems to limit the scope of impossible things to immediately known impossibilities; this accords with Aš'arite views on necessary or immediately known truths (*darūriyyāt*).

the final hour is a grave *thing*,” he cites the Mu^ctazilites as arguing that the former statement is evidence that the presently nonexistent quake is a real “thing” prior to its existence. In response, Ğuwaynī states:

TEXT 2. If they hold that the meaning of the verse is that “If [the final hour] exists, then the quake exists,” we say in the same manner, “If [the quake of the final hour] exists, it is a [real] thing.”³⁵

Ğuwaynī argues that the description of the quake as a “thing” can be understood as a conditional statement: if (or when) the quake *exists*, then the quake is a thing. He concludes by stating that we interpret a nonexistent’s “being a thing on *the supposition [taqdīr]* of its existence.” I return to the conditional form as a way to reformulate categorical propositions in the postclassical tradition, where Aš^carites read the categorical proposition, “Every simurgh is an animal,” for example, as “For every *x*, if *x* were to exist and is a simurgh, it is true that *x* is an animal” (see, for example, Text 12).

As Frank has shown, the emphasis on a linguistic and suppositional analysis of reality and truth is a feature of classical Aš^carite thought. Frank discusses the following example of how Ğuwaynī addresses the truth of one’s nonexistent coat. Ğuwaynī states:

TEXT 3. When one knows that one does not have a coat with him, his knowing is a fact which there is no way to reject. Then, [this] knowledge must have an object and it is impossible for the object of his knowledge *to be the existence [ṭubūt] of his coat*. This is because he can distinguish between his knowledge of “his coat’s being with him” and between his knowledge of “its not being with him.” This then shows that knowledge is correlated to the non-actuality of his having a coat with him.³⁶

Ğuwaynī effectively distinguishes between the cognitive or intensional content of terms or phrases (and their epistemological grounds) and the truth of statements in which they are used. Our knowledge and expression of truth need not correspond to the content of an object of knowledge in terms of *real* objects or existents at all, in contrast to the Mu^ctazilites. Ğuwaynī holds that the nonexistent is a pure nullity [i. e., in external reality] but it is also a proper object of knowledge. He states, critically, that objects of knowledge are *not* like objects of perception (*al-mudrak*), as the former need not correspond in terms of intensional content. In the above case, a sentence corresponds simply to a state of affairs irrespective of whether the objects in the sentence *exist*. Frank aptly summarizes the general approach of the Aš^carites:

³⁵ Ğuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 138.

³⁶ Ğuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 138.

The presence of the posited coat, were it to exist ... would be an element in a hypothetically conceivable alternative to the actual state of affairs, one whose actuality involves a series (or several convergent series) of events that could have occurred rather than those which did in fact occur... Each event in the hypothetical series that would have led to the existence of the coat-with-me could, in al-Ġuwaynī's terminology, have occurred *'ala ṣiḥḥati wal-badal* [i. e., in virtue of truth and substitution] with respect to the ones in the series that did occur.³⁷

I must set aside further discussion of the notion of "in virtue of truth and substitution" (*'ala ṣiḥḥati wal-badal*), which Frank sees as serving as a kind of hypothetical view of truth in various sources.³⁸ As he describes it in the above passage, the approach concerns how to consider the truth of statements independently of what objects are existent or nonexistent. Ġuwaynī does not state that we mentally reduce nonexistent objects to existent or real objects of knowledge. Rather, his method or strategy is to turn the requirement of the existence and reality of objects into a question of the truth of statements, i. e., units of composed meanings.³⁹ As we will see, this linguistic-semantic analysis of reality is reflected in postclassical sources criticizing MEE.⁴⁰

I will return to other aspects of the classical discussion in the course of the analysis of postclassical discussion of MEE.⁴¹ But we can highlight

³⁷ See Frank, "The Non-Existent and the Possible," p. 5.

³⁸ The *ṣiḥḥa*, i. e., the "truth" or "correctness" of propositions is addressed in a similar manner by later sources (see Text 16).

³⁹ He states that the object of knowledge in "The partner of God does not exist" and "Two contraries do not exist together" is the "nullity" (*intifāʿ*) of the terms. His analysis suggests that the intensional content of terms need not correspond to an existent or real object. He states, "For knowledge of a nullity, it is necessary that knowledge is connected to the 'supposition of a thing' (*taqdīr al-ṣayʿ*)." (*Šāmil*, p. 138.)

⁴⁰ Cf. Benevich, "The Reality of the Non-Existent," p. 46–57; the latter source overlooks the distinction between Muʿtazilite "reductionism," which is intensional or psychological, and the reductive approach of Ašʿarite truth analysis, where mental objects are not required.

⁴¹ We must set aside the important role of "meaning" (*maʿnā*) and internal speech in the Ašʿarite tradition, which parallels aspects of the Stoic view of *lekta* as "impression-independent" propositional content and contrasts with the Muʿtazilite materialist-reduction of meanings. The role of "states" (*ahwāl*) also provides further background to the bifurcation of approaches to analyzing truth. For those Ašʿarites who endorsed it, the analysis of *states*, as Gimaret suggests, led to a kind of extensional or "categorical realism" (Daniel Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane* [Paris: Vrin, 1980], p. 98–100). By contrast, the original Bahšamite analysis of *states* serves as a kind of essentialist-ontological analysis of reality, one that would ultimately influence Avicenna. On the latter, see the important analysis of Marwan Rashed, "Chose, item et distinction: L'homme volant d'Avicenne avec et

two points from the above that will anticipate later discussions. First, paralleling Ġuwaynī's method, postclassical Aš'arites will heavily emphasize that we can formulate true propositions without requiring the existence or the external reality of a (subject) term or object of knowledge. Later Aš'arites will emphasize the truth of the "propositional relation" (*al-nisba al-ḥukmiyya*) as opposed to the existence or reality of the subject term or object of knowledge. Second, postclassical Aš'arites will read categorical propositions in a conditional-suppositional form, where the philosophical motives for the latter mirror Ġuwaynī's arguments against the Mu'tazilite view of the nonexistent.

2. EXISTENTIAL IMPORT: AVICENNA AND RĀZĪ

In this section, we focus on two points regarding Avicenna and Rāzī: (1) the question of existential import; and (2) Rāzī's "essentialist" reading of categorical propositions. As noted, Avicenna's distinction between mental existence and external existence is central to his philosophical and logical system. As recent studies confirm, Avicenna's requirement that the subject term obtains in external or mental existence is a central principle of his logic.⁴² Avicenna expounds no third category to analyze truth conditions. He states:

TEXT 4. The reality of an affirmative proposition is to assert that a predicate's existence holds of a subject term, and it is impossible to assert of a non-existent subject that it has an existent thing. Therefore, every subject term in an affirmative has existence *in re* or in the mind.⁴³

This is essentially MEE as stated above (and as repeated by proponents of MEE below).

With regard to mental existence as a truth condition, Avicenna makes a distinction paralleling the Mu'tazilite view above: he distinguishes possible objects from impossible objects. For example, Avicenna takes

contre Abū Hāšim al-Ġubbā'ī," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 28 (2018), p. 167–185. Rashed's discussion of the Bahšami usage of *amr* is especially relevant here but cannot be addressed (see p. 169–171, 183–184).

⁴² Salua Chatti, "Existential Import In Avicenna's Modal Logic," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 26 (2016), p. 48–49; Seyed N. Mousavian, "Avicenna on Talking about Nothing," p. 144–145; Wilfrid Hodges, "Affirmative and Negative in Ibn Sīnā," in C. D. Novaes & O. H. Thomassen (eds.), *Insolubles and Consequences: Essays in Honour of Stephen Read* (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, 2012), p. 119–34; Allan Bäck, "Avicenna on Existence," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), p. 360. Mousavian's reconstruction of Avicenna's view raises important questions. I address some of those below.

⁴³ Avicenna, *Ibāra*, p. 79.

possible nonexistents, like “heptagonal house” (where no such houses obtain in external existence), as satisfying mental existential import but views imaginary nonexistents, like “simurgh” to be empty – or an “absolute nonexistent” – that fails to satisfy mental existential import.⁴⁴ Avicenna addresses the status of “simurgh” as a subject term in affirmative propositions:

TEXT 5. An affirmative statement, whether metathetic or non-metathetic, correctly holds only of an *existent* subject term. Hence, it is correct to say, “The simurgh is not seeing,” but it is not correct to say, “The simurgh *is* non-seeing.” One should not attend to any distinction that is mentioned beyond this.⁴⁵

That is, one must reformulate an affirmative proposition with an (absolute) nonexistent subject term as a denial or negative proposition. If we take general affirmatives, it seems that for Avicenna a sentence like, “Every simurgh is an animal,” is false on both mental and external existence but “Every icosahedron is a shape (or is a non-circle)” is true on mental existence where no icosahedron exists in external reality.⁴⁶ Note that Avicenna states that one should not look “beyond this” reading, a point he repeats in his *Metaphysics*, to which we now turn.

In his *Metaphysics of The Healing*, Avicenna discusses MEE in similar terms while addressing *kalām* views. In 1.5, Avicenna objects to the position of the Muʿtazilites that a thing can be an “absolute nonexistent” (*al-maʿdūm al-muṭlaq*) and a “thing.” He argues the following point: a thing can be nonexistent *in re* and “existent” (*tābit*) in the mind but one cannot make assertions of an absolute nonexistent, i. e., what has no existence in either. He states,

TEXT 6. As for an assertion (*al-ḥabar*), it is always of a thing that is existent in the mind. And the *absolute nonexistent* is not [a subject of] affirmative predication, and even if the sentence is a negative predication (*al-salb*), existence of a certain kind is formed in the mind. Because our saying “it”

⁴⁴ Chatti, “Existential Import,” p. 48. See Mousavian on why “simurgh” is the better translation for *ʿanqāʾ* than phoenix or griffin: “Avicenna on Talking about Nothing,” p. 146, n. 13.

⁴⁵ Avicenna, *Al-nağāt*, ed. by Muḥyī al-Dīn Sabrī al-Kurdī, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1938), p. 16; Avicenna, *Ibāra*, p. 82; Chatti, “Existential Import,” p. 48.

⁴⁶ These are my examples of predicate terms. Chatti states, “To make sense of the difference between the mathematical entities and the imaginary ones, we could say that the griffin [i. e., simurgh] could never be other than imaginary, while the mathematical objects could not be seen as pure illusions.” See Chatti, “Existential Import,” p. 51. Mousavian suggests that Avicenna treats “simurgh” as an impossible or absurd object, while “heptagonal house” and “phoenix” are possible; “Avicenna on Talking about Nothing,” p. 146, n. 13.

(*huwa*) contains a reference (*išāra*), and a reference to a nonexistent, which has no *form* in the mind whatsoever, is absurd.⁴⁷

In other words, mental existence, or existence in *a mind*, is necessary to account for (the truth of) assertions about nonexistent objects. It is unclear how mental existence contributes to the truth conditions of an assertion, i. e., what non-representational role it plays. In the case of negative propositions with empty terms, such as “The simurgh does not exist” (which is true and syntactically correct in Avicenna’s system), “simurgh” would have “a certain kind” of existence in the mind sufficient to formulate a compound meaning, but presumably not enough existence to make such statements false, or to make “The simurgh exists” true. Mousavian has addressed this question as the problem of “change of truth-value;” that is, if mental existence is *existence* in some form, then empty terms held in the mind must *exist*, making “The simurgh does not exist” false. Postclassical thinkers will address this question. Mousavian notes that the contemporary “standard reading” of MEE does not sufficiently account for this problem. According to Mousavian’s proposal, mental existence must be weakened to make sense of Avicenna’s view of the truth conditions of affirmatives or denials.⁴⁸ Whether one accepts

⁴⁷ The point parallels Ibn Mattawayh’s statement discussed above that the nonexistent “points” to something real. I translate *ḥabar* as “assertion;” its counterpart in logic is *ḥukm*, i. e., an assertion or judgment that is either affirmative or negative.

⁴⁸ Mousavian is clear that he is not aiming at “a ‘true’ Avicennan account of the semantics of so-called ‘empty names’” but a partial reconstruction. I find the former’s analysis convincing but take Avicenna’s own aims as having a more narrow or conservative scope. That is, Avicenna addresses basic problems or counter-examples to his view of existential import, which are chiefly singular or temporal (past and future) propositions with empty terms. But this does not lead him to offer a corresponding general semantics of categorical or quantified logic with universals, as we will find in the proponents of MIR. Rather, to preserve his distinction that “The simurgh is an animal” is false and “The heptagonal house is seven-sided” is true (my examples), Avicenna holds to a kind of essentialist-actualism where, even though both subject terms “exist” in the mind (i. e., for reference-fixing or assertability), the latter sentence is possible *in re* and the former subject is impossible *in re*. For his postclassical defenders, this view is defended by glossing “mental existence” as existence is the Active Intellect. Damien Janos suggests that “pure quiddity” has existence in an abstract intellect; *Avicenna on Pure Quiddity*, p. 171–188; 202–22; Mousavian emphasizes Avicenna’s essentialist-scientific commitments; see Seyed N. Mousavian, “Avicenna on the Impossibilia: *The Letter On The Soul Revisited*,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 33 (2023), p. 163–213. Marwan Rashed’s analysis of Avicenna’s Bahšamī influences provides further background, i. e., Avicenna’s view of truth may parallel a Bahšamī modes analysis; but this cannot be addressed here. Rashed, “Chose, item et distinction,” p. 167–185. Mousavian proposes “meanings” in Avicenna can be understood as “hyper-intensional structured entities” in “Avicenna

the standard reading of MEE or not, Avicenna's formulation raises several problems. For example, if we can mentally posit, say, a "simurgh" or "partner of God" as subject terms in negative propositions – i. e., it has a kind of existence in the mind that is sufficient for formulating negative statements – why can the same not serve as subjects of (true) affirmative propositions?⁴⁹ More fundamentally, if mental existence does not contribute to truth conditions in a perspicacious way, why not simply jettison the concept? Rāzī will raise these and related questions against Avicenna's view of MEE.⁵⁰ I turn now to Rāzī's discussion.

First, Rāzī rejects the view that the subject term requires existential import in his logic. He notes, for example, that "The nonexistent is non-existent" (*al-ma'cūm la-mawǧūd*) is a true affirmative proposition despite the fact that "Avicenna judges that [the subject term] must be existent" in affirmatives.⁵¹ He expands on the question of existential import in his analysis of the semantics of categorical propositions. In his commentary on Avicenna's *Išārāt*, Rāzī raises problems that will help him "refute their school" (*nubtilu maḍhabahum*).⁵² He addresses specifically Avicenna's position noted above that an affirmative with an empty or impossible subject term must be reformulated as a negative proposition. Rāzī states,

TEXT 7.

[7A] If it is possible for the intellect to *conceive existence* (*yafriḍ tubūt*) for such terms such that one is able to make them into *predicate terms* [of a negative proposition], then one can *conceive existence* (*wuǧūd*) for them to make them *subject terms* [of affirmative propositions] so that an affirmative proposition can be correctly said to hold of a non-existent [subject term]. *And upon that their view is refuted that it is not permitted to state:* "The partner of God is non-seeing."

[7B] But the [proper] revision (*taḥqīq*) of this is that *it is not a condition* (*šart*) *to affirm the existence of the subjects of affirmative propositions but rather what is affirmed is the relation of* (*nisba*) *the predicates to them.*

on the Semantics of *Ma'cūnā*," in *Forms of Representation*, p. 95–140. If so, it is hard to see why it does not show in his logic, including his insistence on "not looking beyond" his basic distinctions.

⁴⁹ Wisnovsky raises this question; see *Avicenna's Metaphysics*, p. 156.

⁵⁰ This is close to what Mousavian raises as the problem of "change of truth-value;" "Avicenna on Talking about Nothing," p. 146.

⁵¹ Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Manṭiq al-Mulāḥḥaṣ*, ed. by A. F. Qarāmalikī and A. Aṣḡar-īnizhād (Tehran: Dānišgāh-e Imām Ṣādiq, 1381 [2002 or 2003]), p. 136.

⁵² Avicenna and Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Šarḥ Al-išārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. by °Alī Riḍā Naǧafzāda (Tehran: Anǧuman-i Āṭār va Mafāḥir-i Farhangī, 1384 [2005 or 2006]), vol. 1, p. 152–159.

[7C] And everything that is possible to make the predicate of a proposition, it is possible to make the subject of another proposition. Therefore, it is possible for the subject of an affirmative proposition to be non-existential (*‘adamī*), and so it has been refuted what you [i. e., the *falāsifa*] hold that the subject of an affirmative metathetic proposition must be existent.⁵³

There is much of philosophical interest in this passage but we can focus on the following points. Rāzī begins (7A) by assuming the Avicennan view of the requirement of mental existence, which he turns against the Avicennan view. Rāzī’s first argument is precisely the problem that we raised above: If Avicenna holds that mental existence suffices for positing *predicate* terms in (true) negative propositions, then surely mental existence suffices for negative or impossible *subject* terms in an affirmative proposition. Rāzī’s example, “The partner of God is non-seeing,” violates the condition that Avicenna places on affirmative propositions: an affirmative proposition cannot have an impossible or empty subject term. But this point leads to a more important result. Notably, the first response is not based on Rāzī’s own position regarding existential import. Rather, Rāzī indicates at 7B that his own position or “revision” is not based on “affirming the existence of the subject” but rather on affirming the *relation* of a proposition, i. e., “rather what is affirmed is the relation of the subjects to [the predicates].” The latter point is repeated by Rāzī in various contexts. This point suggests how Rāzī departs fundamentally from Avicenna on the semantic analysis of propositions, i. e., it is not the existential status of terms but the truth of propositional relations. Notably, the examples and the term, *‘adamī*, indicate that Rāzī is precisely addressing Avicenna’s emphasis on excluding “absolute nonexistents.” If we turn to Rāzī’s logic in the Compendium (*Mulāḥḥaṣ*), we see that the above is not just a passing criticism to be raised against Avicenna but a core insight leading to a very different semantics of categorical propositions.

In the Compendium, Rāzī draws an important connection between the semantics of categorical propositions and conditionals in the same context of discussing existential import. He states,

TEXT 8. The [correct] consideration in [determining] whether a predicative statement (*al-ḥamlīyya*) is affirmative or negative is the affirmation of a judgment (*itbāt al-ḥukm*) or its negation, and *it is not whether the subject and predicate is existent or non-existent* (*tubūtiyyan aw ‘adamiyya*). So if you state, “That which is non-living is non-knowing,” you have asserted that the non-living is a non-knower, and this is a [true] affirmative asser-

⁵³ Avicenna / Rāzī, *Šarḥ Al-išārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, vol. 1, p. 152.

tion [and not a denial]. *And the evidence of this is that in the conditional [proposition], whenever you affirm the consequence (luzūm) [between the antecedent and consequent], it is affirmative, whether or not the two elements are existent, non-existent, or mixed.* For if you state, “As long as the entity is not-living, it is not-knowing,” you have affirmed the consequence between the non-existence of living-ness and the non-existence of knowing-ness, so the conditional is affirmative in the sense that the consequence is affirmed, *even if each one of its elements is non-existent (‘adamī).*⁵⁴

Again, there is much here of interest but I highlight three points that will be critical features of postclassical thought and, particularly, within the MIR camp: (1) Rāzī permits impossible or absolute non-existent subject terms in (affirmative) categorical propositions against the Avicennan view; (2) he focuses on the truth of *propositional relations* rather than the *existence* of the subject terms; and (3) the truth conditions of categorical propositions are assimilated to the truth conditions of a conditional statement. We will see (1) and (2) in play in postclassical sources in the next section. But it is worth noting that (3) offers a potentially powerful breakthrough in addressing (Aristotelian and Avicennan) problems in the semantics of categorical propositions. Such a semantics clearly bears the potential to render Avicenna’s external and mental existence framework idle. But let us turn to a final element in Rāzī’s thought on the semantics of categorical propositions.

Recent scholarship has underscored Rāzī’s seminal distinction between “externalist” (*ḥārīḡī*) and “essentialist” (*ḥaqīqī*) readings of categorical propositions. Rāzī’s “essentialist” reading has been interpreted chiefly as requiring mental existence in some form.⁵⁵ However, a close reading suggests that Rāzī does not require mental existence or Avicennan *possibilia* as a necessary condition for the truth of categorical propositions. Our postclassical proponents of MIR support this reading; they will explicitly distinguish the “essentialist” reading from the “external” existential *and* “mental” existential readings of categorical propositions. That is, they introduce a *threefold* distinction. The following focuses on two aspects of Rāzī’s texts on the “essentialist” reading that informs later sources: (1) his avoidance of the requirement of mental existence in his formulation of the truth conditions of categorical proposition; and (2) his translation of categorical propositions as conditionals.

Despite broad agreement on Rāzī’s essentialist reading as requiring mental existence, a critical fact has been overlooked: nowhere in his dis-

⁵⁴ Rāzī, *Mantiq al-Mulāḥḥaṣ*, p. 135 (also 201).

⁵⁵ Chatti, *Arabic Logic*, p. 67.

cussion of the externalist / essentialist distinction does Rāzī refer explicitly to or require the notion of “mental existence.”⁵⁶ In fact, he contrasts external existence with the “more general” notion of “what holds true of.” For example, Rāzī reads a sentence like, “Every triangle is figure” in the following way. On the *ḥaqīqī* or “essentialist” reading, Rāzī states:

TEXT 9. We do not mean [by Every *J*] what is described by *J*-ness in external reality but rather what is *more general* than that, namely, that which *if it were to exist in external reality, it would be true of it that it is J, whether it exists in external reality or not.* For it is possible for us to say that every triangle is a figure, even if there are no triangles existent in external reality. Indeed, we say it in the sense that *any thing, if it were to exist and is a triangle, then it is necessary that insofar as it exists it is a figure.*⁵⁷

Rāzī does not refer to mental existence as a truth condition. Rather, he is at pains to avoid the binary language that Avicenna uses, as we saw above. Moreover, what is “more general” means if *J* “were to exist in external reality,” i. e., a kind of conditional or hypothetical statement. In a corresponding section in his *Šarḥ ‘Uyūn al-ḥikma* (Commentary on the Founts of Wisdom), Rāzī addresses Avicenna’s mental existence conditions more directly,

TEXT 10. When we say, “Every *J*,” we do not mean by it that which is said to be *J* in external reality, for if that were what is intended and if we [for example] verify that all horses are dead such that no horses remain whatsoever, then the following statement must be made false: “Every horse is an animal.” They say: “Rather, what is intended in our saying ‘Every *J* is that which is *J* according to *mental conception (al-farḍ al-‘aqlī).*”

I say: This discussion needs further clarification and precision. The revision (*taḥqīq*) of it is: What is intended by *J* can be (1) that which is *J* in external reality (*fi-l-‘yān*) and what is intended by it can be (2) that which (*al-amr*), *if it were to exist in external reality, it would be J...* If we mean the second sense, our saying, “Every horse is animal” is true whether or not horses obtain in external reality.⁵⁸

Again, Rāzī formulates the truth of the *essentialist* reading without explicitly requiring mental existence. In this second text, Rāzī once again distinguishes between (1) the externalist reading and (2) the essentialist reading. The externalist reading or (1) requires external existential import. The essentialist reading does not require external existence, but he does not mention mental existence either. What is “intended” by it is again more general. Rāzī states that in contrast to the

⁵⁶ Chatti, “Existential Import,” p. 66–67, and sources cited therein.

⁵⁷ Rāzī, *Mantiq al-Mulāḥḥaṣ*, p. 141.

⁵⁸ Rāzī, *Šarḥ ‘Uyūn al-ḥikma* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anḡlū al-Miṣriyya), vol. 1, p. 128.

externalist reading one can interpret (2), i. e., the truth of categorical propositions, *in a conditional or suppositional form*. The externalist reading does not appear to require this conditionalized form. That Rāzī contrasts what “they” say regarding mental existence or conception with his own revision (*taḥqīq*) is notable and parallels the way he addresses negative terms in Texts 7 and 8. He is unsatisfied with the response that “they” provide where we account for the truth, say, of “All horses are animals” upon the death or nonexistence of all horses by reference to mental existence. In other words, it can be asked what Rāzī’s “revisions” amount to in these cases if it simply reasserts mental existence and MEE.⁵⁹

Regarding the *form* of categorical propositions, Rāzī is remarkably consistent throughout his logic, from his discussion of categorical propositions to syllogisms. Rāzī’s preferred translation of (absolute) a-propositions, Every *J* is *B*, follows this general form:

For every *x*, if *x* were to exist and is *J*, then *x* is *B*.

This form will be widely adopted by postclassical authors.

The following text from a work of Aš‘arite *kalām* by Šams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 1302) is an apt entry to our postclassical sources, connecting classical *kalām* doctrines and Rāzī’s so-called essentialist reading. Samarqandī defends the Aš‘arite view of nonexistents while refuting Avicennan and Mu‘tazilite views. Samarqandī states that “we [the Aš‘arites] have two points to support the view that the absolute nonexistent is pure nullity in the state of nonexistence.”⁶⁰ His first point concerns a *threefold* distinction regarding the semantics of categorical sentences:

TEXT 11. The first point can be formulated by advancing a premise: namely, rational people have come to agree that if the predicative proposition is true, it is true with respect to *three* things: [1] the external (*al-ḥāriḡī*), [2] the real (*al-ḥaqīqī*) and [3] the mental (*al-dihnī*). The *external* is for the

⁵⁹ Scholarship has been rather unclear on this. Rāzī’s distinction has generally been read as focused on problems internal to the logic of Alfarabi and Avicenna. Perhaps the suggestion is that Rāzī simply expands Avicennan possibilities to general conceptual possibilities or imagined objects (Benevich, “The Reality of the Non-Existent”). However, the above discussion suggests that Rāzī was addressing truth analysis and problems from a broader perspective. As discussed above, Avicenna treated nonexistent and empty terms in a limited fashion and focused on existent *terms* or *essences* rather than propositional relations or content. Rāzī’s emphasis on nonexistent terms and the truth of (hypothetical or counterfactual) propositions is striking by contrast.

⁶⁰ Samarqandī, *Ma‘ārif*, vol. 1, p. 451.

subject and predicate to hold true of one thing in external reality, like our saying, “Every animal is a body...”

[11A] *The real* is the following: It is if the truth of the subject term is postulated (*furīda*) of the thing in external reality, the predicate term holds true of it, whether or not it is true in external reality. This is the case in our saying, “Every simurgh is an animal.” [11B] *That is, every thing, if it were to exist and is a simurgh, it is true that it is an animal.*

The *mental* is for the subject and predicate to hold true of what *exists* in the mind.⁶¹

We will return to how the above solves Samarqandī’s problem regarding nonexistents in the next section but two points highlighted by Samarqandī are central to the following discussion. First, he articulates a *threefold* division of categorical propositions and their truth conditions, adding “the real” (*al-ḥaqīqa*) to the Avicennan twofold distinction of mental and external existence.

Second, Samarqandī connects his definition of *real* propositions at 11A precisely to Rāzī’s revised translation and semantics of categorical sentences in conditional form at 11B. As Samarqandī makes clear, this does *not* require existence in the sense of (1) “the external” nor in the sense of (2) “the mental.” The conditionalized semantics is not needed in those cases. Particularly satisfying here is Samarqandī’s example, “Every simurgh is an animal,” and its “real” semantics; the latter is distinguished from external *and* mental existential import. Samarqandī takes sentences with empty subject terms, e. g., “Every simurgh is an animal,” as *true* on the real reading. Samarqandī indicates an important semantic function for Rāzī’s conditional formulation: it provides a way to articulate truth conditions, or to describe *reality*, without *existence* conditions, be it external or mental. He seems to understand the truth of a proposition in a kind of hypothetical or counterfactual sense. This *threefold* distinction is widely disseminated in sources after the 13th century. As we will see, “the real” will be associated with *nafs al-amr*, or “reality itself,” particularly by the proponents of MIR.

Note that the term *ḥaqīqī* in Text 11 is the term that Rāzī uses for what has been labelled the “essentialist” reading of categorical propositions. Given the above, I propose translating the latter as the “realist” or “real” reading of categorical propositions.

⁶¹ Šams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *Ma‘ārīf*, vol. 1, p. 451. See sources cited below.

3. MIND-INDEPENDENT REALITY IN POSTCLASSICAL SOURCES

This section turns to criticisms of Avicennan MEE and the alternative analysis of mind-independent reality. I focus on the “general concepts” (*umūr ʿamma*) section of works of *kalām*, which develop preliminary distinctions for subsequent philosophical analysis. This includes the works of al-Samarqandī (d. 1302), al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390), al-Qūšǧī (d. 1474) and Gelenbevī (d. 1791). I address postclassical proponents of MEE in places below, particularly Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) who comes to represent the Avicennan-MEE camp.

Šams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī stood at the head of a postclassical wave of Ašʿarite *kalām*.⁶² He was an adept astronomer and mathematician. In his self-commentarial work of philosophical *kalām*, *Al-maʿārif fī šarḥ al-Šahāʾif*, we find an early articulation of the notion of mind-independent reality. In his chapter on the division of existents (*qismat al-mawǧūd*), he begins with the distinction between external and mental existence and then alludes to a third concept, which, he states, “is broader than ‘the external’ (*al-ḥāriǧ*), and you will know in detail what it is in this chapter.”⁶³ The lemma of the text does not provide a name for the third concept and limits itself to the distinction between external existence and mental existence. However, in the commentary, he refers to the concept as *nafs al-amr* and as *ḥaqīqī*, which I have translated as “reality itself” and “the real,” respectively. Following a discussion of problems concerning mental existence, Samarqandī states,

TEXT 12. Now, the time has arrived to fulfill our promise to [12A] define “reality itself” (*nafs al-amr*) and the difference between the former [concept] and between external and mental [existence] (*al-ḥāriǧ wa-l-dihn*). [12B] With God’s assistance, we say that things are either actualized (*taḥaqquq*) strictly in virtue of mental conception (*fard ʿaqlī*), which [is what] exists only in the cognitive faculties (*al-quwwa al-darrāka*), or [they exist] in virtue of “the real” (*al-ḥaqīqī*), which is what obtains external to the cognitive faculties, *whether mental conception or the intellect (al-ʿaql) exist or not*, and that is what is called “that which is with respect to *reality itself*” (*fī nafs al-amr*).⁶⁴

The text suggests that this third distinction was not widely known to this point. Samarqandī aims to distinguish (*al-farq*) between *reality itself* or *the real*, on the one hand, and external and mental existence,

⁶² İhsan Fazlıoǧlu, “Samarqandī” in Thomas Hockey et al. (eds.), *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers* (New York: Springer, 2007), 1008.

⁶³ Samarqandī, *Maʿārif*, vol. 1, p. 427.

⁶⁴ Samarqandī, *Maʿārif*, vol. 1, p. 443.

on the other. At 12B, he states that *reality itself* is to be equated with *al-ḥaqīqī* or *the real*; the point is intended to anticipate and connect his analysis of *reality itself* with his reading of *real propositions* discussed a few pages later (recall Text 11 above).

At 12B, Samarqandī characterizes the notion of mental existence as a thing's existing or being actualized in individual human minds or cognitive faculties. Mental existence as such is a minimal concept and does not assume a singular, immaterial intellect here. He addresses the latter idea later on in the passage. Samarqandī then contrasts existence in "cognitive faculties," or mind-dependent existence, with the notion of reality itself. The latter concept is mind-independent, he states, in the sense that we can think of an object as obtaining "whether mental conception or the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) exist or not." The latter phrase is a notable addition. That is, it does not simply mean that *reality itself* or *the real* is what obtains external to the mind but it suggests that the former obtains independently of existence of individual minds, powers, or mental activities.⁶⁵

Two questions, however, arise from the above text. First, what is the relation of *reality itself* – understood as a category that is independent of mental existence or minds – to external existence? Second, what precisely is the relation of *reality itself* to existent and non-existent objects and truths? Recall that the crux of the question is how to think about things or states of affairs that are real, or true, but do not, and need not, exist in external or mental reality. Samarqandī's discussion is clearly an early introduction to the concept and remains somewhat rough. In the following lines of the passage, Samarqandī sheds further light on what he means by *reality itself*,

TEXT 13. The *real* is either [13A] with respect to [items] "themselves" (*bi-l-naẓar ilā anfuṣihā*) or [13B] with respect to what is external to [the items] themselves, which is what is termed external existence (*al-ḥāriġ*). *Reality itself*, then, is external to the cognitive faculties and *is more general* than external existence and [more general than] external to the mind [*al-ḥāriġ min al-dihn*].⁶⁶

Samarqandī's phrasing of the distinction between 13A and 13B is not immediately clear. But, at this juncture, the distinction between the two seems to be that 13A is to consider items "with respect to the item 'themselves' (*anfuṣihā*)" and irrespective of the item's existence in external reality. As the following shows, by 13A, he means to refer to the

⁶⁵ Rāzī indicates the same point in a text cited below.

⁶⁶ Samarqandī, *Maʿārif*, vol. 1, p. 443.

very *semantic* or *propositional content* of an assertion or term irrespective of external existence. (I return below to the shortened term, *nafs* or the plural *anfus*, which drops *al-amr*; I translate the latter as *itself* or *themselves*).

Samarqandī contrasts the extension of *reality itself* with the extension of external existence and mental existence, i. e., *reality itself* is “more general” than external existence.⁶⁷ By “external to the cognitive faculties,” he means that *reality itself* is either broader than or independent of minds; Text 12 suggests the latter. Still, referring to the relative extension of each domain leaves open how we should determine the members of each category. Samarqandī provides a rather perspicacious ground for the distinction by turning to the truth conditions of propositions. In the following lines of the passage, he address the former along with the contending views of Ṭūsī and the Muʿtazilites on the status of nonexistent objects:

TEXT 14.

[14A] So if *reality itself* is broader [in extension] than external reality, and if a meaning is true (*ṣadaqa*) in external reality, then it is true [with respect to] *reality itself*. For example, if it is true that “Body is composite” in external reality, it is true that it is composite in *reality itself*. [14B] As for if it is true with respect to *reality itself* in the sense that it is so only *with respect to itself* (*fī nafsihi*), it will *not* be true in external reality if it does not [actually] exist in external reality, *because what is not existent in external reality is not described with anything in external reality but it is permitted [according to the Ašʿarite view] with respect to itself* (*fī nafsihi*); that is, it is true that “The black non-existent in external reality is a color with respect to *itself*,” and it is not true that it is a color in external reality [i. e., as the Muʿtazilites hold]; *this is with respect to affirmative propositions*. As for negative propositions...

[14C] Most errors arise from the conflation of propositions “themselves” (*ḥukm al-anfus*) with propositions about external existence or mental existence; so whoever masters what we have set down as a principle here, grasping realities and nuances becomes easier...

[14D] The Master, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, states regarding *reality itself* that it is the Active Intellect. But he does not provide a [plausibly] intelligible view as one can object that the Necessary Being and the Higher Intel-

⁶⁷ Note that *reality itself* is said to be “more general” than both external reality and what is “external to the mind.” The latter term seems to exclude mental objects or truths that exist in external reality only insofar they are conceived or held in a concrete mind. There is a proliferation of distinctions in the text, particularly in terms of considering relations between external and mental existence. The following will focus on the core distinctions between *reality itself*, mental existence, and external existence.

lects would then not exist with respect to *reality itself* due to the impossibility of their existence in the Active Intellect.

[14E] When the *falāsifa* and the Mu^ctazilites found that essences with respect to themselves obtain in virtue of those very essences, they believed that those [essences] *exist* [i. e., are real in some way] in external reality as such. So they held that an agent has no efficacy with regard to essences but rather [has only efficacy] in endowing *existence* [to those essences]. The Mu^ctazilites held that [the nonexistent] is a “thing” in external reality and is “actual” (*tābit*) in it.⁶⁸

At 14A, Samarqandī begins by clarifying that external existence is sufficient for something to be true with respect to *reality itself*. That is, if “Body is composite” is made true in external reality, it is (trivially) true with respect to *reality itself*. Otherwise put, external existence is *sufficient* for an assertion to be true with respect to *reality itself*.⁶⁹ However, external existence is not *necessary* for an assertion to be true with respect to *reality itself*. He states that is “because what is not existent in external reality is not described with anything in external reality” – that is, external existence is necessary only for the truth of an *externalist* reading of a proposition “but it is permitted with respect to *itself* (*fī nafsihi*); that is, it is true that ‘*The black non-existent in external reality is a color with respect to itself*,’ and it is not true that it is a color existing in external reality.” In other words, an assertion is true “with respect to *itself*” even if the subject term does not exist in external reality. (I return shortly to the relation between the terms, *nafs* or *fī nafsihi*, and *nafs al-amr*.) The upshot of Samarqandī’s point is that the statement, “The black is color,” can be understood as true whether or not an instance of blackness exists in external reality or in a mind. This propositional analysis helps to some extent but it still leaves much unclear in terms of how to understand this third category of truth. Here, a more precise semantics of propositions might be one way of clarifying, which is what he does in Text 11.

It can be noted that, up to this point, Samarqandī has not *directly* discussed the question of existential import in categorical propositions and related questions of semantics in logic. He alludes to the question of existential import in noting that “this is with respect to affirmative propositions” and points to negative propositions (not clarifying that he

⁶⁸ Samarqandī, *Ma^cārif*, vol. 1, p. 443–447.

⁶⁹ This gets more complex when we turn to universal and necessary claims, where external existence may not be a sufficient condition. Rāzī, for example, suggests that knowledge of all external instantiations is not a sufficient condition for universal affirmatives to be true. See discussion below.

specifically means universal negatives or e-propositions). In the above text, Samarqandī clarifies that the subject term is nonexistent by stating, “The black that is *non-existent* in external reality,” i. e., the phrase underlined above stands as the subject term of the sentence. The suggestion is that we can assert that the non-existent black is a color with respect to *reality itself*, independently of external and mental existence conditions. Samarqandī expands on the proper interpretation of “universal affirmative propositions” several pages later, providing the formal semantics discussed in the previous section (see Text 11).

At 14C, Samarqandī urges that philosophical errors arise from the failure to distinguish a third category of truth and reality from the two categories of mental existence and external existence. That is, MEE is the problem and the antidote or “principle” to resolve such problems is *reality itself* defined as a third and independent condition.

At 14D, he refers to the Avicennan view of *nafs al-amr*, which involves the more ontologically laden sense of existing in the Active Intellect. Ṭūsī becomes the chief representative of interpreting Avicenna’s mental existence as requiring, not simply the existence of a thought in individual minds, but a kind of eternal, immaterial intellect as the ontological ground or truthmaker. Mental existence, or human intellection, then is a matter of connecting to this realm of eternal truths. In his *Risalat iṭbāt al-‘aql al-muğğarrad* (A Treatise on Proving the Existence of the Immaterial Intellect), Ṭūsī argues that truths such as “One is half of two” must have a truthmaker external to the mind. In the “fifth premise” of his argument, he states that what is true or “actual in external reality” (*al-tābit al-hāriğ*) is either a self-subsistent object, i. e., a Platonic form, or something (mentally) “represented” in a substance, i. e., an abstract intellect.⁷⁰ He rejects the former option but concludes that, in either case, what secures truth “cannot be connected with a *particular* location in the world or time.”⁷¹ He concludes that the true truthmaker is then a “self-subsistent externally existent entity that is devoid of space-location (*wađ*^c) and encompasses all intelligible objects in actuality [i. e., intelligible objects are never absent or merely potential in the entity].”⁷²

I return to Ṭūsī’s view of MEE below. But it is notable that a central motivation in Ṭūsī’s arguments to make the Active Intellect a truthmaker is problems with minimal definitions of mental existence, i. e., as

⁷⁰ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Risālat iṭbāt al-‘aql al-muğğarrad*, ed. by F. A. Qarāmalikī and T. ‘Ārifniyā (Tehran: Markaz-i Pizhuhīšī-i Mirās-i Maktūb, 2014), p. 4.

⁷¹ Ṭūsī, *Iṭbāt al-‘aql al-muğğarrad*, p. 5.

⁷² Ṭūsī, *Iṭbāt al-‘aql al-muğğarrad*, p. 7.

being held in ordinary, individual minds. Such problems are highlighted in Samarqandī's analysis and go back to Rāzī's objections to mental existence. In his lemma, Samarqandī, for example, highlights the point that mental existence cannot be the ground of an object's reality and existence "because this would also entail that one and the same thing would exist in two or more places at the same instance of time if two or more thinkers held [the same thought] in the intellect."⁷³ This and other objections to mental existence make clear that a minimal sense of mental existence as existing in ordinary, concrete minds is insufficient for securing truth or an object's reality. Such distinctions would force defenders of Avicenna and MEE to be clearer about mental existence at a rather basic level.

Regarding terminology, it was noted that Samarqandī uses the shortened term *itself* or *themselves* (*nafs*, or the plural *anfus*; omitting *al-amr*) in discussing the strict sense of *reality itself*. Notably, the shortened version is used in a similar sense – i. e., in referring to a nonexistent subject term or noun phrase – in classical Aš'arite sources. For example, Ğuwaynī states,

TEXT 15. The adept [among the *mutakallimūn*] have stated that [15A] rational proofs indicate in virtue of *themselves* (*al-adilla al-'aqliyya tadullu li-anfusihā*)... [15B] But even this terminology of the masters is somewhat figurative, because they state that what rationally indicates indicates *in virtue of itself* (*li-nafsihi*). But that cannot stand [as it is], for what has *no self* (*mā lā nafsahu*) can indicate, and by [what has no self] I mean what is nonexistent (*'adam*).⁷⁴

It is significant that there is both a terminological and conceptual parallel in the use of the term, *nafs*. Samarqandī's states at 14C that "most errors" arise by conflating propositions "themselves" with mental and external existence. Ğuwaynī states that a similar clarification is needed because the term, *nafs*, may indicate the *existence* of a "self" or object but by "what has no self," he means the "nonexistent." That is, both seem to center on permitting the truth of statements or propositions without requiring the existence of objects. The main difference is that Ğuwaynī does not mention mental existence nor MEE as a principle; he is arguing chiefly against Mu'tazilite views of causal explana-

⁷³ Samarqandī, *Al-ṣaḥāʿif al-ilāhiyya*, ed. by Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Šarīf (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falāḥ, 1985), p. 82.

⁷⁴ Ğuwaynī, *Šāmil*, p. 71. See also analysis in Ibrahim, "Reason and Revelation in Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the Aš'arī Tradition," in Nadja Germann and Mostafa Najafi (eds.), *Philosophy and Language in the Islamic World*, vol. 2 (De Gruyter, 2020), p. 147–154.

tions (*taʿlīl*). Samarqandī discusses assertions or propositions (*ḥukm*), whereas Ğuwaynī addresses the more general notion of rational signifiers and arguments (*dalīl ʿaqlī*). The view that (15A) rational signifiers indicate “in virtue of themselves” and (15B) that this definition implies that one can assert things of pure “non-existents” (*ʿadam*) appears to go back to al-Baqillānī (d. 1013), who is quoted as stating that “the non-existent can be the signifier (*dalīl*).”⁷⁵ Postclassical Ašʿarites after Samarqandī will use *nafs* in similar ways.

In the subsequent chapter on “The Nonexistent,” Samarqandī continues his criticisms of the Avicennans and Muʿtazilites. In 14E, he suggests that both camps are philosophically aligned when it comes to addressing the reality of nonexistents. It is in the following chapter that he discusses how the *real* semantics of categorical propositions precisely supports his view against both Avicennan and Muʿtazilite views (Text 11). Connecting the two chapters, he states that the Muʿtazilite view of the “thingness” of the non-existent is “precisely” (*bi-ʿaynihi*) the doctrine of the *falāsifa* “except that the [*falāsifa*] do not call this concept an actuality (*tubūt*), nor do they use it as a pretext to claim that the essence in the state of non-existence is a thing. And we have clarified in the previous chapter that *both camps* were diverted from mastering the point because they conflated *reality itself* with external reality.”⁷⁶ Recall that Text 11 and the real semantics of categorical propositions served to shore up his Ašʿarite stance that “the absolute nonexistent is pure nullity in the state of nonexistence.” Whereas Avicenna had chided the Muʿtazilites for overlooking “existence in the mind” as a way to account for nonexistent objects, Samarqandī criticizes both camps for overlooking the independent status of *reality itself* and its articulation on semantic-logical terms. Moreover, Samarqandī argues that both the Avicennans and Muʿtazilites converge in their intuitions on the reality of essences – i. e., their own kinds of actualism – in a way that diverges from how the Ašʿarites aim to analyze reality. This metaphysical fault line, moreover, has broad implications in logic and metaphysics, from questions of existential import to the causation of essences (*ḡaʿl al-māhiyya*). We must set aside the latter question which is at the center of the chapter on the nonexistent. But the above aptly

⁷⁵ Addressing the context of objects of divine power, Frank states, “Properly speaking, in fact, one should not use the expression ‘in itself’ with reference to the non-existent, for there is no ‘self’ (*nafs*).” (He may be referring to the passage in Ğuwaynī but no citation is provided for this and it is unclear what “in itself” translates; “The Non-Existent and the Possible,” p. 34.)

⁷⁶ Samarqandī, *Maʿārif*, vol. 1, p. 450–451.

captures how Samarqandī articulates *reality itself* as philosophically extending Ašʿarite intuitions about reality.

In the above, Samarqandī provides two distinctions for later Ašʿarite views of MIR. First, he sharply distinguishes the concept of mind-dependence and existence-dependence from *reality itself*. Second, he suggests the best way to understand and test the concept is to consider the truth conditions of (categorical) propositions. Still, there are points in Samarqandī's analysis that need to be fleshed out.⁷⁷ I turn now to later thinkers who expand on the above views.

Short of a century after Samarqandī, Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī emerges as an influential postclassical Ašʿarite thinker. Taftāzānī writes a widely studied and cited lemma of Ašʿarite *kalām* with a self-commentary: “A Commentary on ‘The Aims’” (*Šarḥ al-Maqāšid*). The following passage is, again, from the introductory chapter on “general concepts.” It is notable that Taftāzānī devotes an entire chapter to the question of existential import in propositions and *reality itself*; the title can be translated as “On the truth conditions of assertions” (*Iṭbāt šihhat al-ḥukm*). Taftāzānī states,

TEXT 16.

Lemma. [16A] The truth of [a proposition] does not *require* that it corresponds to external existents (*al-muṭābaqa li-mā fi ʿl-aʿyān*) – as the subject and predicate terms need not exist in external reality – nor is it *sufficient* for it to correspond to that which is in the mind, for it is possible for falsities to be impressed in minds. Rather, the proper understanding is for it to correspond to that which is with respect to *reality itself* (*fī naḥs al-amr*). And the meaning of this is what is understood from our saying, “This matter is such with respect to *itself* (*fī naḥsihi*),” that is, strictly in terms of itself (*fī ḥadd dātihī*) *irrespective of the judgment of the assertor* (*ḥukm al-ḥākim*). And the interpretation of [*naḥs al-amr*] as that which exists in the Active Intellect is rather far-fetched, if what is meant is an explanation of the concept [of being true with respect to *reality itself*].⁷⁸

Commentary. What is required for the truth of a judgement is its correspondence to that which is with respect to *reality itself*. And that is what is meant by “actuality” (*al-wāqiʿ*) or “the external” (*al-ḥāriġ*), that is, *external to the self* (*dāt*) *of the perceiver or assertor*. [16B] And its meaning is what is understood by our saying “The matter is so with respect to *itself*” (*ḥāda al-amr kaḏā fī naḥsihi*) or “not so with respect to *itself*” with respect

⁷⁷ For example, Samarqandī seems to come down on the side that *reality itself* is what is *possibly true* independently of external and mental existence. But he seems to view true propositions with impossible subject terms as true only in the mind. Later thinkers have differing views on this.

⁷⁸ Taftāzānī, *Šarḥ al-Maqāšid*, vol. 1, p. 391–392.

to it [i. e. the statement] *independently of the perception of a perceiver or the assertions of assertors*, in that what is meant by [the term] *amr* is matter (*šaʿn*) and thing (*šayʿ*) and by [the term] *nafs* self (*dāt*).

If it is said: [16C] *How is this [concept of nafs al-amr] conceptualized for what has no “self” (dāt) and “thingness” as in the case of nonexistents, and especially impossible things?* The answer in *general* terms is: We know with certitude that our statement, “The co-existence of contraries is impossible” is true with respect to *reality itself*; and that our saying that that is possible does not correspond [to *reality itself*], even if we do not know the precise mode of that correspondence exhaustively and we are not able to articulate [its underlying reasons].

[The answer in] *detail* is: [16D] correspondence is a relation where the realization (*taḥaqquq*) of the *two relata* with respect to the mind are *sufficient* (*yakfihā*) [for propositional truth] and there is no doubt that the mind upon inspecting the two concepts [i. e., the relata] and the relation between the two, whether they are existents or non-existents, we find that between the two there is an affirmative relation or a negative relation that is entailed by immediate knowledge or proof (*al-ḍarūra aw al-burhān*). *And that relation, insofar as it is the result of necessity or proof with respect to looking at that very propositional [content] (al-maʿqūl), without the specificity of the perceiver or reporter, that is what is meant by actuality (al-wāqiʿ) and that which is with respect to reality itself...*

[16E] Moreover, the [*falāsifa*’s] view that what is meant by what accords with the *reality itself* is what is in the Active Intellect is certainly false because every rational person knows that our saying one is half of two is true with respect to the *reality itself*, without ever imagining the Active Intellect, much less affirming its existence or that in it are impressed the forms of existents. Indeed, [such things are true] even if one denies the existence [of the Active Intellect] and believes in its nonexistence as is the view of the *mutakallimūn*.⁷⁹

In contrast to Samarqandī’s discussion, Taftāzānī sees no need to introduce the concept of *reality itself* and its relation to the problem of existential import. Rather, the distinctions are sufficiently familiar that he can effectively codify it in the lemma. His job is to explain (his) reading of MIR as a theory of truth. There are several points of interest in the above text; I limit the discussion to important developments from Samarqandī.

(1) In the lemma, Taftāzānī focuses on the necessary and sufficient conditions of propositional truth. This allows him to articulate the third category of truth, which has various labels including *reality itself*, actuality (*al-wāqiʿ*) and even “the external” in the sense of being external to the perceiver but not having external existence. Like Samarqandī, he

⁷⁹ Taftāzānī, *Šarḥ al-Maqāšid*, vol. 1, p. 392–394.

views the third category as a corrective to the limitations of MEE, providing examples illustrating why the latter fails to provide necessary and sufficient conditions in terms of propositional truth.

(2) Taftāzānī emphasizes mind-independence in stronger terms than Samarqandī. Four times in the above text, he states that *reality itself* concerns truth or correspondence as being independent of the perceiver and assertor: “external to self of the perceiver or assertor;” “irrespective of the perception of a perceiver or the assertion of an assertor;” “without the specificity of the perceiver or assertor.” The latter phrasing is found in Rāzī’s text (see Text 17 below). Whereas Samarqandī emphasizes cognitive *faculties*, Taftāzānī refers to the agent (perceiver, assertor, “the self of...”) as well as the mental states or acts of the agent (perceptions; judgments, and assertions).⁸⁰

(3) Taftāzānī’s question at 16C connects *nafs al-amr* to the classical Aš‘arite background in a direct manner. Following terminological clarification at 16B, Taftāzānī fields the objection at 16C that the very term, *nafs al-amr*, may evoke Mu‘tazilite “thingness” and thus exclude propositions about impossible nonexistents. Paralleling Ğuwaynī’s comment on the Aš‘arite view of rational signifiers discuss above (Text 15), Taftāzānī cautions that the term, *nafs*, might be taken to mean an existent entity or the “self” (*dāt*) of an term, implying external reality or ontological import of some kind. That is, the Aš‘arite view of reality itself would then revert to the Mu‘tazilite view that distinguishes possible things from impossible nonexistents. Notably, his first response to this question affirms the Aš‘arite-Razian position that the impossible can be used as a subject term and we can say truthful things without MEE. His concluding point that we do not know the “precise mode of correspondence” underscores the distinction between linguistic truths and the mode of our apprehension of their correspondence to external reality.

(4) Taftāzānī’s “more detailed” distinction at 16D is critical. Recall that he begins the lemma by focusing on the status of subject terms in assertions. Here, he clarifies that “correspondence is a *relation (nisba)* between two concepts” and that our consideration of the latter is “sufficient” for analyzing reality. The suggestion is that we neither need external existential import of terms / objects, nor need we posit a direct correspondence between mental existence and external existence. It is notable that throughout the discussion Taftāzānī emphasizes our grasp of or assent to “statements,” “our saying X or Y” or “the very content of

⁸⁰ See Fazloğlu, “Between Reality and Mentality,” p. 13–19.

a proposition” rather than objects held in the mind. In 16B, he states that *reality itself* should be understood in the following way: “And its meaning is what is understood by our saying “The matter is so in *itself*” (*hāda al-amr kaḏā fī nafsīhi*) ... with respect to it [i. e. the assertion itself] independently of the perception of a perceiver or the assertions of assertors.” Samarqandī has suggested a similar point at 15A. In 16D, Taftāzānī restates the point thus: “And that relation, insofar as it is the result of necessity or proof *with respect to looking at that very proposition* (al-*ma^cqūl*), *without the specificity of the perceiver or reporter* ... is what is meant by *reality itself*.” By excluding both external existence and dependence on individual minds or thinkers, Taftāzānī focuses on the very semantic or propositional content of statements. The *ma^cqūl*, or the apprehended *meaning*, of a proposition is not what exists in the mind but the mind-independent content of linguistic statements. Later commentators will read Taftāzānī’s passage as endorsing a kind of linguistic-propositional notion of truth that is independent of both external existence and mental existence.

The “detailed” view evokes Rāzī’s discussion of metathetic terms examined above: “But the revision (*taḥqīq*) of this is that it is not a condition that [one] affirms the existence of the subject terms of propositions but rather what is affirmed is the *relation* of the predicates to them.” As noted, this adds an critical dimension to MIR that emphasizes the truth of propositional content or relations over any prior determination of the ontological status of terms and objects.⁸¹

In fact, Taftāzānī’s clarification at 16D bears a close parallel with texts of Rāzī concerning *reality itself* and mind-independence. In works of logic, Rāzī distinguishes between what is necessary in the mind and what is necessary extra-mentally:

TEXT 17. Necessity and possibility can mean the consideration of *a state of a thing with respect to itself* (*fī nafsīhi*) or they can mean the consideration of the state of a thing in the mind. As for the first, it is for this predicate to be necessarily affirmed (*wāğib al-tubūt*) of that subject *in itself* (*fī nafsīhi*) and insofar as it is what it is *irrespective of intellects and minds*. As for the second, it is to consider the manner in which the mind makes judgements about it.⁸²

⁸¹ Spiker charges Taftāzānī’s view with being incoherent “on its own term;” the former overlooks critical distinctions and its underlying rationale; cf. *Things as They Are*, p. 85.

⁸² Rāzī, *Šarḥ ‘Uyūn al-ḥikma*, vol. 1, p. 135.

In the Compendium, he states in a parallel passage:

TEXT 18. Just as the state of the predicate term in relation to the subject term can be by necessity (*darūra*) – or not by necessity – with respect to *reality itself* (*fī nafs al-amr*), so is its state in the mind in that [the relation of the predicate to the subject] can be by necessity or not by necessity in the mind. That is, mental necessity is the proposition for which, *when the form of its subject and predicate is held in the mind, the mind cannot but affirm this subject of this predicate*. Such a proposition has mental necessity, because it is necessary (*lā budda*) for *that relation* to be realized in the mind. *External necessity* is necessary insofar as this relation must be realized with respect to *reality itself* (*nafs al-amr*).⁸³

There are important parallels and differences here to Taftāzānī's passage. In terms of parallels, Rāzī introduces a notable usage of the concept of *reality itself* and its mind-independent nature, i. e., "insofar as it is what it is (*min ḥaytu huwa huwa*) irrespective of intellects and minds." He emphasizes the notion of *reality itself* as concerning the necessity "itself," which again is language that departs from the *existence* conditions of MEE. Moreover, Rāzī highlights that it is the *relation* of the subject term to the predicate term that is at issue, i. e., not the existence or reality of objects. Finally, Rāzī notes that mental necessity "is to consider the manner in which the mind makes judgements about it," suggesting the "mind-dependent" and defeasible nature of mental content.

An important difference is that Rāzī does not clearly provide a three-fold division; *reality itself* is not clearly distinguished from external *existence* and mental *existence*. As we saw above, he does not address MEE as directly as postclassical authors. This may be because his distinction is meant to simply bypass MEE. In this context, the modal notion of external *necessity*, as opposed to external *existence*, complicates the question. Note that Samarqandī's "external in the broader sense," i. e., where the former need not *exist* in external reality or in the mind, parallels Rāzī's use of "external necessity." The above suggests that the postclassical concept of *reality itself* involves a systematization of various parts of Rāzī's works by later thinkers. In particular, Rāzī's distinctions appear to provide the core distinctions informing postclassical thinking on mind-independence.⁸⁴

(5) Finally, in 16E, Ṭūsī's view of the Active Intellect once again serves as the inevitable logical conclusion of the Avicennan view. Notably, Taftāzānī refers to the mathematical truth that "one is half of

⁸³ Rāzī, *Mulaḥḥaṣ*, p. 157.

⁸⁴ These distinctions seem to sharply depart from Avicenna's views. This is not to exclude elements of this view in earlier thinkers like Abū al-Barakāt al-Baḡdādī.

two” is true with respect to *reality itself*, which to the former is treated on par with other linguistically formulated truths. In *Iṭbāt al-ʿaql al-muğarrad*, Ṭūsī, as an Avicennan, focuses on mathematical truths as a category of eternal truths, and does not address linguistic truths generally. We now turn to Ṭūsī and a commentary on his creedal work, *Ṭağrīd al-iʿtiqād* (The Abstract of Belief).

In this short but important work of philosophical theology, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī begins his “general concepts” section with the topic of existence. After discussing the definition of existence and its distinctness from essence, Ṭūsī states, “[Existence] divides into mental and external, otherwise reality would be [made] void (*wa-illā baṭalat al-ḥaqīqa*).” The lemma was interpreted by later thinkers as strongly endorsing MEE. Postclassical commentators not only read the text as advancing MEE but as applying to the truth of *real* propositions. I focus below on the criticism raised against MEE by Ṭūsī’s Aṣʿarite commentator, ʿAlā al-Dīn al-Qūšġī (d. 1474). But I begin with a brief look at commentators who support MEE.

To be sure, Ṭūsī’s view gave rise to an Avicennan-MEE reading of *real* propositions, which states that the truth of real propositions *requires* mental existence. This reading is chiefly found in Twelver commentators. Al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (d. 1325) reads Ṭūsī’s statement as suggesting that “the truth of real propositions is proof for (*yadullu ʿalā*) mental existence.”⁸⁵ From al-Ḥillī to later commentators of Avicenna, we find a reading of real propositions that requires mental existence. Regarding Avicenna’s criticisms of the Muʿtazilites in *Metaphysics* 1.5 discussed above, Sulayman al-Baḥrānī, a 17th-century commentator, states, “If it were not for mental existence ... real propositions of what does not exist in external reality would be false. It is clear that [because] this faction [i. e., the Muʿtazilites that Avicenna criticizes] does not affirm mental existence, they do not affirm real propositions.”⁸⁶ Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1636) does not refer to real propositions in his commentary on the passage but affirms MEE: “Assent to what has no actuality (*ṭabāt*) in the mind or *in re* is pure nonsense, and assertions of it are impossible.”⁸⁷ The

⁸⁵ Ḥillī, *Kaṣf al-murād*, p. 40; see also n. 8.

⁸⁶ Avicenna, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Šīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), et al., *Al-ilāhiyyāt (Al-šifāʿ)*, *wa-taʿlīqāt Ṣadr al-Mutaʿllihīn ʿalayhā maʿa zubdat al-ḥawāšī* (Tehran: Anġuman-i Aṣār va Mafāḥir-i Farhangī, 2004) (hereon *Taʿlīqāt ʿala al-Ilāhiyyāt*), p. 83v. This not to say all (Twelver) commentators interpreted it in this way; e. g., see Mīr Dāmād’s reading on p. 82v.

⁸⁷ He refers to *al-qaḍāya al-mutaʿarifa* (“conventional propositions”) in this context; see Avicenna / Mullā Ṣadrā, *Taʿlīqāt ʿala al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 80r.

argument for mental existence on the basis of securing the truth of *real propositions* was often advanced as a response to Rāzī's rejection of mental existence – a rather ironic turn of events.

Turning to Qūšǧī's commentary on the *Taǧrīd*, the latter begins by clarifying what Ṭūsī means by *wa-illā baṭalat al-ḥaqīqiyya* ("reality would be made void"). In some witnesses, we have *al-ḥaqīqiyya* (i. e., real propositions) instead of *al-ḥaqīqa* (essence / reality) in the lemma itself.⁸⁸ Whether or not Qūšǧī himself read the lemma as having the term *al-ḥaqīqiyya* instead of *al-ḥaqīqa* is unclear but it is certain that he reads Ṭūsī's text as directly concerning real propositions. Qūšǧī states:

TEXT 19.

[19A] That is, this category of propositions would not be realized [i. e., hold true], as they comprise [subject terms] which are held to be true with respect to *reality itself* (taken as a universal and token),⁸⁹ whether [the subject term] exists with respect to external reality – actually or suppositionally [*muqaddaran*] – or whether it does not exist in external reality at all [i. e., truths about impossibilia].

[19B] *And that is because if it were not for mental existence, then existence would be limited to external existence.* But then true affirmative judgments expressed by *real* propositions [said of] what is not existent in external reality would be false ... but real propositions in the sense we have mentioned is affirmed by the revisionists (*muḥaqqiqūn*).⁹⁰

In commenting on Ṭūsī's phrase, Qūšǧī provides the rationale for MEE on the former's behalf: without mental existence propositions about nonexistents that we want to read as true would be made false. This corresponds with Avicenna's rationale for MEE discussed above; although Avicenna would read the kind of propositions Qūšǧī has in mind as false or ill-formed. Qūšǧī's text indicates that defenders of MEE also refer to the terms, *nafs al-amr* and *ḥaqīqī* propositions; but they use it *within* the framework of MEE.

⁸⁸ It is more likely that Ṭūsī's original text had *ḥaqīqa* rather than *ḥaqīqiyya*. The editor of Qūšǧī's commentary states that all other consulted witnesses of the commentary have *ḥaqīqa* for the lemma. But the editor chooses *ḥaqīqiyya*. Qūšǧī / Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ Taǧrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 122.

⁸⁹ The phrase in parentheses qualifying *nafs al-amr* is: *al-kullī al-wāqīʿ unwān*. The latter is an outcome of increasingly nuanced distinctions that develop focusing on the semantics of categorical propositions. The phrase cannot be discussed here but refers to a reading of real propositions in which subject (or predicate) terms are not instantiated in all categories, i. e., external, mental, and other domains that will be distinguished. I thank the anonymous reviewer for proposing the apt term, "token," to translate *unwān*.

⁹⁰ Qūšǧī, *Šarḥ Taǧrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 122.

Qūšġī's division of items in 19A is unclear. By things that exist in external reality "suppositionally" (*muqaddaran*), Qūšġī means considering subject terms in true propositions that *can* be instantiated in external reality but is currently or absolutely nonexistent. In the subsequent lines, he provides the example of the statement, "Every triangle has angles equal to two right angles." He states that the proposition applies not only to triangles that exist at a point in time but every triangle, even "what does not exist in *any time* whatsoever." The view evokes Rāzī's external necessity and a kind of propositional platonism. By contrast, what does not exist in external reality "at all" likely refers to impossibilities. What is critical for our discussion is that Qūšġī states that Ṭūsī's text endorses MEE for the following rationale: "If it were not for mental existence, then existence would be limited to external existence."

Thus far, Qūšġī simply provides the reasoning for MEE on behalf of its proponents. Following the above comment, however, Qūšġī distances himself from the "prevailing" view held by the Avicennan-MEE commentators:

TEXT 20. This proof [i. e., that mental existence is required] is based in fact on what *they* adduce as evidence for the prevailing position (*al-mašhūr*), which is that we can make true judgements by means of "real things" (*umūr tubūtiyya*) with respect to what has no existence in external reality, so it is necessary that its subject term is real in some sense, if not in external reality, then in the mind... *We will provide further discussion of this problem in our investigation of the reality of the nonexistent.*⁹¹

Like his Aš'arite predecessors, Qūšġī points us to the question of the nonexistent. When we turn to the latter discussion, we find that Qūšġī follows the line of criticism we saw in Samarqandī and Taftāzānī, where Avicennans and Mu^tazilites are viewed as falling into a similar error regarding nonexistents. Qūšġī however provides a more precise critique: "Perhaps [the Mu^tazilites] fell into the same [error] that the philosophers fell into in affirming mental existence."⁹² He begins with a preliminary statement that recalls Samarqandī's point that "both groups were diverted from mastering the point because they conflated *reality itself* with external reality." Qūšġī states that the Mu^tazilites "agree with" the Avicennan philosophers in making a binary division (*waġhayn*) of the reality (*tubūt*) of essences. Although both camps agree on external existence, the philosophers call both categories of reality (*tubūt*) "existence" and that nonexistent reality "can only be conceived as existing in

⁹¹ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 124.

⁹² Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 139.

a cognitive faculty, which they call *mental existence*.⁹³ The Mu^ctazilites however do not call the latter category “existence” and call it *tubūt* and they “attribute” it to external reality.

Qūšġī then turns to how both camps affirm two logical principles. The first is that “the meaning of an affirmative statement is that one asserts the existence (*tubūt*) of one thing [as holding] of another.”⁹⁴ The second principle is that “the existence of one thing [holding] of another thing is based on the existence of the subject of affirmation [i. e., the subject term].”⁹⁵ The two principles can be viewed as *kalām*-derived definitions for existential import. However, Qūšġī states that the two principles, if accepted, should force the Mu^ctazilites to hold that *all* nonexistents, including impossible things, are actual in external reality, since impossibilia are subjects of truth-bearing statements. In short, Qūšġī suggests that the Mu^ctazilites must read their formal principles in an ad hoc manner to account for why impossible objects have no external actuality (*tubūt*).⁹⁶

Turning then to the Avicennan philosophers’ view of MEE, Qūšġī applies the same two principles:

TEXT 21. Affirming mental existence will not help the philosophers. And that is because we know that “The co-existence of two contradictories is absurd,” and that “The partner of God is impossible,” *even if there did not exist a mind nor a cognitive faculty*.⁹⁷

Qūšġī clarifies that the two principles lead to a contradiction. That is, the first principle applies formally to the two statements, i. e., they are *affirmative* propositions rather than denials. The propositions positively assert truths about the terms “the co-existence of contradictories” and “the partner of God.” However, the second principle entails that “the co-existence of contradictories” and “the partner of God” – i. e., the subject terms of each affirmative proposition – *exist*. The Avicennans avoid the Mu^ctazilite dilemma by introducing “existence in the mind.” But this, as Qūšġī states, “will not help the philosophers” as such statements are true despite the very existence of minds, i. e., they are true mind-independently.

Qūšġī’s text brings us full circle with respect to the Aš‘arite tradition.

⁹³ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-‘aqā’id*, p. 140

⁹⁴ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-‘aqā’id*, p. 140.

⁹⁵ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-‘aqā’id*, p. 140.

⁹⁶ Cf. Benevich, “The Reality of the Non-Existent,” p. 37–42. The latter terms this the “positive of positive rule” and suggests that Razian approach assumes it.

⁹⁷ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-‘aqā’id*, p. 140

Recall that Ġuwaynī had stated in Text 1: “If you say every known object is a thing, then what do you say regarding one who knows that ‘there is no *partner to God*’ or that ‘*two contraries cannot co-exist...*’” Qūšġī goes on to highlight the Razian distinction that the truth of such propositions concern a *relation* and this relation accords with external relations or state of affairs (*al-nisba al-ḥāriġiyya*).⁹⁸

Following the above text, Qūšġī addresses the status of the (external) propositional relation and the view that *reality itself* corresponds with the Active Intellect. He provides a shortened version of Taftāzānī’s text (17E), stating that people need not be aware of or affirm the existence of the Active Intellect to know propositional truths, like “The co-existence of contradictories is impossible.”⁹⁹ Qūšġī then turns to a text that evokes Taftāzānī’s “detailed” discussion (17D) addressed above:

Some of the revisionists have stated: When the intellect considers two meanings along with the relation between the two, whether they are existents or nonexistents, one finds between them an affirmative or negative relation that is entailed immediately or by proof (*al-ḍarūra aw al-burhān*). And that relation insofar as it is a result of immediate knowledge or demonstration with respect to the “self” (*nafs*) of that intelligible object (*ma^ʿaqūl*), and without the specificity of the perceiver, that is what is meant by actuality (*al-wāqi^ʿ*) and what relates to *reality itself*.¹⁰⁰

The editors of the commentary suggest that the text refers precisely to the discussion above in 17D (Taftāzānī). Qūšġī then states,

According to the revision of this author, neither immediate knowledge in its entirety nor what is inferred by demonstrative proof would then have an *external* [reality] to which [the two categories of truth] would correspond, even though they state in dividing speech into assertoric (*ḥabar*) and performative sentences (*inšāʿ*): If the relation [in the statement] corresponds, or does not correspond, with an external [reality], it is an assertion; otherwise, it is a performative statement.¹⁰¹

After considering problems regarding the infinite regress of propositional relations, Qūšġī goes on to propose the following:

The meaning of an affirmative proposition is that what holds true of the subject holds true of the predicate, without the existence of one thing holding of another thing, or its actualization with it. Rather, [an affirmative]

⁹⁸ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 141.

⁹⁹ However, he notes that the Avicennans could hold that what is in the Active Intellect is what accords with immediate knowledge and demonstrative proof, in which case the objections would not apply. Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁰ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 142.

¹⁰¹ Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-ʿaqāʿid*, p. 142.

concerns only the *expression* (*al-^cibāra*) and the *assumption* of mental existence (*i^ctibār al-wuġūd al-dihnī*).¹⁰²

The text suggests that the semantic content of propositions can be taken in kind of a *a priori* way that is both mind-independent and independent of external existence; and mental existence or supposition can be understood as a theoretical condition.¹⁰³ This leaves open a broad scope of questions regarding how to more precisely parse the distinction, and it seems Aš^carites themselves will differ on this. What unites them, however, is the basic foundational principles of MIR as outlined above. The latter framework provides, at least in theory, a spectrum of possibilities from realism to anti-realism regarding reality and truth that departs from the prevailing Avicennan approaches to truth analysis.

Philosophical analysis understood in terms of a mind-and-existence independent semantic framework appears to be central to later Aš^carite thought and is applied to a broad scope of problems.¹⁰⁴ We can return to our epigraph at the beginning of this article. Writing in the 18th century, Isma^cīl Gelenbevī (d. 1791) addresses differences between the *mutakallimūn* and the Avicennan philosophers regarding the nature of mental existence. After noting that the *mutakallimūn* reject mental existence, i. e., the view that mental objects have a kind of “existence” in the mind, he notes that “existence” for the *mutakallimūn* applies strictly to that which obtains in external reality. He then states that mental objects for the *mutakallimūn* are understood with respect to “*reality itself*, analogous to the relation [of consequence] (*mulāzama*) between ‘the sun’s rising’ and ‘the existence of day,’ because the [latter relation] is not purely nonexistent as is the relation between [‘the sun’s rising’] and ‘the existence of night.’” It can be noted that the terms he uses are the standard sentences used in logic for conditional sentences or relations of (semantic) implication. For example, Rāzī states,

¹⁰² Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-^caqā^cid*, p. 146.

¹⁰³ Regarding the distinction between *ḥabar* and *inšā^c*, see Pierre Larcher, “Les arabisants et la catégorie de *inšā^c*: Histoire d’une ‘occultation’”, *Historiographia linguistica*, 20 (1993), p. 260.

¹⁰⁴ Dawānī makes a distinction that there is an external or objective reality to which those statements correspond which does not require *existence*. The former concerns the content that one expresses (*ḥikāya*) of things that may be held in the mind but are not considered as such. Qūšġī, *Šarḥ Taġrīd al-^caqā^cid*, p. 142. Qūšġī himself seems to want to view correspondence as requiring an external reality (though not external *existence*); perhaps this is something like Ġuwaynī’s states of affairs or Gelenbevī’s idea of implicational relations. In any case, Aš^carite-trained philosophers seem to have a range of ways to analyze mind-independent reality in a way that does not collapse into the Mu^ctazilite or Avicennan view.

“What is meant by our statement, ‘If the sun is rising, then it is day,’ is that the rising of the sun implies (*yalzam*) the existence of day.”¹⁰⁵ Gelenbevī states this is how the *mutakallimūn* analyzed their view of accidents, including quantity, which they took as not having external existence but are mentally imagined. As the above shows, the concept of a hypothetical-conditional analysis of questions of reality and truth is a consistent feature of Aṣʿarite thought. Although much more needs to be studied in this regard, it seems to provide a unique and powerful tool for how proponents of MIR philosophize about the world.

4. CONCLUSION

It is worth concluding with a discussion of the metaphysical stances of the Aṣʿarite-trained proponents of MIR, including their embracement of mystical and Neoplatonist ideas.¹⁰⁶ In the above discussions of “general concepts” (*al-umūr al-ʿāmma*), the proponents of MIR advance an analysis of reality that departs from the standard ontological and psychological assumptions of Avicennan philosophy, from the nature of subject terms in logic to the role of mental forms and the Active Intellect. Their approach emphasizes a mind-and-existence independent analysis of reality that eschews the “ontological permissivism” of prevailing strands of Islamic philosophy, including Avicennan philosophy, Muʿtazilism, and Illuminationism.¹⁰⁷ But this is not to say that they eschewed metaphysics altogether. Rather, their approach appears to be quite the contrary.

Scholars have noted that the same Aṣʿarite-trained authors who encourage “parsimony” and criticize the metaphysical extravagances

¹⁰⁵ Rāzī, *Šarḥ ʿUyūn al-ḥikma*, vol. 1, p. 121. Rāzī goes on to state, “If we express a conditional proposition in this way, it becomes a predicative proposition (*ḥamliyya*). The result then is that the *only difference between a predicative proposition and a conditional proposition is in expression.*” This further substantiates the above discussion that thinkers read the semantics of categorical propositions with respect to a conditional-hypothetical semantics. The latter cannot be discussed here.

¹⁰⁶ I thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting addressing this topic.

¹⁰⁷ Although Suhrawardī addresses some similar points as thinkers in the MIR tradition, his aim is to better understand the *ontological grounds* of knowledge and reality by revising the relations between Avicennan transcendental-metaphysical concepts. As Jari Kaukua states, his “objective is to clear conceptual room for the intermingling of being and knowledge that is characteristic of his illuminationism.” He appears to fall closer to the Avicennan approach than that of MIR. (See *Suhrawardī’s Illuminationism: A Philosophical Study* [Brill, 2022], p. 117).

of Avicennans in their works of *kalām*, embrace, in other contexts, Neoplatonist and Sufi metaphysical doctrines.¹⁰⁸ From Samarqandī to Gelenbevī, philosophers in this camp castigate Avicennans for grounding the concept of *reality itself* in, say, the Active Intellect or Platonic forms but appear to affirm the latter ideas in theological-metaphysical contexts. How are we to understand their seemingly paradoxical stances? Although the problem has not been systematically addressed to my knowledge, one prevailing approach has been to view such sources, particularly the Ašʿarite-trained authors, as dialectical and apologetic.¹⁰⁹ In the context of *kalām* and formal philosophy, we are to view thinkers in this tradition as operating mainly as critics of *falsafa* or as skeptics, and not as philosophers investigating the rational foundations of reality. In other works, the same thinkers let go of their “reticence” and adopt *falsafa* metaphysics – if only to reaffirm theological and mystical doctrines. The clash between philosophical parsimony and metaphysical extravagance in this tradition has been understood as a function of its dialectical bent.¹¹⁰

The above analysis suggests that this picture of the nature of the tradition is problematic. It is not only that our Ašʿarite-trained philosophers develop a theory of reality, namely MIR, that goes well beyond the critique of *falsafa* and defense of Ašʿarite doctrine. Their conception of *reality itself*, and its related tools of logical analysis, inform how our authors develop and articulate philosophical ideas, including, it seems, how they interpret theological-metaphysical doctrines. In the same work where Gelenbevī refers to the *kalām*-inspired view of *reality itself*, as discussed above, he addresses Platonic and Avicennan ideas about eter-

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Spiker, *Things as They Are*, p. 100–153. Spiker addresses a “diametrical” opposition in different works: “A prototypical example would be Jurjānī himself; in his *kalām* works, he often explains anti-exemplarist stances similar to those of Taftāzānī – yet in his *Risālat al-wujūd* he explicitly adopts an Akbarian epistemology which is in many ways *diametrically opposed* to that of *kalām* in its strictly demarcated form.” (Pages 87–88; emphasis mine.) The above analysis suggests that our authors need not see any such diametrical opposition but that the two domains of inquiry were interconnected and complementary.

¹⁰⁹ S. Naquib al-Attas is notable in viewing the results of philosophical Sufism as broadly interpretable within an Ašʿarite philosophical framework; see *Prolegomena*, p. 297–319. A better understanding of the function of formal philosophy (*nazarī*; *rasmī*) vis-à-vis *kašf* and philosophical Sufism is needed.

¹¹⁰ Kalin views the Rāzian-*kalām* position as leading to skepticism and epistemic “subjectivism.” Spiker identifies the “ontological parsimony” of Ašʿarite *kalām* in interpreting *nafs al-amr*, and suggests a kind of compartmentalization of fields of inquiry; see note above.

nal forms and truths. At first blush, the discussion appears to evidence the dialectical nature of a thinker like Gelenbevī: his critical analysis of *reality itself* need not inform his later adoption of *falsafa* and *kaşf*-based metaphysics. However, if we look more closely at Gelenbevī's discussions, we see that much of it relies on the conceptual framework of MIR. Following his chapter on divine knowledge, Gelenbevī criticizes the Avicennan view that God knows things universally, so much so that he criticizes Dawānī for "falling into a major error by following the philosophers' position on *mental existence*."¹¹¹ Gelenbevī views *divine knowledge*, along with *reality itself*, to include, in some undifferentiated way, not only imaginary *nonexistents*, like "the fangs of ghouls" and "a sea of quicksilver" but also "impossibilities" like "the conjunction of two contraries." Regarding the latter, he states against the *falāsifa* that "those objects of knowledge are impossible in existence and not impossible in knowability." Gelenbevī goes on to consider whether the notion of fictional or "imagined" existence can help analyze the undifferentiated status of objects of divine knowledge.

In this regard, the Akbarian Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751) states, "Impossibilities are divine realities. Their *state* (*ṣʿan*) is to not appear in external reality, just as the state of possibilities is to appear therein."¹¹² Qayṣarī then invokes the Akbarian adage that even the Immutable Archetypes "do not scent the fragrance of *existence*." We cannot detail here how such positions are, for some thinkers in the tradition, uniquely interpretable within MIR as opposed to MEE. But all this indicates a broader philosophical context that transforms the very terms of philosophical analysis. Reality and the divine realm are understood in more nuanced terms, including propositional content / truths, "presences" (*ḥaḍarāt*), impossibilities, and imaginary objects.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Although Dawānī's view of *iğmāl* and *hikāya*, i. e., the meaning-content of statements (not terms), appears closer to an Ašʿarite MIR view than Gelenbevī's own analysis of divine objects of knowledge. That is, Dawānī seems to view God's knowledge not as "universal" but as "general" in the sense of "undifferentiated" (*iğmāl*) (a point that takes us closer to the Ašʿarite view of internal speech (*kalām nafsi*) than Platonic forms). See Kalin, *Knowledge*, p. 175–180.

¹¹² Qayṣarī, *Maṭlaʿ ḥuṣūṣ al-kalīm fī maʿānī fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. by Şayḥ ʿĀṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2012), p. 59. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer's comments on the relation between the former text and *kalām* texts discussed above.

¹¹³ They address, inter alia, a more complex (propositional) platonism rather than the old Platonism of *falsafa*. Notably, many of the Ašʿarite-trained authors tend to *begin* their metaphysical treatises on the topic with the explanatory inadequacies of the Active Intellect and Platonic-exemplary forms, raising the question as to what their

What formal tools our thinkers use to analyze problems appears central to a better understanding of their approaches.

From the above discussion, we can propose analyzing metaphysics as following two divergent paths – which, to some extent, accords with how the tradition saw itself.¹¹⁴ On the one hand, we have “Avicennan” philosophy which accords with certain fundamentals of *falsafa* or Avicennan-Neoplatonist views. From Ṭūsī to Mullā Ṣadrā, fundamental challenges to the Avicennan-Neoplatonist framework, including critiques of MEE, are met by some defense or revision consistent with the foundations of that system, from Ṭūsī’s Active Intellect to Mullā Ṣadrā’s revival of the unification theory of knowledge.¹¹⁵ In revising Avicenna’s mental existence, the analysis of reality becomes more closely connected to noetic ontology in this tradition. Philosophical inquiry focuses on revising a *falsafa*-derived worldview, incorporating the insights of *kašf* and Sufism within the prism of the Avicennan-Neoplatonist tradition. These philosophers often saw themselves as the heirs of Avicenna’s philosophy in some form, however much they revised or criticized it.

By contrast, in the counter-tradition of philosophy examined above, philosophical inquiry can have more radical philosophical aims and outcomes. The more critical-skeptical tone of this tradition against Avicenna and *falsafa* is not a sign of dialectics and reticence, but is rather aimed at deeper revisions of philosophical analysis than permitted in standard Avicennan approaches. Their critiques lead to fundamentally divergent paths of inquiry, from the semantics of categorical sentences to the ontological nature of propositional truths. Regarding philosophical Sufism and theological metaphysics, this novel framework allows some thinkers in this tradition to imagine and articulate the content of *kašf*-based sources on foundationally different terms. In contrast to the

apparent reversion to such ideas mean; see, for example, Ṭāšköprüzāde, *Al-šuhūd al-‘aynī fī mabāhiṭ al-wuğūd al-dihni*, ed. by M. Ğül (Külünüyā: Manšūrat al-Ġamal, 2009), p. 29–30. Cf. Spiker, *Things as They Are*, p. 93–153.

¹¹⁴ See the nuanced discussion of Robert Wisnovsky, “On the Emergence of Maragha Avicennanism,” *Oriens*, 46 (2018), p. 263–331.

¹¹⁵ Kalin argues that Mullā Ṣadrā saw such (Razian) critiques as “jeopardizing the intrinsic intelligibility of objects of knowledge;” for the former, philosophical knowledge can only be salvaged by an ontological account of unification (Kalin, *Knowledge*, p. xv). Spiker reads the Akbarian material similarly as providing the “ontological grounds” for ordinary human cognition, i. e., as a response to a kind of Kantian critique of metaphysics. To my mind, these thinkers are not genuinely worried about such forms of skepticism (as they seem to anticipate similar concerns) and are more worried about the limitations that *falsafa* metaphysics places on articulating deeper understandings of metaphysical reality.

Avicennan tradition, their formal analysis leaves open the possibility of revising the foundations of received understandings of metaphysical reality, particularly as it concerns the experiential or intensional content of metaphysical reality. In other words, their “reticence” on dictating a singular metaphysical picture of reality, or “school of thought,” in formal contexts is a philosophical feature of their system and not a defect.¹¹⁶ We cannot address here how they may have understood the division of labor between *formal* philosophizing and post-formal theological-metaphysics, where the latter draws on posited (rather than rationally demonstrated) spiritual-experiential content and revelatory sources. But their views of *reality itself* suggests an expansion of the spectrum of metaphysics and realism in the tradition of Islamic philosophy.

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¹¹⁶ A parallel is the relation of the (four) Sunni legal schools to a core (Sunni) hermeneutic theory. It is notable that in their works of *kalām* and philosophy these thinkers usually leave open their commitments to a *specific* metaphysical school, concept, or Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*). We find that even Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrines can be complemented, reinterpreted, or even superseded by a more complete source of *kašfī* knowledge, as is the case with the influential Tiġānī tradition. In the latter metaphysics, Akbarian thought is eclipsed by the “hidden sainthood” of Šayḥ Aḥmad al-Tiġānī, and much of the Neoplatonist framework in Akbarian metaphysics is superseded by al-Tiġānī’s metaphysics, a kind of radical monism of divine reality that eschews distinct or “fixed entities;” see Zachary Wright, *Realizing Islam: The Tijaniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Muslim World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2020), p. 155–160. Neoplatonism as a philosophical tradition appears to become more closely tied to the Twelver philosophical tradition; see Sajjad Rizvi, “(Neo)Platonism Revived in the Light of the Imams: Qadi Sa‘id al-Qummi and (d. AH 1107 / AD 1696) and his Reception of the *Theologia Aristotelis*,” in P. Adamson (ed.), *Classical Arabic Philosophy: Sources and Reception* (London: Warburg Institute, 2007), p. 176–207. This, of course, is not to say that all philosophers in the Twelver tradition were committed to a Neoplatonist framework.