

NOTES ON AVICENNA'S CONCEPT OF THINGNESS (ŠAY'IYYA)*

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In an article published in 1984, Jean Jolivet suggested that the origins of Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence lay not in ancient Greek philosophy, as has generally been supposed, but in early Islamic dogmatic theology (*kalām*), and specifically in the ninth- and tenth-century-CE debates between Muslim dogmatists (*mutakallimūn*) over how the terms "thing" (*šay'*) and "existent" (*mawğūd*) relate to each other.¹ The present article provides evidence that gives qualified support to Jolivet's hypothesis. I argue that Jolivet is correct in highlighting the *kalām* background to Avicenna's essence-existence distinction, but that an important and previously overlooked testing-ground for that distinction, Avicenna's analysis of the relation between efficient and final causes, arose from an entirely Aristotelian problematic.

This article has three parts. Part 1 is an introduction to the problem. I shall survey early *kalām* discussions of things and existents and present evidence supporting Jolivet's hypothesis that these *kalām* discussions were the backdrop against which Avicenna made his distinction between essence (*māhiyya*, literally "whatness," and often Latinized as "quiddity") and existence (*wuğūd*).² While it is easy to imagine a progression from

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¹ "Aux origines de l'ontologie d'Ibn Sinā," in J. Jolivet and R. Rashed (eds), *Études sur Avicenne* (Paris, 1984), 19-28.

² It is true that *māhiyya*, "quiddity," is only one of several terms – including *ḥaqīqa*, *dāt*, *šūra*, *ṭabi'a* and, as we shall see, *šay'iyya* – which, taken as a whole, constitute Avicenna's idea of "essence" (cf. A.-M. Goichon, *La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sinā (Avicenne)* [Paris, 1937], 48). As will become clear, *māhiyya* is first among equals in this cluster of terms. Goichon sees *dāt* as the essential term for essence, following the lead of its Latin translation as *essentia*; *māhiyya*, by contrast, was rendered as *quidditas*.

the *mutakallimūn*'s use of *mawǧūd* to Avicenna's use of *wuǧūd*, the route from *šay'* to *māhiyya* seems less direct. I explore the possibility that the concept of thingness, *šay'iyya*, served to link the *mutakallimūn*'s use of *šay'* and Avicenna's use of *māhiyya*. In Parts 2 and 3 of the article, I discuss some previously unexamined passages where Avicenna uses the term *šay'iyya* to explain how the final cause, *al-'illa al-ǧā'iyya*, can be seen to be prior to the efficient cause, *al-'illa al-fā'iliyya*. More particularly, Part 2 addresses a philological problem: whether or not these passages should be emended to read *sababiyya*, "causality," instead of *šay'iyya*, "thingness." I argue that *šay'iyya* should be retained. In Part 3, I discuss what *šay'iyya* means in the context of Avicenna's analyses of final and efficient causality. In so doing I hope to cast some light on how exactly the concept of thingness bridges the *mutakallimūn*'s discussions of things and existents on the one hand, and Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence on the other.

PART 1: ŠAY'IYYA BETWEEN ŠAY' AND MĀHIYYA

Given the opaque and scattered nature of most of the early sources available to us, we cannot know for sure when and where thinkers writing in Arabic first used the terms *šay'* and *mawǧūd*. It is fairly certain, however, that the *mutakallimūn*'s first discussions of things and existents arose not out of some general and spontaneous interest in ontology, but out of a desire to marshal Qur'ānic evidence in favor of their own positions and against their opponents' on two basic theological topics: God's attributes (in this case, whether or not God could be correctly spoken of as a *thing*, and if so, how) and God's creative power (in this case, whether or not it is *things* which God causes to come into existence and pass out of existence, and if so, how). In order to buttress their arguments the *mutakallimūn* had to address the question of what *šay'*, "thing," refers to when it is used in the Qur'ān.

The term *šay'* appears in many places in the Qur'ān, and mainly refers, in a general and undifferentiated sense, to the objects of God's attributes. God is all-powerful (*qadīr*); over what is God all-powerful? Things, or, more precisely, every thing. Similarly, things are the objects of God's knowing (*'-l-m*), creating (*h-l-q*), witnessing (*š-h-d*), being in charge of (*w-k-l*),

preserving (*ḥ-f-z*), encompassing (*ḥ-y-t*), reckoning (*ḥ-s-b*) and supervising (*r-q-b*).³

Despite the Qur'ān's straightforward, quasi-pronominal use of *šay'* (*amr* is used as an all-purpose direct object in much the same way), early commentators and *mutakallimūn* nevertheless tried to determine what precisely it meant to be a thing. For example, it seems clear enough that because things are the objects of God's attributes, they are *other than* God. The distinction between thing and God is reinforced by the famous verse 42:11, *laysa kamīṭlihi šay'*, "No thing is [even] like a likeness of Him." Believers are also instructed not to verge towards polytheism by associating things with God (3:64; 4:36; 6:151; 12:38; 22:26; 60:12). Finally, the divine act of creation is described in two famous verses, 16:40 (*inna-mā qawlunā li-šay'in idā aradnāhu an naqūla lahu kun fa-yakūnu*) and 36:82 (*inna-mā amruhu idā arāda šay'an an yaqūla kun fa-yakūnu*), as consisting in God's saying "Be!" to a thing, at which point the thing then is.

But the strong suggestion that things are other than God weakens slightly when one takes into account a number of verses that seem to indicate that God Himself is a thing. For example, 6:19, "Say: Which thing is the greatest in terms of witnessing? Say: God is witness between you and me" (*qul ayyu šay'in akbaru šahādatan qul Allāhu šahīdun baynī wa-baynaka*), implies that God is a thing, and 28:88, "Every thing will perish save His face" (*kullu šay'in hālikun illā waḡhahu*), implies that at least the divine countenance is a thing.

This ambiguity was reinforced by the early grammarians, who held that *šay'* was the most generally applicable of terms (*a'ammu al-āmm*), applying to all that may be placed in relation to a predicate (*yaqa'u 'alā kulli mā uḡbira 'anhu*).⁴ That is,

³ *q-d-r*: 2:20, 2:26, 2:109, 2:148, 2:259, 2:284, 3:26, 3:29, 3:165, 3:189, 4:85, 5:17, 5:19, 5:40, 5:120, 6:17, 8:41, 9:39, 11:4, 16:77, 18:45, 22:6, 24:45, 29:20, 30:50, 33:27, 35:1, 41:39, 42:9, 46:33, 48:21, 57:2, 59:6, 64:1, 65:12; *'l-m*: 2:29, 2:231, 2:282, 4:32, 4:176, 5:97, 6:80, 6:101, 7:89, 8:75, 9:115, 20:98, 21:81, 24:35, 24:64, 29:42, 29:62, 33:40, 33:54, 40:7, 42:12, 48:26, 49:16, 57:3, 58:7, 64:11; *ḥ-l-q*: 6:101, 6:102, 13:16, 16:48, 20:50, 25:2, 27:88, 32:7, 39:62, 40:62, 51:49, 54:49; *š-h-d*: 4:33, 5:117, 22:17, 33:55, 34:47, 41:53, 58:6 (and implied in 3:5, 14:38, 40:16); *w-k-l*: 6:102, 11:12, 39:62; *ḥ-f-z*: 11:57, 34:21; *ḥ-y-t*: 4:126, 41:54; *ḥ-s-b*: 4:86; and *r-q-b*: 33:52.

⁴ Sibawayhi (d. ca. 796), *al-Kitāb I*, ed. I.B. Ya'qūb (Beirut, 1999), 47,7; and ap. al-Zabīdī, *Tāḡ al-'arūs min ḡawāhir al-qāmūs I*, ed. 'A. Šīrī (Beirut, 1994), 185a20-21 and 27-28. The formulation *al-šay' huwa mā yaḡūzu an yuḡbara 'anhu* is also found in al-Ḥwārizmī (d. 997), *Mafātiḥ al-'ulūm*, ed. G. van Vloten (Leiden, 1895), 22,14-15; in that same work al-Ḥwārizmī reports (199,14-200,1) that *šay'* is also used by the "Algebrists" as a kind of universal variable.

šay' refers to every *mubtada'* (subject) in relation to which one could place a *ḥabar* (predicate). If we want to predicate any attributes of God, therefore, we will be forced to maintain that He is a thing. This grammatical consideration seems to have overridden the weight of Qur'ānic evidence, and apart from the arch-unitarian Ḡahm ibn Ṣafwān, who – as we shall see – held to a strictly understood interpretation of thing (namely, that it was synonymous with *mahlūq*, “created,” and that therefore God was not a thing), consensus arose around the fence-straddling assertion that God was a *šay' lā ka-al-ašyā'*, “a thing not like [other] things.”⁵

But whether or not it is right to call God a thing was not the only problem which the term *šay'* forced the early *mutakallimūn* to confront. More seriously, the *mutakallimūn* had to contend with the implication of verses 16:40 and 36:82 (mentioned above) that things were somehow there *before* God said “Be!” to them; for otherwise, what would God be saying “Be!” to?⁶ It seemed perfectly sensible to draw the conclusion, as most Mu'tazilites did, that thing applies not only to what exists (*al-mawḡūd*) but also to what does not exist (*al-ma'dūm*); and that what does not exist in turn applies not only to what did not exist and now exists, such as the world, but also to what does not now exist but will exist, such as the Day of Resurrection.

Other *mutakallimūn*, by contrast, held that *šay'* applies solely to what exists. This was partly because the Mu'tazilite view could be seen as leading to two unsavory alternatives. The first arises from the premise that even before it exists one particular thing – my great-great-grandson – is and always has been distinct from another particular thing – my great-great-granddaughter. In 68 years God will say “Be!” to one non-existent thing, my great-great-grandson, and in 72 years God will say “Be!” to another non-existent thing, my great-great-granddaughter. The same premise can be applied to things that have existed but now do not. Thus my great-great grandfather, even though he is non-existent now, remains one thing, and my great-great-grandmother remains another thing, and both will

⁵ Ps.-Abū Ḥanīfa (ca. 950), *al-Fiqh al-aḳbar* (= Mullā 'Alī b. Sultān Muḥammad al-Qārī, *Sarḥ al-fiqh al-aḳbar*, ed. M.M. al-Ša'ār [Beirut, 1997], 16,18).

⁶ The term *amr* is used synonymously with *šay'* to refer to the things which God is saying “Be!” to, at 2:117, 3:47, 19:35, 36:82 and 40:68. In his *Tafsīr* (ad 2:117) Ṭabarī (d. 923) describes the positions of various “interpreters” (*mu'awwilūn*) on this issue (*Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī II*, ed. M.M. Šākir [Cairo, 1954], 542,1-550,7).

remain distinct things up to, including and (presumably) beyond the Day of Judgment. The problem is that all these pre- and post-existent individual things must *be* or *subsist* somewhere before and after they exist. Let us say they are all located somewhere *outside* God's mind; in that case they will share the attribute of eternality with God, and the precept of *tawhīd*, understood as divine uniqueness, will be violated. Let us then say that they are all located *within* God's mind; in that case they will introduce multiplicity into God, and the precept of *tawhīd*, understood as divine simplicity, will be violated.

Alternatively, and just as problematically, the Mu'tazilite conception could be understood as implying that before and after they exist, things were and will be undifferentiated, just one great eternal blob of Thing. In other words, when things are non-existent, they are undifferentiated; when things are existent, they are distinct one from the other. But this conception would expose the Mu'tazilites to the charge that an eternal and undifferentiated non-existent Thing was, for all intents and purposes, equivalent to the eternal and (in itself) undifferentiated prime matter of the Eternalists (*al-dahriyya*). God's sole possession of eternality is infringed upon, and the precept of *tawhīd*, understood as divine uniqueness, will again be violated.⁷

To some extent the arguments just articulated are conjecture, for as I mentioned above, contemporaneous evidence of early *kalām* discussions of things and existents is hard to come by. Aš'arī's *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn* contains a few typically terse descriptions of the views held by early *mutakallimūn*:

1) A thing is something created which has a likeness (Ġahm ibn Šafwān and various Zaydīs);

2) a thing is a body (Anthropomorphists – *al-mušabbīha*);

⁷ On this see H. Wolfson, "The Kalam problem of nonexistence and Saadia's second theory of creation," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 36 (1946): 371-91, reprised in his *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 359-72. The world-view of the eternalists was shaped partly by Aristotelian notions of potentiality (*quwwa*) and actuality (*fi'l*) then coming into circulation. See, for example, al-Kindī (d. ca. 870), *Risāla fī al-ibāna 'an suġūd al-ġirm al-aqṣā wa-tā'atīhi li-Allāh* (= R. Rashed and J. Jolivet (eds), *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*. Vol. II: *Métaphysique et cosmologie* [Leiden, 1998], 187,3-19), as well as the evidence preserved in the Jābirean corpus (ca. 900) (= *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān: Essai sur l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'islam*. Vol. 1: *Textes choisis*, ed. P. Kraus [Paris, 1935]) where one can detect the infiltration of notions of potentiality and actuality into the *šay'/mawġūd/ma'dūm* paradigm: *Kitāb ikhrāġ mā fī al-quwwa ilā al-fi'l*, 2,14-3,1; *Kitāb al-ḥawāṣṣ al-kabīr*, 357,1-2; *Kitāb al-mizān al-ṣaġīr*, 427,3-5; 431,8-11; 445,13-14; 451,18.

3) a thing is what can be pointed to (Hishām al-Fuwatī);

4) a thing is a thing before it comes into being (‘Abbād b. Sulaymān; certain Baghdadi Mu‘tazilites); saying “X is a thing” is the same as affirming X. Affirming X covers the time before X came into being as well as the time after it came into being (al-Khayyāt); a thing is all that can be known, and all that can be called to mind and of which predication is possible. Things are knowable as things before they come into being. Things can be called things before they come into being (al-Ġubbā’i);

5) a thing is an existent (al-Aš‘arī); a thing is a thing only when it exists (Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Šāliḥī; Ibn al-Rāwandī).⁸

From the end of the ninth century to the end of the tenth – the period, that is, just before Avicenna started writing philosophy – the *mutakallimūn* holding positions 1, 2 and 3 became increasingly isolated, and the debate about things polarized into positions 4 and 5, with most Mu‘tazilites holding position 4 and virtually everyone else – Aš‘arites, Māturīdites and most Shi‘ites – holding position 5.⁹ With God’s uniqueness and sim-

⁸ See al-Aš‘arī (d. 935), *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn I*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1929), 158,1-163,8 and 181,1-182,4; al-Aš‘arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn II*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1930), 518,4-519,8. Perhaps our earliest source regarding the debate over things and existents is the Zaydi Shi‘ite al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d. 860), *Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr*, ed. B. Abrahamov (Leiden, 1990), 74,10-76,7.

⁹ Mu‘tazilites: al-Khayyāt (d. ca. 913), *Kitāb al-intiṣār*, ed. H.S. Nyberg, (Cairo, 1925), 60,4-14; 107,6-108,8; 126,1-2; Sa‘diyā al-Fayyūmī (i.e. Saadia Gaon, d. 942), *Kitāb al-amānāt wa al-i’tiqādāt*, ed. S. Landauer (Leiden, 1880), 11,10-12 and 213,13-15; ‘Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 1025), *al-Muġnī fi abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-‘adl*, ed. M.M. Ḥilmī *et al.* (Cairo, 1958f.), IV 247,12-13; V 202,8-203,9; 249,4-8; 251,3-4; 252,4-6; VI/1 79,17-80,15; VI/2 75,5-77,7 and 135,3-136,9; VIII 74,1-82,12; XII 20,1-3 and 48,5-6. Aš‘arites: Ibn Fūrak (d. 1015), *Muġarrad maqālāt al-Aš‘arī*, ed. D. Gimaret (Beirut, 1987), 42,7-18 and 252,4-256,22; and al-Bāqillāni (d. 1013), *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. R.J. McCarthy (Beirut, 1957), 193,17-194,6; 195,6-196,12; 266,4-9. (In fact, al-Aš‘arī admitted in his *Kitāb al-amad* that he himself had originally held the Mu‘tazilite position: “We wrote a book on the topic of “thing,” namely, that things are things even if they be non-existent. We have retreated from it [i.e. the position articulated in this book] and [now] contradict it, so whoever comes across it [the book], let him not place any store by it”; reported by Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyin kaḍīb al-muftarī fi-mā nusiba ilā al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-Aš‘arī*, no ed. [Damascus, 1928], 133,5-6.) Māturīdites: al-Māturīdī (d. ca. 944), *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. F. Kholeif (Beirut, 1970), 39,20-43,21; 86,2-92,20; 104,8-106,18; 242,3-16; and Abū al-Layṭ al-Samarqandī (d. ca. 990), *Šarḥ al-fiqh al-absaṭ li-Abī Ḥanīfa*, ed. H. Daiber (as *The Islamic Concept of Belief in the 4th/10th Century*) (Tokyo, 1995), 119,1-2 (= lines 426-7). Shi‘ites: al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022), *Awā’il al-maqālāt fi al-maḍāhib wa-al-muḥtārāt*, ed. M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1993), 42,14-19. See also R.M. Frank, “Al-ma’dūm wal-mawjūd,” *MIDEO*, 14 (1980): 185-210; and now his “The Aš‘arite ontology: I Primary entities,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 9/2 (1999): 163-231; A. Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām* (Leiden, 1994), 27 n.4 and 29-30; M.J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Sayḥ*

plicity at stake, not to mention the nature of His causation of the world, the primitive dogmatic formulae devised to encapsulate these two positions grew into fully articulated school doctrines. The *kalām* discussion of things and existents came to encompass general questions of ontology, and the metaphysical notions used in the debate became more sophisticated.

This increase in complexity went hand in hand with the intensifying philosophical activity of the period, activity that involved translating Greek philosophical texts into Arabic as well as composing original philosophical works in Arabic. In his *Kitāb fi al-falsafa al-ūlā*, Kindī uses the term *šay'* in a brief discussion of essence, existents and non-existents, but for the latter three terms he uses *dāt*, *ays* and *lays* respectively.¹⁰ Fārābī was the first *faylasūf* to incorporate the term *māhiyya* ("whatness," "quiddity" or simply "essence") – a term deriving primarily from the rendering of the Greek *to ti ēn einai* as *mā huwa* in the Arabic translations of Aristotle's logical works – into the *kalām* problematic of things and existents.¹¹ Fārābī

al-Mufīd (Beirut, 1978), 196-9; F. Klein-Franke, "The non-existent is a thing," *Le Muséon*, 104 (1994): 375-90; D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam* (Paris, 1988), 142-50; and J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin, 1991-1997), I 357f.; II 481f. and 499-501; IV 45-9 and 432-5.

¹⁰ *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī II*, 41,3-43,18.

¹¹ It is true that *to ti ēn einai* (and its variants) was translated as *māhiyya* only rarely, and primarily in the context of distinguishing definition (*al-ḥadd*) from property (*al-ḥāṣṣa*): the former is a statement that "indicates the thing's essence" (*al-dāll 'alā māhiyyat al-šay'*), the latter one that does not. See, for example, *Top.* 101b38-102a1 (= *Ṭūbika*, in *Manṭiq Aristū II*, ed. 'A. Badawī [Cairo, 1949], 474,17); 102a21 (= 475,14); 103b10-11 (= 481,11); and 154a30 (= *Manṭiq Aristū III*, ed. 'A. Badawī [Cairo, 1952], 685,12-13). In the *Organon to ti ēn einai* was mostly translated as *mā huwa*. See, for example, *An. Post.* 83a21 (= *Taḥlīlāt tāniyya*, in *Manṭiq Aristū II*, 375,6); 83b5 (= 376,14); 84a26 (= 380,8); 97a25 (= 448,5) and 97b2 (= 449,4); 102a32-33 (= 476,12); 103b21.30.34 (= 482,4.12.15); 120b21 (= 552,15); 122a5-6.12-19.21.32.36 (= 557,18, 558,6-11.13 and 559,4.8.9.10.11 bis); 128a14.19 (= 581,15 and 582,1) and 148a1 (= 656,8). It is also translated as *mā huwa al-šay'*: *An. Post.* 79a25.27.29 (= *Taḥlīlāt tāniyya*, 354,2.4.5) and *Top.* 101b22 (= *Ṭūbika*, 474,1); and as *mā al-šay'*: *An. Post.* 82b37 (= *Taḥlīlāt tāniyya*, 373,15); and *Top.* 101b21 (= *Ṭūbika*, 473,17); *Top.* 103b24.26 (= *Ṭūbika*, 482,8.9) and 148a1 (= 656,7). In the *Metaphysics*, *to ti ēn einai* was translated as *mā huwa* at 994b17 (= *Mā ba'da al-ṭabi'a I*, 34,8) and 993a18 (= I, 161,13); as *mā hiya* and *mā al-šay'* at 1016a33-34 (= II, 536,5-6); as *mā huwa al-šay'* at 994a11 (= I, 17,3); as *mā anniyyat al-šay'* at 1024b29 (= II, 685,1); and as *mā kaynūnat al-šay'* at 1013b22 (= II, 487,14). Mostly, however, *to ti ēn einai* in the *Metaphysics* was translated as *mā huwa bi al-anniyya*: at 1025b29-29 (= II 705,8); 1030a6 (= II 795,10); 1030a17 (= II 798,6); 1030a29 (= II 802,6); 1031a9-10 (= II 818,10); 1031a18 (= II 821,16); 1031b30 (= II 831,7); 1033b7 (= II 860,15-16); 1035b16 (= II 903,8); 1037a21 (= II 936,8-9); 1037a33-b1 (= II 939,15); 1044a36 (= II 1074,1); 1045b3 (= II 1096,13); and 1075a2 (= II 1693,1).

appears at first glance to come down on the side of the Mu‘tazilites on the issue of whether or not thing was a more overarching category than existent, but closer examination reveals that his view is more nuanced. Fārābī first establishes that his definition of *mawǧūd* as “that which, outside the soul, is set apart by some essence, be it conceived of or not” (*mā huwa munḥāzun bi-māhiyyatin mā ḥāriġa al-nafsi tuṣuwwirat aw lam tutaṣawwar*), is broader and hence more basic than the other definitions of *mawǧūd* he suggests.¹² Fārābī defines *šay’*, on the other hand, as “all that possesses some essence, in whichever way, be it outside the soul or conceived of in any sense whatsoever, divided up or undivided” (*kullu mā lahu māhiyyatun mā kayfa kāna ḥāriġa al-nafsi aw kāna mutaṣawwaran ‘alā ayyi ġiḥatin kāna munqasimatan aw ġayra munqasimatin*).¹³ Thus defined, *mawǧūd* is not as broadly applicable as *šay’*, because *šay’* covers essences both outside and inside the mind, whereas *mawǧūd* covers merely those outside the mind. In this sense Fārābī appears to be echoing the Mu‘tazilite position.

On the other hand, Fārābī again follows the Arabic translations of the Organon and argues that *mawǧūd* has one technical use that *šay’* does not: as the copula (*rābiṭ*) that connects the subject (here the logical term *al-mawḍū‘* as opposed to the grammatical term *al-mubtada‘*) to the predicate (*al-maḥmūl* as opposed to *al-ḥabar*) in categorical affirmative propositions (*al-aqāwīl al-ġāzima al-mūġiba*).¹⁴ For example, Fārābī says, when we wish to state that Zayd is a just person, it might make sense to say, literally, “Zayd is found to be a just person” (*Zaydun mawǧūdun ‘ādilan*), while it makes no sense to say “Zayd is thing a just person” (*Zaydun šay’un ‘ādilan*). In this technical, copulative sense, *mawǧūd* is more broadly applicable than *šay’*, although Fārābī stresses that the first, non-copulative sense of *mawǧūd* is more basic. As he did with *māhiyya*, Fārābī has tried to incorporate an Aristotelian notion – here the copulative or predicative sense of *to einai*, “to be” – into the *kalām* problematic of *šay’* v. *mawǧūd*.¹⁵ To sum up Fārābī’s position, then, *šay’*

¹² Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-ḥurūf*, ed. M. Maḥdī (Beirut, 1969), 116,23-117,1.

¹³ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-ḥurūf*, 128,6-8.

¹⁴ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-ḥurūf*, 125,12-13.

¹⁵ Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-ḥurūf*, 128,12-13. In *Metaph.* 4.2, 1003b10 (= Averroes, *Tafsīr Mā ba‘da al-ṭabī‘a I*, ed. M. Bouyges [Beirut, 1938], 301,9-10) Aristotle claims that we can say that even something that is non-existent (*to mē on = allaḍi laysa bi-*

is more broadly applicable than *mawğūd* in the first, more basic sense, yet less broadly applicable than *mawğūd* in the second, more technical sense.

The *kalām* discussions of things and existents and Fārābī's efforts to Aristotelianize them provide the backdrop for an important discussion in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-šifā'*, where Avicenna seems to be making a distinction between essence and existence.¹⁶ In *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 Avicenna attempts to make the following points. First (29,5-31,2), he argues that thing and existent are primitive, basic and immediately apprehensible concepts. Because there are no terms more broadly applicable than thing and existent, they are indefinable, in the Aristotelian sense of definition at least; that is, there is no genus under which they can be subsumed as species. Second (31,2-32,3), Avicenna shows that thing and existent have different meanings. "Thing" is associated with terms such as "inner reality" (*ḥaqīqa*) and "whatness" (*māhiyya*), and appears to refer to an entity viewed in light of essence; "existent" is associated with terms such as "affirmed" (*muṭbat*) and "realized" (*muḥaṣṣal*), and appears to refer to an entity viewed in light of existence. Third (32,3-34,14), Avicenna explains that although they have different meanings, thing and existent are co-implied (*mutalāzimāni*). In this context, Avicenna's purpose in describing *šay'* and *mawğūd* as co-implied seems to be to convey the idea that although they have different meanings, neither *šay'* nor *mawğūd* is more broadly applicable than the other; the domains of objects to which each term refers fully overlap. The reflexivity inherent in the sixth-form term *talāzum* has important connotations as far as Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence is concerned. For at least in this context, Avicenna is saying that neither *šay'* nor *mawğūd* is logically prior to the other. There is no hint here that being an existent is somehow subordinate to, or an accident of, being a thing.

huwiyyatin) in some sense is non-existent (*einai mē on = fa-innahū laysa huwiyyatan*). Generally speaking, *to on* in the *Metaphysics* was translated into Arabic not as *al-mawğūd* but as *al-huwiyya* ("being"). Fārābī's analysis is discussed by Jolivet, "Origines," 17; S. Abed, *Aristotelian Logic and the Arabic Language in Alfārābī* (Albany, N.Y., 1991), 111-17; F. Zimmermann, *Al-Fārābī's Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle's De Interpretatione* (London, 1981), xlv-xlv, lx-lxiii and cxxx-cxxxiv; and F. Shehadi, *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy* (Delmar, N.Y., 1982), 45-69.

¹⁶ *Kitāb al-šifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt*, eds G. Qanawātī and S. Zāyid (Cairo, 1960), 29,5-34,14.

To sum up, then, the debate in the tenth century came to turn on how things and existents relate to each other both *extensionally* (that is, whether or not the domain of things overlaps with the domain of existents) and *intensionally* (that is, whether or not thing and existent have the same meaning). Logically speaking, these were the options:

1) *thing and existent are mutually exclusive both extensionally and intensionally*: “things are never existents and existents are never things; to be a thing and to be an existent have different meanings” (no one from this period seems to have held this view);

2) *thing is subsumed extensionally but not intensionally under existent*: “things are always existents but existents are not always things; to be a thing and to be an existent have different meanings” (no one from this period seems to have held this view);

3a) *existent is subsumed extensionally but not intensionally under thing*: “existents are always things but things are not always existents; to be a thing and to be an existent have different meanings” (most Mu‘tazilites);

3b) *existent is subsumed extensionally but not intensionally under thing**: “existents are always things but things are not always existents (*although *mawġūd* can be used as a copula whereas *šay’* cannot); to be a thing and to be an existent have different meanings” (Fārābī);

4a) *thing and existent are identical both extensionally and intensionally*: “things are always existents, and existents are always things; to be a thing and to be an existent have the same meaning” (Aš‘arites, Māturīdites and most Shi‘ites);

4b) *thing and existent are identical extensionally but different intensionally*: “things are always existents, and existents are always things; to be a thing and to be an existent have different meanings” (Avicenna).

The debt Avicenna owes to the *kalām* discussions of things and existents seems self-evident, given the similarity of his position to that of the Aš‘arites, Māturīdites and most Shi‘ites (from now on I will use the abbreviation AMS for this position). In this regard Jolivet is surely correct. But more precisely, Avicenna’s position in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 seems to be a compromise between AMS on the one hand, and the Mu‘tazilites’ and Fārābī’s position on the other. For although Avicenna advocates the extensional identity of thing and existent just as AMS does,

he also advocates the intensional difference between thing and existent just as the Mu'tazilites and Fārābī do.

Nevertheless, Jolivet reckons that the influence of the *mutakallimūn* was greater than that of the Aristotelian philosophers because no Greek antecedent can be found for *šay'* (*pragma* is the possibility Jolivet explores and rejects), in contrast to *mawğūd*, whose roots lie in the Greek term *to on* (and similarly *ta onta* for *mawğūdāt*, and *to einai* for *wuğūd*).¹⁷ Although Jolivet is correct in asserting that *to on* is the Greek equivalent of *mawğūd*, and that *pragma* is not the Greek equivalent of *šay'*, the fact remains that a Greek antecedent for *šay'* does exist: *ti* ("something"). In fact, the question of the ontological status of the non-existent – *to mē on* – and its relation to the something – *to ti* – has an ancient pedigree. The problem originates with Parmenides, is discussed at length by Plato in the *Sophist*, is analyzed by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* and the *Physics*, and emerges as a coherent ontology among the Stoics, who – like the Mu'tazilites and Fārābī – put "something" (*ti*) at the top of their ontological pyramid, above even "existent" (*to on*).¹⁸

¹⁷ Jolivet, "Origines," 15-16. On this see also P. Hadot, "Sur divers sens du mot *pragma* dans la tradition philosophique grecque," in P. Aubenque (ed.), *Concepts et catégories dans la pensée antique* (Paris, 1980), 309-19.

¹⁸ Parmenides, fr. VI, lines 1-2 (*esti gar einai, mēden d'ouk estin* – "There is being, but there is no nothing") and VII,1 (*ou gar mēpote touto damēi einai mē eonta* – "That there are non-existent things will never be proven") (In fact, Parmenides comes across as a proto-Aś'arite when Fārābī quotes him as asserting that "All that is non-existent is not a thing" – *wa-kullu mā huwa ġayru mawğūdin fa-laysa bi-šay'in*: al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-hurūf*, 128,19); Plato, *Sophist* 236E onwards; Aristotle, *Metaph.* 4.2, 1003b10 (At *Metaph.* 14.2, 1089a5-28, Aristotle argues that Plato's conception of *to mē on* as "the false" – *to pseudos* – is useless in explaining generation and corruption, and proposes that a better conception of *to mē on* is "the potential" – *to kata dunamin* – a position followed explicitly by Fārābī, *K. al-hurūf*, 120,8-121,6 and 123,1-124,4; see also Aristotle's distinction between absolute and incidental non-existence in *Phys.* 1.8 and 1.9, 191a23-192b7). On the Stoic ontology, and on the way in which incorporeals are said to "subsist" rather than "exist," see P. Hadot, "Zur Vorgeschichte des begriffes Existenz: *huparkhein* bei den Stoikern," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 13 (1969): 115-27; A. Graeser, "À propos *huparkhein* bei den Stoikern," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, 15 (1971): 299-305; V. Goldschmidt, "*Huparkhein* et *huphistanai* dans la philosophie stoïcienne," *Revue des Études Grecques*, 85 (1972): 331-44; P. Pasquino, "Le statut ontologique des incorporels," in J. Brunschwig (ed.), *Les Stoïciens et leur logique* (Paris, 1978), 375-86; J. Brunschwig, "The Stoic theory of the supreme genus and Platonic ontology" and "On a Stoic way of not being," both originally published in French (as "La théorie stoïcienne du genre suprême et l'ontologie platonicienne," in J. Barnes and M. Mignucci (eds.), *Matter and Metaphysics: Fourth Symposium Hellenisticum* (Naples, 1988), 19-127, and "Sur une façon stoïcienne de ne pas être," *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 122 [1990]: 389-403) and

It would be tempting to assert a Stoic link here, but tracing Stoic influence on Arabic *kalām* and *falsafa* has always been a tricky business; many scholars have tried, with varying degrees of success.¹⁹ Less uncertain is the influence Stoicism had on the Greek Aristotle-commentators, whom the Arabic philosophers read carefully. For example, in his commentary on Book 4, Chapter 1 of Aristotle's *Topics*, Alexander of Aphrodisias criticizes the Stoics for elevating "something" above "existent":

Here is a way you can demonstrate how wrong the Stoics are in holding that "something" is the genus under which "existent" is subsumed: if it is a something, it will clearly be an existent as well; and if it is an existent it will be definable as existent. Now they wriggle out of this dilemma by holding that "existent" is said of bodies alone, and on this basis they speak about "something" being a higher genus than it, given that it ["something"] is predicable of incorporeal as well as corporeal entities.²⁰

Now any attempt to use this particular passage as evidence of a direct filiation between Stoic and Mu'tazilite ontology will be frustrated by the fact that only Alexander's comments on part of Book 1 and Books 5-8 of the *Topics* survive, at least according to Ibn al-Nadīm.²¹ But elsewhere in Alexander's commentary on the *Topics*, as well as in Simplicius' commentary on the *Categories*, the Stoic ontology is articulated, although less starkly than in the *in Top.* 4.1 passage just translated.²² To sum up: Jolivet is correct in asserting that the *kalām* discussions of things and existents were likely to have been the most important (and certainly the most immediate) influences on Avicenna, but wrong in reasoning that this was because ancient philosophers had no such discussions.

translated into English by J. Lloyd in Brunschwig's *Papers in Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1994), 92-157 and 158-169; and now V. Caston, "Something and nothing: The Stoics on concepts and universals," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 17 (1999): 145-213.

¹⁹ e.g. F. Jadaane, *L'influence du stoïcisme sur la pensée musulmane* (Beirut, 1968), 43-98; J. van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des 'Aḡudaddīn al-Īcī* (Wiesbaden, 1966), 191-200; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 355-72; S. Pines, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomenlehre* (Berlin, 1936), 116-17; these are reviewed briefly by Gutas in his "Pre-Plotinian philosophy in Arabic (other than Platonism and Aristotelianism): a review of the sources," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.36.7 (Berlin, 1994), 4939-73, at 4959-62.

²⁰ Alexander, *in Top.* 4.1 (*ad* 121a10), *CAG II*, 301,19-25.

²¹ Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel (Leipzig, 1871), 249,17-19.

²² Alexander *in Top.* 42,37 and 359,12-16; Simplicius *in Cat.*, *CAG VIII*, 105,7-20; 209,10; 222,30-33; 333,31.

Having briefly dealt with the question of Greek antecedents, I can focus on the question of how exactly the *kalām* discussions of things and existents influenced Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence. For while it is easy enough to imagine his making the move from *mawǧūd* to *wuǧūd*, less obvious is Avicenna's progression from *šay'* to *māhiyya*, the term he uses most consistently to describe essence when contrasting it with existence. To some extent Avicenna's progression from *šay'* to *māhiyya* can be reconstructed by analyzing the *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 passage devoted to showing how thing and existent have different meanings. In that passage Avicenna starts by asserting that every thing (*šay'*) or entity (*amr*) has an inner reality (*ḥaqīqa*) by which it is what it is (31,5-6). This inner reality (e.g. triangularity) is sometimes called "existence that is specific" (*al-wuǧūd al-ḥāṣṣ*); specific, that is, to one class of things (triangles) as opposed to another class of things (cats). Existence that is specific is distinct from the more general type of existence which Avicenna calls "affirmative existence" (*al-wuǧūd al-iṭbātī*) (31,7-8). To predicate affirmative existence of an entity is to assert *that* the entity is, not *what* the entity is. To predicate existence that is specific, on the other hand, is to assert *what* the entity is, not *that* the entity is. Since existence that is specific is identical to inner reality, and inner reality is identical to whatness (*māhiyya*), it follows that existence that is specific is identical to whatness (31,10). And since existence that is specific is identical to whatness, and existence that is specific is distinct from affirmative existence, it follows that whatness is distinct from affirmative existence. In other words, essence is distinct from existence.²³

A brief remark later on in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 (33,16-18) raises the intriguing possibility that *šay'iyya*, thingness, served to link Avicenna's distinction between things and existents on the one hand and his distinction between essence and existence on the other:

According to people who hold this view [that what is predicated can be a non-existent, i.e. the Mu'tazilites], in and among all that is predicated and known are some entities [*umūr*] that, when non-existent, possess no thingness

²³ Avicenna's discussion of things and existents in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 is related to similar treatments in Aquinas' work by I. Craemer-Ruegenberg, "Ens est quod primum cadit in intellectu" – Avicenna und Thomas von Aquin," in U. Tworuschka (ed.), *Gottes ist der Orient - Gottes ist der Okzident* (Köln, 1991), 133-42.

(*šay'iyya*); let the person who is inclined to agree with that go back to whatever dogmatic formulae they babbled out unintelligibly, [formulae] which do not deserve any attention.

In this passage Avicenna is attacking those who maintain that there is a class of non-existent entities that possess no thingness, and hence are not things. A later commentator on the *Ilāhiyyāt*, Mullā Mahdī Narāqī (d. 1764), advises us that Avicenna's target here was a group of Mu'tazilites who, in maintaining that some non-existents (those that are impossible, *al-mustaḥīlāt* or *al-mumtani'āt*) had no thingness and hence were not things, deviated from the classical doctrine of their school.²⁴

Despite Avicenna's use of the term *šay'iyya* here, any attempt to prove that the term served to bridge the ninth- and tenth-century-CE *kalām* discussions of things and existents on the one hand, and Avicenna's discussions of essence and existence on the other, will face two difficult challenges. The first challenge is that *šay'iyya* would play a bridging role more convincingly if that term had appeared often and in a wide variety of ninth- and tenth-century *kalām* texts. It does not. In fact, I have not seen a single instance of *šay'iyya* where I most expected to find it: in a text written by a Mu'tazilite, a member of the school most infamous for affirming the thingness of the non-existent. Nor does *šay'iyya* seem to appear in an Aš'arite text until Ġuwaynī, that is, not until a generation after Avicenna's death.²⁵

²⁴ Mullā Mahdī Narāqī, *Šarḥ al-ilāhiyyāt min kitāb al-šifā'*, ed. M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1986), 265,2. M. Marmura ("Avicenna on primary concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifā'*," in R. Savory and D. Agius (eds), *Logos Islamikos: Studia islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens* [Toronto, 1984], 219-39; revised slightly in his "Avicenna and the Kalām," *ZGAIW*, 7 [1991/1992], 172-206) argues that what troubled Avicenna specifically was the Mu'tazilite Abū Hāšim's and his followers' application of their *šay'/mawǧūd/ma'dūm* paradigm to the problem of bodily resurrection. Also see D. Black's discussion of the dilemmas that faced Avicenna in distinguishing between fictional entities such as phoenixes, which seem to have some kind of mental existence even though they never exist as concrete objects in the outside world, and impossibilities such as a square circle, which seem to have neither mental nor concrete existence: "Avicenna on the ontological and epistemic status of fictional beings," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 8 (1997): 425-53.

²⁵ Strangely enough, Ġuwaynī devoted a long section of his *Šāmil* to reviewing the debate about things and existents, yet does not once use the term *šay'iyya* there: *al-Šāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. 'A.M. 'Umar (Beirut, 1999), 23,18-33,24; but see his use of the term in other contexts, at 113,2.4; 161,25.26.27; and 169,6.17. Šahrastānī uses

But *šay'iyya* does make a few appearances in the tenth century. It turns up once (in a passage attributed to Ġa'far al-Šādiq (d. 765) commenting on the credal formula *šay' lā ka-al-ašyā'*, "[God is] a thing not like [other] things") in the *Kāfi* of the Shi'ite traditionist Abū Ġa'far al-Kulaynī (d. 940).²⁶ It is only in the *Kitāb al-tawhīd* of al-Māturīdī (d. 944) however, that *šay'iyya* is also used consistently to describe and attack the doctrine of the Mu'tazilites.²⁷ Later in the tenth century, Māturīdī's use of *šay'iyya* in the context of anti-Mu'tazilite polemics was echoed in the *Šarḥ al-fiqh al-absaṭ li-Abī Ḥanīfa* of the Ḥanafite scholar Abū al-Layṭ al-Samarqandī (d. 990).²⁸

Are these appearances of *šay'iyya* the first uses of the term, or are they evidence of earlier Mu'tazilite use? At this stage of research it is difficult to tell. With such a tiny proportion of what was written by ninth- and tenth-century *mutakallimūn* now available to us, assertions about the term's history will inevitably suffer from tentativeness. But the fact that the term seems to be absent from the few Mu'tazilite and Aš'arite sources we do have from this pre-Avicennian period indicates that Māturīdī might well deserve the honor of being called *Abū šay'iyya*. What is interesting here is that because Avicenna grew up outside Buḥārā – that is, in Transoxania, an area where the Samarqandī Ḥanafism of al-Māturīdī was strong – and because he was taught jurisprudence by a Ḥanafite scholar called Ismā'il al-Zāhid, Avicenna may well have come across the term *šay'iyya* during his youthful *fiqh* studies, if not in Māturīdī's *Kitāb*

šay'iyya in several places: *Kitāb nihāyat al-iqdām fi 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. A. Guillaume, no date, 33,20; 73,17; 150,7.8.10; and 151,2.7. For an argument that Šahrastānī is more properly described as an Ismā'īlī, rather than an Aš'arite, see D. Steigerwald, *La pensée philosophique et théologique de Šahrastānī* (Québec, 1997). Ġazālī himself mentions the Mu'tazilite view without using *šay'iyya*: *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1927), 358,8-11.

²⁶ Abū Ġa'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ġaffārī (Tehran, 1961), 82,4-85,9 at 83,6-8. In Ibn Bābawayh's slightly later collection of Imāmī Shi'ite sayings, *šay'iyya* is also used in the context of affirming that God is a thing unlike other things, except this time in a passage attributed to Ġa'far al-Šādiq's son, Mūsā al-Kāzim: Abū Ġa'far Muḥammad ibn Bābawayh al-Šadūq, *Kitāb al-tawhīd* (Bombay (?), 1903), 94,9-95,1.

²⁷ Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 41,10 *bis.*15; 86,3.16; 104,10.11.12.15; 132,19; 238,9.10; 242,8.9.11.12.13.14 *bis.*18. See D. Gimaret's brief discussion of Māturīdī's use of *šay'iyya*, in his *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane* (Paris, 1980), 182-184 and 203.

²⁸ Abū al-Layṭ al-Samarqandī, *Šarḥ al-fiqh al-absaṭ li-Abī Ḥanīfa*, 119,1.2 (= lines 426-7).

al-tawḥīd, then perhaps in Abū al-Layṭ al-Samarqandī's commentary on Abū Ḥanīfa's *al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*. Even if Ismā'īl al-Zāhid himself was not a Māturīdite in *kalām* (Buḥāran Ḥanafites tended to be less rationalistic and speculative in *kalām* than those in Samarqand, and in any case there were Ḥanafites such as Ibn Fūrak who were Aš'arite in *kalām*), it is perfectly possible that Ismā'īl could have used a simple commentary such as Abū al-Layṭ's when teaching his young student the Ḥanafite creed.²⁹

Of course it is also perfectly possible that Avicenna came up with the term *šay'iyya* all by himself. Others have remarked on Māturīdī's predilection for abstract nouns ending in *-iyya*, an extreme example being his grafting of the Arabic *-iyya* (equivalent to the English “-ness,” or the Latinized “-ity”) onto the Persian *hast* (“be”) to form *hastīyya* (“being”).³⁰ Māturīdī's predilection for abstract nouns was a trait Avicenna certainly shared. But given the presence of the term *šay'iyya* in a small number of tenth-century *kalām* texts as well as in Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5, there is a possibility – nothing more – that the term played a bridging role between the earlier *kalām* discussions of things and existents and Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence.

The second challenge to my hypothesis still remains to be met. For even if future research is able to establish a firmer link between *kalām* uses of the term *šay'iyya* and Avicenna's own use of it in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5, the fact remains that the concept of what it is to be a thing (of thingness, in other words) which Avicenna articulates in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5, appears to be inconsistent with his discussions of things elsewhere. More importantly, Avicenna's concept of thingness in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 does not seem to mesh with his concept of *māhiyya*, or essence. Despite Avicenna's clear assertion in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 that thing and exis-

²⁹ On Avicenna's Ḥanafite education, see D. Gutas, “Avicenna's *madhhab* with an appendix on the question of the date of his birth,” *Quaderni di studi arabi*, 5-6 (1987-1988): 323-36. On Ismā'īl al-Zāhid, see W. Gohlman (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Ibn Sina* (Albany, N.Y., 1974), 20,4-7, and al-Ḥaṭīb al-Baḡdādī, *Tārīḥ Baḡdād* 6, no ed. (Beirut, 1968), 310,17-311,18 (= #3355). On Māturīdism in Transoxania, see W. Madelung, “The spread of Māturīdism and the Turks,” *Actas do IV Congresso de Estudos Árabes e Islâmicos Coimbra-Lisboa 1968* (Leiden, 1971), 109-68, and his article “Māturīdiyya,” *EI*², vi, 847, and now U. Rudolph, *al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden, 1996).

³⁰ Rudolph, *al-Māturīdī*, 212-13; compare al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-ḥurūf*, 111,17-21.

tent are co-implicated (*mutalāzimāni*) and extensionally identical, there are several discussions of essence and existence elsewhere in the *Ilāhiyyāt* and in other works from Avicenna's middle period, which suggest that *šay'* – and *māhiyya*, as we shall see – is at the very least logically prior to *mawǧūd*, and perhaps even a broader category than *mawǧūd*. If *šay'* is logically prior to *mawǧūd*, then Avicenna's assertions about the reciprocal nature of the co-implication (*talāzum*) between thing and existent – so clearly articulated in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 – will be undermined. Even more seriously, if *šay'* is a broader category than *mawǧūd*, then their extensional identity will be repudiated.

The following are summaries of the relevant passages, including *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5, in chronological order:

1) *Madḥal* 1.2: The essences of things (*māhiyyāt al-ašyā'*) are sometimes found in concrete objects in the outside world, and other times are conceived of in the mind. But essence has *three* aspects: as a concrete, external existent; as a mental, internal existent; and a third aspect, in which it is unrelated to either concrete or mental existence.³¹

2) *Madḥal* 1.12: Genera and species may be divided into those which are *before* a state of multiplicity (that is, those contained in the active intellect and the other celestial intellects), those which are *in* a state of multiplicity (that is, those contained individually in sublunary concrete existents), and those which are *after* a state of multiplicity (that is, those contained as abstracted universals in human intellects). Taken in itself a genus or a species is a thing. "Animal," taken in itself, is an object (*ma'nān*), regardless of whether it is a concrete or a mental existent, or whether it is general or specific.³²

3) *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 (discussed above): "Thing" and "existent" are primary, indefinable categories. Whatever is predicable of thing will also be predicable of existent, and whatever is predicable of existent will also be predicable of thing. Although they are co-implicated, thing and existent have different meanings.

4) *Ilāhiyyāt* 5.1: A universal (*kullī*) such as "horseness,"

³¹ *Kitāb al-šifā': al-Mantiq (I)/al-Madḥal*, eds G. Qanawāti, M. al-Khuḍayrī and F. al-Ahwānī (Cairo, 1952), 15,1-7.

³² *Madḥal* 1.12, 65,4-12. On this passage see M. Marmura, "Avicenna's chapter on universals in the *Isagoge* of his *Shifā'*," in A. Welch and P. Cachia (eds), *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge* (Edinburgh, 1979), 34-56.

taken in and of itself (*fī nafsihi*) – that is, without considering whether it is one or many (*lā wāḥid wa-lā kaṭīr*), a concrete existent in the outside world or a mental existent inside the soul (*lā mawǧūd fī al-a'yān wa-lā mawǧūd fī al-nafs*), in potentiality or in actuality (*lā bi-al-quwwa wa-lā bi-al-fī'l*) – is a thing (*šay'*).³³

5) *Ilāhiyyāt* 7.1: “One” (*al-wāḥid*) and “existent” (*al-mawǧūd*) are equally predicable of things (*qad yatasāwiyāni fī al-ḥaml 'alā al-ašyā'*); all that may be characterized by “one” may also be characterized by “existent,” but the two terms do not have the same meaning as each other.³⁴

6) *Naǧāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.9: “One” is a necessary accident of things (*min al-a'rād al-lāzima li-al-ašyā'*). Essence is a thing (*bal takūnu al-māhiyya šay'an*), be it a man or a horse, an intellect or a soul; that thing is only subsequently characterized as being one or existent.³⁵

From these passages a discrepancy seems to emerge over the issue of what exactly is it to be a thing; over the question, that is, of thingness. The message from the *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 passage discussed above at length is that thing and existent are extensionally identical yet intensionally different. In other words, while thingness and existence have different meanings, neither term

³³ *Ilāhiyyāt* 5.1, 196,6-13.

³⁴ *Ilāhiyyāt* 7.1, 303,6-12. Avicenna's assertion that *mawǧūd* and *wāḥid* are extensionally identical but intensionally different almost certainly derives from Aristotle's discussions in *Metaph.* 4.2, 1003b22-1004a2 (contained in *Tafsīr Mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a I*, 310,1-311,4 and 316,9) where Aristotle discusses how “that which is” (*to on = al-huwiyya*) and “that which is one” (*to hen = al-wāḥid*) can be seen to be extensionally identical but intensionally different, in the sense that both are equally predicable of substance (*ousia*). See also “‘That which is one’ is said of [the same things] ‘that which is’ is said of” (*to hen legetai hōsper kai to on = yuqāl al-wāḥid ka-miṭli mā tuqāl al-huwiyya aydan*) at *Metaph.* 7.16, 1040b16-24 (= *Tafsīr Mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a II*, 999,14-1000,5); and “‘That which is’ and ‘that which is one’ are the predicates spoken most universally of everything” (*to gar on kai to hen katholou katēgoreitai malista pantōn = fa-inna al-wāḥid wa-al-huwiyya maqūlāt kulliyya aḫtar dālika tuqāl 'alā ḡami' al-ašyā'*) at *Metaph.* 10.2, 1053b16-21 (= *Tafsīr Mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a III*, 1268,11-1269,3).

³⁵ *Kitāb al-naǧāt*, ed. M. Fakhry (Beirut, 1985), 245, 20-21. This passage is identical to *Ḥikma 'Arūḍiyya*, MS Uppsala OR. 364, 2v8-10, but given how little we know about the *Ḥikma 'Arūḍiyya* text, and given the many correspondences between it and the *Naǧāt*, it is impossible to say if the *Naǧāt* passage is a copy of the very early *Ḥikma 'Arūḍiyya* passage, or if what purports to be the *Ḥikma 'Arūḍiyya* passage is merely a copy of the later *Naǧāt*. Gutas discusses the *Naǧāt*'s correspondence to Avicenna's earliest works in *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 87-93 and 112-14.

applies to any entity that the other does not apply to. Yet in *Ilāhiyyāt* 7.1 Avicenna implies that thing is a universally applicable subject of which one and existent may be predicated. In other words it is *one* and existent, not *thing* and existent, which are extensionally identical yet intensionally different. Thing therefore seems to be a category which is more basic, and hence logically prior, to the categories one and existent.

This logical priority is reinforced by Avicenna's implication in *Ilāhiyyāt* 5.1 that properly speaking, thing should be elevated above considerations of existence. There Avicenna claims that a universal is a thing when taken in itself, that is, when it is separated from any consideration of the mode of its existence: one or many, concrete or mental, potential or actual. Not only is a universal taken in itself a thing, but – we are told in *Madḥal* 1.12 – a genus or a species taken in itself is a thing. Even more importantly, Avicenna says in the *Naḡāt* passage that an essence taken in itself is a thing, and that “one” – and, by implication, “existent” – is merely a necessary accident of essence taken in itself. Most starkly of all, Avicenna asserts in *Madḥal* 1.2 that an essence has a third aspect, unrelated to any type of existence whatsoever.

The clear message given in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 that thing and existent are co-implicated, with neither being prior to the other, is therefore muffled by the many hints from the other passages that thing is logically prior to existent. More serious is the question of extension. For while all the passages are consistent in maintaining that thing and existent have different meanings, two in particular – *Naḡāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.9 and *Madḥal* 1.2 – imply that there is a separate category of things – essence taken in itself – to which existence *does not* apply. In these passages Avicenna seems to have forced himself into advocating the Mu'tazilite position that existent is subsumed extensionally but not intensionally under thing; that is, that existents are always things but things are not always existents.³⁶

³⁶ Much ink has been spilled trying to determine how Avicenna meant this extra aspect of essence to be understood. Some maintain that it should be understood simply in the context of a thought experiment, in which *māhiyya* can be separated in a purely logical sense from its existence as a concrete individual in the outside world and from its existence as a universal concept in the mind. Others, citing remarks Avicenna makes in *Ilāhiyyāt* 5.2, believe that the passage provides evidence that Avicenna thought existence was attached to essence merely as an accident. Western interpreters in the Catholic tradition have generally understood Avicenna as implying the latter,

Is there any other evidence in Avicenna's writings to help us understand his concept of thingness? Does that evidence allow us to reconcile Avicenna's various positions on things and essences? These questions will be addressed in Parts 2 and 3.

PART 2: ŠAY'IYYA OR SABABIYYA?

To get a fuller picture of the subtle tension in Avicenna's thought between things and essences we must look for other instances of *šay'iyya* in Avicenna's writings. After all, the isolated instance of thingness in *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 – the only instance of *šay'iyya* that Jolivet cites – hardly constitutes a fully articulated concept in Avicenna's thought. Where else, if anywhere, does *šay'iyya* appear in Avicenna's works? It turns out that the *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 passage, the one that so clearly echoes the earlier Mu'tazilite discussions of things and existents, is not the only time when Avicenna uses the term *šay'iyya*.

Far more often than its lonely appearance there, where the *mutakallimūn* are hovering in the background, Avicenna uses *šay'iyya* in a cluster of discussions which have nothing to do with early *kalām* debates and which are driven by a problem specific to Aristotelian philosophy: the relation between efficient and final causes. In *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 Avicenna writes:

(292,1) The subsequent objection [to the reality of final causation, viz., "How can the end be anything but posterior to the other causes?"] will be solved by knowing that the end may be taken to be a thing as well as taken to be an existent. Although a thing cannot be other than an existent, the difference between thing and existent is just like the difference between some entity and its concomitant (*wa-al-farq bayna al-šay' wa-al-mawğūd wa-in kāna al-šay' lā yakūn illā mawğūdan ka-al-farq bayna al-amr wa lāzimihī*). You have

but consensus is now emerging that the former is also a feasible interpretation. For a sampling of different views see Goichon, *La distinction de l'essence et de l'existence*; É. Gilson, *L'Être et l'essence* (Paris, 1948), 121-31; F. Rahman, "Essence and existence in Avicenna," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1958), 1-16; P. Morewedge, "Philosophical analysis of Ibn Sinā's essence-existence distinction," *JAOS*, 92/3 (1972): 425-35; F. Rahman, "Essence and existence in Ibn Sinā: the myth and the reality," *Hamdard Islamicus*, 4 (1981): 3-14; D. Burrell, "Essence and existence: Avicenna and Greek philosophy," *MIDEO*, 17 (1986): 53-66; S. H. Nasr, "Existence (*wuğūd*) and quiddity (*māhiyyah*) in Islamic philosophy," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 29/4 (1989): 409-28; M. Marmura, "Quiddity and universality in Avicenna," in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* (Albany, N.Y., 1992), 77-87.

already come to know and to verify this. Consider, once again, the case of man: man has an inner reality, consisting of his definition and his essence, which is not conditioned upon [his] existence's being particular or general, concrete or in the soul, or potential or actual.

(292,6) Each cause, insofar as it is that [particular] cause, has an inner reality and a thingness. In its thingness the final cause is the reason why the other causes actually exist as causes. In its existence the final cause is the effect of the other causes' actually [existing] as causes. It is as if the thingness of the final cause were the cause of the cause of its [own] existence; conversely it is as if its existence were the effect of the effect of its [own] thingness. However its thingness does not become a cause unless it occurs as an image formed in the soul, or as something analogous to that. The only cause of the final cause in its thingness is another cause which is different from the cause toward which one thing sets [another] in motion, or toward which something is set in motion.

Know that something can be caused in its thingness, and caused in its existence. An example of what is caused in its thingness is twoness: contained in the definition of its being twoness is its being caused by oneness. What is caused in its existence is clear, not unknown.

Similarly, one thing might possess another thing that occurs as an existent in its thingness, as twoness possesses numberness; or else one thing might be additional to another thing that is added to its thingness, as wood and stone contain rectilinearity. Natural bodies are causes of the thingness of many forms and accidents (I mean of those [forms and accidents] which can only recur in them), as well as being causes of the existence of some of them [the forms and accidents] without [being a cause of] their [the forms' and accidents'] thingness, as is sometimes thought to be the case in mathematics.

(293,4) It has thus been easy for you to understand [sic!] that the final cause, with regard to its thingness, is prior to the efficient and receptive causes, and similarly, prior to form insofar as form is a formal cause leading toward it [the final cause]. In addition, the final cause is prior to the other causes in its existence in the soul. As for [the final cause's being prior to the other causes] in the agent's soul, this is because it [the final cause] comes to exist first and then agency, seeking out a receptive patient, and the quality of the form come to be represented as images. As for [the final cause's being prior to the other causes] in the souls of those other than the agent, one [cause] need not follow another in any kind of necessary order. Therefore, in terms of thingness and in terms of existence in the intellect, there is no cause prior to the final [cause]; instead, it is a cause of the rest of the causes' becoming causes. However, the actual existence of the other causes as causes is [itself] a cause of its [the final cause's] existence. The final cause is a cause not insofar as it is an existent, but insofar as it is a thing. In the sense that it is a cause, it is the cause of the causes, while in the other sense it is the effect of the causes.

(293,12) This is [so] when the final cause comes about in [the world of] generation; when, however, the final cause does not exist in [the world of] generation, but its existence is more sublime than [that of the world of] generation

(as will be explained in its place), then none of the other causes is a cause of it [the final cause], nor are they in the case of the One which is Itself occurrence and existence. [In this case] therefore the final cause is uncaused by the rest of the causes not because it is a final cause but rather because it [already] possesses being. [But] even if it did not have being it would still be completely uncaused. When you consider its [the final cause's] being a final cause, you will find it to be a cause of the rest of the causes' being causes (viz., being an efficient cause and a receptive cause and a formal cause) but not of their being entities and existents in themselves. So what is essential to the final cause insofar as it is a final cause is being a cause of the rest of the causes, while what is accidental to it (insofar as it [the final cause] is understood to be [actually] occurring in the world of generation) is being an effect in the world of generation. It has thus been made clear to you how something may be cause as well as effect, given that it is [both] an agent and an end, this being one of the Natural Philosophers' principles.³⁷

Avicenna also mentions thingness in the same context in *Nağāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.11:

In terms of coming into existence (*fī huṣūl al-wuğūd*) the end is posterior to the effect, while it is prior to the rest of the causes in terms of thingness. It is clear that thingness is something other than existence in concrete reality (*al-wuğūd fī al-a'yān*). For an object [*al-ma'nā*] has an existence in concrete reality and an existence in the soul as well as something common [to both]: what is common [to both] is thingness. The final [cause] insofar as it is a thing is prior to the other causes and is the cause of the causes in terms of their being causes. Insofar as it is an existent in concrete reality it [the final cause] is posterior. When the efficient cause is not itself the final cause, the agent is posterior to the end in terms of thingness. This is because the other causes only become actual causes on account of the final.³⁸

Before I try in Part 3 to explain what Avicenna means when he uses *šay'iyya* in these passages, and to determine whether or not this helps us reconcile the apparent tension in his thought

³⁷ *Ilāhiyyāt*, 292,6-294,5.

³⁸ *Nağāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.11, 248,8-15; *šay'iyya* occurs on 248,9.10.11.14. As mentioned above, Gutas discusses the correspondence of the *Nağāt* to the *Ḥikma 'Arūdiyya*, Avicenna's earliest *summa*, in his *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 87-93 and 112-14. But unlike surrounding sections of the *Nağāt*, the discussion of causes is not identical to the analogous section in the *Ḥikma 'Arūdiyya*. In the earlier work, under the heading of *al-mabda'* ("origin"), Avicenna devotes only a very brief section to the causes, in which he combines and summarizes Aristotle's discussions in *Metaph.* 5.1 (on *arkhē*) and 5.2 (on *aition*). The efficient and final causes are called *sababāni mufāriqāni* (the two causes extrinsic to the effect), as opposed to the material and formal causes, which are called *sababāni muqārīnāni* (the two causes intrinsic to the effect). But there is no mention of how the efficient and final causes relate to each other: *Ḥikma 'Arūdiyya*, 4v16-5r5.

between thingness and essence, I must devote Part 2 to resolving a textual problem. The problem is that there are some indications that *sababiyya*, "causality," and not *šay'iyya*, "thingness," was the word Avicenna used in the passages above. This is in spite of the overwhelming evidence provided by the manuscripts used to come up with the Cairo edition of the *Ilāhiyyāt*, which are unanimous in their reading of *šay'iyya*.³⁹ I shall argue that the balance of evidence compels us to retain *šay'iyya*.

The textual problem in the *Ilāhiyyāt* might never have come to light had it not been for the fact that the Latin translator Gundisallinus consistently rendered what appears as *šay'iyya* in the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 passage not as *realitas* or *entitas*, as one would have expected, but as *causalitas*.⁴⁰ For example, the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 assertion that "Each cause, insofar as it is that [particular] cause, has an inner reality and a thingness," and which reads in Arabic:

wa-kullu 'illatin fa-innahā min ḥayṭu hiya tilka al-'illatu lahā ḥaḡiqatun wa-šay'iyyatun

was rendered into Latin as:

*omnis autem causa, inquantum est ipsa causa, habet certitudine et causalitatem.*⁴¹

One explanation of this anomaly takes into account the fact that translating Avicenna's philosophical works into Latin appears to have been a two-step process. A first translator – the Jewish émigré Ibn Dāwūd, or Avendauth – would render the Arabic orally into the vernacular Spanish of twelfth-century Toledo; as he went along, a second translator – the Catholic cleric Gundissalinus – would render the vernacular Spanish into proper philosophical Latin.⁴² Given this scenario, it is easy to imagine how the first

³⁹ The manuscripts examined for the Cairo edition are described in the introduction to G. Anawati's French translation of the *Ilāhiyyāt* (Avicenne: *La Métaphysique du Šifā'* [Paris, 1978], 17-21). The use of *šay'iyya* in the *Nağāt* is confirmed in the Renaissance edition: *Kitāb al-nağāt muḡtaşar al-şifā' li-ibn Sinā* (Rome, 1593), 58,22-26.

⁴⁰ Ed. S. van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina V-X* (Leiden, 1980), 337,88.90.91.92.94.96.97.00.1.3.5 and 338,11 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 292,6 bis.8.9 bis.10.12.14.16 and 293,2.3.4.8). On the translators, see ed. S. van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina I-IV* (Leiden, 1977), 123*.

⁴¹ *Liber de philosophia prima V-X*, 336,87-337,88 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 292,6).

⁴² Ed. S. van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus I-III* (Leiden, 1972), 95*-98* and C. Burnett, *The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Programme in Toledo in the Twelfth Century* (Berlin, 1997), 12-14.

translator might have tried faithfully to render *šay'iyya* into the vernacular Spanish as *cosità*. The second translator might then have confused *cosità*, “thingness,” with *causità*, “causality,” terms which were probably pronounced much the same.⁴³

It appears more likely, however, that *tašhīf*, a scribal misplacement of diacritical marks, was the cause of the divergence between the Arabic and Latin texts. The *tašhīf* in this case would consist of a scribe's having mispointed *šay'iyya* as *sababiyya* (“causality”), a far less mysterious term (I take it as obvious that *šay'iyya* is the *lectio difficilior* here). Confusing the pairs of terms is perfectly understandable. For in a medieval Arabic manuscript, many of whose words would have been without diacritical marks, the skeleton (*rasm*) سسه is just as easily pointed as سببية as it is as شبيبة. But given the lack of extant Arabic *Ilāhiyyāt* manuscripts from before 1284 (let alone from before the Arabic-Latin translation movement in the middle of the twelfth century), it is impossible to say whether a scribe mistranscribed *šay'iyya* as *sababiyya* before the manuscript reached Avendauth's hands and Avendauth then read the mispointed manuscript accurately; whether the manuscript reached Avendauth with these words pointed as *šay'iyya* and he then “corrected” the pointing to *sababiyya* before translating it; or whether the manuscript reached Avendauth with these words unpointed and he then pointed them incorrectly as *sababiyya* before translating them.

In any case, what inclines me towards attributing the divergence between the Arabic and Latin texts to *tašhīf* and not to mishearing is that what appears as *šay'iyya* in the *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5 passage discussed earlier was also incorrectly rendered into Latin but this time as *similitudinem*, clearly the result of Avendauth's (or an earlier scribe's) mispointing (سسه having been pointed as شبيهه or تشبيهه instead of شبيبة) rather than of Gundissalinus' mishearing.⁴⁴

⁴³ This is the theory advanced by d'Alverny with regard to two instances where, as she understood it, *cosā* had been misunderstood as *causa*. These are mentioned (without references to the text) in M.T. d'Alverny, “L'introduction d'Avicenne en Occident,” *Revue du Caire*, 14/141 (1951): 130-9, at 133, and repeated in her “Les traductions latines d'Ibn Sina et leur diffusion au Moyen Age,” *Millénaire d'Avicenne* (Cairo, 1952), 59-69, at 60. The instances of mistranslation she probably had in mind are S. van Riet (ed.), *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus I-III*, 192,20 (= *Avicenna's De Anima – Arabic Text*, ed. F. Rahman [Oxford, 1959], 103,11) and 273,11 (= *Avicenna's De Anima – Arabic Text*, 154,19).

⁴⁴ *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina I-IV*, 38,21 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 33,17). Jolivet seems not to have noticed this mistranslation; Fazlur Rahman mentions it in

On the other hand, the specter of *taṣḥīf* raises the chilling possibility that the original Arabic texts – the ones written or dictated by Avicenna himself – should in fact be read with *sababiyya*, not *ṣay'iyya*. This concern is heightened by the fact that the oldest manuscript of the Latin translation of the *Ilāhiyyāt* dates from about 1240, while the oldest Arabic manuscript of the *Ilāhiyyāt* dates from 1284.⁴⁵ However, I believe that the Latin translation does not, in itself, provide enough evidence to justify concluding that Avicenna wrote or dictated *sababiyya* rather than *ṣay'iyya*. First of all, if *causalitas* were an indication that the original Arabic should read *sababiyya*, not *ṣay'iyya*, then – by way of consistency – we would also expect to see the instances of *ṣay'* in the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 passage to have been rendered into Latin as *causa*. This is not the case. The Arabic of the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 passage immediately preceding the last quotation:

wa-ammā al-šakku alladī yalīhi fa-yanḥallu bi-an yu'lama anna al-gāyata tufraḍu ṣay'an wa-tufraḍu mauḡūdan

was rendered accurately into Latin as:

*Sed dubitatio quae sequitur hic solvitur hoc modo: scilicet, iam scis quod finis ponitur res et ponitur ens.*⁴⁶

Second, *sabab* would clearly have been out of place in almost every instance where *ṣay'* was mistranslated into Latin as *causa* rather than *res*, so we can be quite certain that in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5, at least, the original Arabic text did not read *sabab*.⁴⁷

his “Essence and existence in Avicenna,” 5 (fn. 2), as does M. Khodeiri, “Lexique arabo-latin de la Métaphysique du Shifā’,” *MIDEO*, 6 (1959-61): 309-24 at 316. Van Riet reckons *similitudinem* derives from *šabiha*, although in my opinion *tašbīh* is just as easy to impute from the skeleton. Elsewhere in the Latin translation of the *Ilāhiyyāt*, *bi-sababihi* was mistranslated as *comparationis* – van Riet sees this as a result of misunderstanding it as *nisbatahu*: 188,80 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 166,4) – and *sababun* as *comparationes*: 493,96 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 413,12). This confusion also occurs in a passage of the *Fī al-naḥs*, where *sabab* was translated into Latin as *comparatio* (ed. S. van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus IV-V* [Leiden, 1968], 20,79 = *Avicenna's De Anima - Arabic Text*, 174,14).

⁴⁵ *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina I-IV*, 125*-138*.

⁴⁶ *Liber de philosophia prima V-X*, 336,84-85 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 292,1).

⁴⁷ In addition to the two instances alluded to by d'Alverny, *ṣay'* is mistranslated as *causa* elsewhere in the Latin version of the *Ilāhiyyāt*: *ṣay'ayni* becomes *duarum causarum* at 99,62 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 86,3), and *sā'ir al-ašyā'* becomes *ceterae causae* at 394,84 (= *Ilāhiyyāt*, 341,3). In the Latin translation of *al-Af'āl wa al-infi'ālāt*, the fourth book of the *Ṭabī'iyyāt*, *ṣay'* was also occasionally mistranslated as *causa*: ed. S. van Riet, *Avicenna Latinus: Liber quartus naturalium de actionibus et passionibus*

All in all, the evidence provided by the Latin translation of the *Ilāhiyyāt* (and the parallels in the translation of the *Fī al-nafs*) allows us merely to hypothesize that *taṣḥīf* occurred in one or more of the manuscript lines that reached Andalusia. It is not conclusive with regard to the question of whether the original text should read *sababiyya* rather than *ṣay'iyya*.

The Latin mistranslation of *ṣay'iyya* in the *Ilāhiyyāt* – if it was in fact a mistranslation, as I believe – does seem to explain the absence of analogous concepts in discussions of final and efficient causes by later Latin philosophers, and the presence in those same discussions of *causalitas*.⁴⁸ Medieval European

qualitatum primarum (Leiden, 1989), 23,72 (= *Kitāb al-ṣifā': al-Ṭabī'iyāt (4) al-Afāl wa al-infi'ālāt*, ed. M. Qāsim [Cairo, 1965], 213,15); 28,54 (= *al-Afāl wa al-infi'ālāt*, 217,3); and 79,73 (= *al-Afāl wa al-infi'ālāt*, 256,6). Conversely, *asbāb* was mistranslated in the *Fī al-nafs* as *rebus* at 21,82 (= *Avicenna's De Anima - Arabic Text*, 174,15), and *sabab* as *res* at 21,83 (= *Avicenna's De Anima - Arabic Text*, 174,16).

⁴⁸ The Latin Avicenna's "theory" that the final cause is prior to the efficient in terms of causality is cited explicitly by Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), *Quodlibet XIII*, ed. J. Decorte (Leuven, 1985), 106,71-78; and by Duns Scotus (d. 1308), *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis I-IX*, Bk. 5, Quest. 1, Para. 51. Avicenna's "theory" (or the gloss on it contained in the Latin translation of Ġazālī's *Maqāsid* – see note 51) also seems to inform the opinions of Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), *In duodecim Aristotelis Metaphysicae libros* (Venice, 1572): in *Metaph.* 1, 12rC (Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* 6 is mentioned at 12vE and 104rD), in *Metaph.* 3, 54rD-55rD, and in *Metaph.* 5, 105rA-D; of Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* 1.8 (= E.M. Macierowski (ed. and trans.), *Thomas Aquinas's Earliest Treatment of the Divine Essence* [Binghamton, N.Y., 1998], 52,5-6); in *Metaph.* 5 #775 and #782; in *Phys.* 2.3, #186; *Summa contra gentiles* 3.17.9; of Siger of Brabant (d. 1283), *Quaestiones in metaphysicam* 5.9 (Cambridge MS), ed. A. Maurer 3-28 (Louvain, 1983), 203-4; of John Buridan (d. 1358), in *Metaph.* 5, quaest. 1, fols 26a-27a; of Albert of Saxony (d. 1390), *Expositio et quaestiones in Aristotelis Physicam ad Albertum de Saxoniam attributae I*, ed. B. Patar (Louvain, 1999), 111,6-9; and of Francisco Suarez (d. 1617), *Disputationes metaphysicae* Disp. XXVII, Sect. 2, paras 7-14, (= *Disputationes metafisicas IV*, eds and trans. S. Rabade Romeo, S. Caballero Sanchez and A. Puigcerver Zanon [Madrid, 1962], 172-77). A. Maier ("Finalkausalität und Naturgesetz," in her *Metaphysische Hintergründe der spätscholastischen Naturphilosophie* [Rome, 1955], 273-335 at 212-13 and 302-3) discusses Avicenna's "theory" and relates it to Buridan's; see also J. Biard, "Le système des causes dans la philosophie naturelle de Jean Buridan," in A. Hasnawi *et al.* (eds), *Perspectives arabes et médiévales sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique grecque* (Paris, 1997), 491-504 at 494-5. This is not to say that Avicenna's concept of thingness was lost forever to European thinkers. In 1907 Horten translated the instances of *ṣay'iyya* in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 correctly into German as *Dingheit* (M. Horten [trans.], *Die Metaphysik Avicennas* [Halle, 1907], 428-9), and the instances of *ṣay'iyya* in the *Nağāt* passage were translated by Carame into Latin as *entitas*: N. Carame (trans.), *Avicennae metaphysices compendium* [Rome, 1926], 34,21-35,19 (*ṣay'iyya* is rendered as *entitas* at 34,23 *bis* and 35,2.7).

thinkers would probably not have been struck to find Avicenna's concept of thingness missing from their translations of the *Ilāhiyyāt*, since *šay'īyya* does not appear in Ġazālī's summary of Islamic philosophy, the *Maqāšid al-falāsifa*, through which – as *Intentiones philosophorum* – many Latins were introduced to Avicenna's thought. The *Maqāšid* was popular due to Ġazālī's fluency of style and liberality with examples, qualities which Avicenna painfully lacked. It is an irony of the history of medieval philosophy that during the period before Averroes' *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* was translated into Latin – that is, before Ġazālī was exposed as a philosophy-hater – “Algazel” was seen by some Europeans as Avicenna's greatest disciple.⁴⁹

The non-appearance of *šay'īyya* in the *Maqāšid* is, on the surface, evidence inclining us towards thinking that the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Nağāt* passages should be emended to read *sababiyya*. But *šay'īyya*'s absence in the *Maqāšid* has a more straightforward explanation. Ġazālī based the *Maqāšid* primarily (though not entirely) on Avicenna's Persian *summa*, the *Dānišnāma-yi 'Alā'ī*, in which a Persianized equivalent of *šay'īyya* does not make an appearance. Avicenna's Persian statements in the *Dānišnāma* that:

The end is the cause of all the causes... So when there is an end, it is the cause of all the causes⁵⁰

were rendered into Arabic by Ġazālī in the *Maqāšid* as:

Part of what is special about the final cause is the fact that the other causes become causes through it... So when the final exists among all the causes, it is the cause of the causes.⁵¹

⁴⁹ e.g. Giles of Rome, introducing the section on al-Ġazālī from his *Errors of the Philosophers: Algazel autem, ut plurimum Avicennam sequens et eius abbreviator existens...*: *Giles of Rome Errores Philosophorum*, ed. J. Koch (Milwaukee, 1944), 38,4-5.

⁵⁰ *Ilāhiyyāt-i Dānišnāma-yi 'Alā'ī*, ed. M. Mu'īn (Tehran, 1952), 54,9-10 and 55,2.

⁵¹ *Maqāšid al-falāsifa*, ed. S. Dunyā (Cairo, 1961), 190,10.13. Interestingly, the *Intentiones philosophorum* – the Latin translation of the *Maqāšid al-falāsifa* – contains several extra lines which are in neither the *Dānišnāma* nor the Arabic edition of the *Maqāšid*; these include the assertion “Indeed, the final cause is last in terms of existence, yet first and foremost in terms of intention” (*Causa vero finalis est ultima in esse, et est prima et precedens in intencione* = *Algazel's Metaphysics*, ed. J. Muckle [Toronto, 1933], 38,5-6). My guess is that the extra line is a gloss by Avendauth or Gundissalinus, given their intimate involvement in translating both Ġazālī's *Maqāšid* and Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* into Latin. S. Stern describes how this precept was applied to the arrangement of topics in philosophy books, in his “The first in thought is the last in action”: The history of a saying attributed to Aristotle,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 7/2 (1962): 234-52.

Since Ġazālī did not allow the straw-man philosopher of the *Maqāṣid* to apply the concept of *šay'iyya* to the question of how efficient and final causes relate to each other, he probably felt no need to criticize thingness in the polemical *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. And perhaps as a consequence of *šay'iyya*'s absence in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, Averroes may have felt no need to raise the topic in the *Tahāfut at-tahāfut*. Nor is Avicenna's distinction between thingness and existence cited by Averroes in the latter's long commentaries on any of the most canonical Aristotelian discussions of the four causes, *Physics* 2.3 and 2.7 and *Metaphysics* 5.1 and 5.2.⁵² Therefore, *šay'iyya*'s absence from Ġazālī's (and hence Averroes') discussions of efficient and final causes does not by itself constitute evidence in favor of either reading.

Some evidence that appears to favor *sababiyya* may be found in the writings of two other thinkers trained in the Aš'arite theological tradition. The Aš'arite *mutakallimūn* al-Šahrastānī and Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wrote extensively about Avicenna's metaphysics, among other topics. If *šay'iyya* were to appear in one of their summaries or critiques of Avicenna's discussions of causality, it might help confirm its inclusion in the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Nağāt* passages. The opposite seems at first glance to be the case. One major piece of evidence tempting us to reject *šay'iyya* in favor of *sababiyya* in the *Nağāt* is the fact that in Šahrastānī's doxography, the *Kitāb al-milal wa al-niḥal*, Šahrastānī paraphrases the *Nağāt* passage on final and efficient causes but appears to read *sababiyya* instead of *šay'iyya*. According to the editor's critical apparatus, however, most of the *Milal* manuscripts read *šay'iyya*. The *Milal*'s importance as a piece of evidence one way or the other is therefore limited.⁵³

More alarming is the evidence pointed to by Rāzī. Rāzī himself wrote a very important commentary on as well as a shorter summary of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-išārāt wa al-tanbihāt*, a late work of Avicenna that greatly influenced subsequent Islamic philosophy.⁵⁴ In the *Išārāt* discussions of final and efficient causes *šay'iyya* does not make an appearance. Instead, Avicenna uses *māhiyya* – not *šay'iyya* – in the passage from the *Išārāt*'s

⁵² Averroes in *Phys.* 2.3 and 2.7 (= *Aristotelis opera cum Averois commentariis IV* [Venice, 1562-1574], 59D-63K) and Averroes in *Metaph.* 5.1 and 5.2 (= *Tafsīr Mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a II*, ed. M. Bouyges [Beirut, 1942], 475,1-481,8; 483,7-487,8; 490,1-497,6).

⁵³ *Kitāb al-milal wa al-niḥal II*, ed. M. Badrān (Cairo, no date), 1092,6-1093,4.

⁵⁴ In Part 3 I briefly discuss Michot's objections to giving the *Išārāt* a late date.

metaphysics section (*Namaṭ* 4: *Fī al-wuḡūd wa-‘ilalihi*) which parallels the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Naḡāt* passages, as well as the term *‘illiyya* (causality):

Something may be caused with reference to its essence and its inner reality, and it may be caused in terms of its existence... The final... is the efficient cause of the causality [*‘illiyya*] of the efficient cause.⁵⁵

In another passage from *Iṣārāt* 4, Avicenna says:

The final cause – that on account of which the thing is – is a cause, through its essence [*bi-māhiyyatihi*] and its [being an] object (*wa-ma‘nāhu*), of the causality [*‘illiyya*] of the efficient cause, while it is an effect of it in its existence. The efficient cause is a cause of its [the end’s] existence if it is one of the ends that actually come into being, but it [the efficient cause] is not a cause of its [the end’s] causality nor of its [being an] object.⁵⁶

In his summary of the *Iṣārāt*, entitled *Lubāb al-iṣārāt*, Rāzī has this to say about the *Iṣārāt* passages:

How clever the Shaykh was to say that the final cause is an efficient cause of the causality [*‘illiyya*] of the efficient cause.⁵⁷

Now to my mind Avicenna’s use of *‘illiyya* in the *Iṣārāt* passages devoted to efficient and final causality is simply evidence of what appears to be an almost universal preference for *‘illiyya* over *sababiyya* in his works.⁵⁸ But a counterargument might run like this. Given *ṣay’iyya*’s absence in the *Iṣārāt* passages, and given instances elsewhere in Avicenna’s works where he uses *‘illiyya* to describe priority in causality, we would be perfectly justified in emending the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Naḡāt* passages to read *sababiyya* instead of *ṣay’iyya*.⁵⁹ In other words, Avicenna sometimes uses

⁵⁵ *Kitāb al-iṣārāt wa al-tanbihāt*, ed. J. Forget (= *Ibn Sīnā: Le Livre des théorèmes et des avertissements*), (Leiden, 1892), 139,14-20.

⁵⁶ *Kitāb al-iṣārāt wa al-tanbihāt*, 140,6-9.

⁵⁷ *Kitāb lubāb al-iṣārāt*, ed. ‘A.S. ‘Aṭiyah (Cairo, 1936), 80,4-5. Rāzī echoes this in his fully fledged commentary, *Ṣarḥ al-iṣārāt* (= *Sarḥay al-iṣārāt*, no ed. [Qum, 1983 or 1984], 193,36-194,20) and in his *Mabāḥiṭ maṣriqiyya (al-Mabāḥiṭ al-maṣriqiyya I*, ed. M. al-Baḡdādī [Beirut, 1990], 661,21-662,8).

⁵⁸ e.g. *Ilāhiyyāt* 16,3; 166,12; 169,10 *bis*; and 266,11. The only instance of *sababiyya* I have come across in Avicenna’s works is in his *‘Uyūn al-ḥikma* (= *Avicennae Fontes sapientiae*, ed. ‘A. Badawi [Cairo, 1954], 52,8). According to the editor’s apparatus, however, the manuscripts contain many variant readings of *sababiyya*, and in any case, the term is not applied there specifically to the final cause but to the substrate (*mawḍū‘*), end and agent collectively.

⁵⁹ See *aqdam bi al-‘illiyya* in *Ḥikma ‘Arūḍiyya*, 5v4 and 83v15, and in *Kitāb al-ṣifā’/Manṭiq* (5): *al-Burhān*, ed. A. ‘Afīfī (Cairo, 1956), 297,10-11; *taqaddum fī al-‘illiyya* in *Avicenna’s De Anima - Arabic Text*, 230,3, and in *Kitāb al-hidāya*, ed. M. ‘Abduh (Cairo, 1974), 241,1; and *qabla fī al-‘illiyya* in *Ḥikma ‘Arūḍiyya*, 5r13.

'*illiyya* to describe priority in causality, and other times (e.g. in the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Nağāt* passages) uses *sababiyya* to describe priority in causality; *šay'iyya* need not come into the picture at all.

As attractive as this counterargument might appear, I believe it suffers from flaws graver than those of my own argument. First of all, when Avicenna talks about priority in '*illiyya* it is clear from the contexts in which the term appears that he is referring to the priority enjoyed by *any* cause – be it formal, material, final or efficient – to its effect. As far as I know, Avicenna nowhere says that the final cause in particular enjoys priority in '*illiyya* to the efficient cause. Second, Avicenna's assertion in the *Išārāt* that the final cause is a cause *through* its essence (*bi-māhiyyatihā*) of the causality of the efficient cause (*li-'illiyyat al-'illa al-fā'iliyya*) is perfectly reconcilable with his assertions in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 that the final cause is both a cause *through* its own thingness and of the efficient cause's thingness. As for the first prepositional phrase, the *Išārāt* passages are meant to show that the final cause's priority derives from its essence; and essence, as I have shown in Part 1, is conceptually very similar, though apparently not identical, to thingness. Because *māhiyya* is much closer in meaning to *šay'iyya* than it is to *sababiyya*, the *Išārāt* passages can just as easily be understood as providing evidence in favor of, rather than against, retaining *šay'iyya* in the *Nağāt* and *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 passages. As for the second prepositional phrase, the apparent discrepancy between the final cause's being the cause of the efficient cause's *šay'iyya* or of its '*illiyya*, is solved by recognizing the simple fact that a cause's *šay'iyya* is precisely its '*illiyya*.

My confidence in *šay'iyya* is strengthened by turning from the evidence in later Aš'arism to that in later Shi'ite Avicennism. For example, in Ṭūsī's commentary on the *Išārāt* passages on final and efficient causes, he follows Avicenna's lead and uses *māhiyya* as well as '*illiyya*:

The essence of the end and its [being an] object – *I mean its being some thing or other (kawnahā šay'an mā)* – is different from its existence... [The final cause's] causality ('*illiyatuhā*) consists of the fact that it makes the agent an actual agent and is thus a cause of the agency of the agent. The agent is a cause of the fact that that essence [of the final cause] becomes an existent. Thus the essence of the end is a cause of the cause of its existence not in an absolute sense, but in a certain respect, so no circularity need be implied by this.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Ṭūsī, *Šarḥ al-išārāt*, 193,31-194,6. Compare similar uses of *māhiyya* by Avicenna's pupil Bahmanyār ibn al-Marzubān (*al-Taḥṣīl*, ed. M. Muṭahharī [Tehran,

It seems clear from his gloss on *māhiyya* and *ma'nā* – that they refer to the end's being some thing or other – that Ṭūsī had read the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Nağāt* passages carefully and was borrowing from them to flesh out the much terser *Iṣārāt* passage. For it is the distinction between *essence* and existence, not one between *causality* and existence, that Ṭūsī (rightly) sees as underlying Avicenna's distinction between the final cause's causality from the efficient cause's causality.

Like Ṭūsī, Mullā Ṣadrā – in his commentary on the *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 passage – seems aware of the *Iṣārāt* passage when he pairs *ṣay'iyya* with *māhiyya*, and uses 'illiyya:

Therefore the final cause, *through its essence and its thingness*, is a cause of the causality of the rest of the causes [*li-'illiyya sâ'ir al-'ilal*].⁶¹

Even in his own philosophical treatises Mullā Ṣadrā occasionally retains *ṣay'iyya*. In the *Kitāb al-asfār*, for example, he says:

Although with respect to thingness (*ṣay'iyya*) the end is prior to the act, it follows nonetheless that with respect to existence it is posterior to the act and subsequent to it (*mutarattiba 'alayhā*).⁶²

To summarize Part 2, then, pieces of evidence from the later Latin and Aš'arite traditions tempt us to reject *ṣay'iyya* and replace it with *sababiyya*. Nevertheless, I feel the burden of proof still lies with anyone who would advocate such an emendation, in view of the following factors: the apparent unanimity of the extant *Nağāt* and *Ilāhiyyāt* manuscripts in reading *ṣay'iyya*; the inconsistent and scattered mistranslations of *sabab*, *ṣay'* and *taṣbīh* in the Latin translations of the *Ilāhiyyāt* and the *Fī al-nafs*, which indicate *taṣhīf* in the Latin translators' Arabic manuscripts but not necessarily in the originals those manuscripts were derived from; Avicenna's use of *māhiyya* – a term that is far closer in meaning to *ṣay'iyya* than *sababiyya* – in the parallel *Iṣārāt* passages; Avicenna's apparent preference for 'illiyya over *sababiyya* when discussing causality;

1997], 546,1-9), as well as Sabzawārī (d. 1878) (*Šarḥ ġurar al-farā'id* (also known as *Šarḥ-i manzūmah*), ed. M. Muḥaqqiq and T. Izutsu [Tehran, 1969], 161,11-12).

⁶¹ *Al-Ta'liqāt 'alā ilāhiyyāt al-šifā'*, in Avicenna, *al-Šifā' II* (Tehran, 1886), 258,3. In his *Kitāb al-mašā'ir* (= *Le Livre des Pénétrations métaphysiques*, ed. H. Corbin [Paris/Tehran, 1964], 7,13 and 20,19.20) Mullā Ṣadrā – in existentialist rather than commentator mode – chucks *ṣay'iyya* into the dustbin of terms denoting essence.

⁶² *Al-Asfār al-arba'a II*, ed. H.H. al-Āmulī (Tehran, 1995), 347,4-5.

šay'yya's appearance in Avicenna's *Ta'liqāt* and *Mubāḥaṭāt*, as we shall see in Part 3; Mullā Ṣadrā's equation of *šay'yya* and *māhiyya*; and finally the principle of *lectio difficilior*, which clearly favors thingness over causality.

PART 3: FROM PRIORITY IN ŠAY'YYA TO PRIORITY IN MĀHIYYA

Now that I have argued in favor of retaining thingness in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Nağāt/Hikma Ilāhiyya* 1.11, albeit with a few qualms, I must try to explain what exactly the term means in the context of Avicenna's discussion of the relation between efficient and final causes. Once this is done it will be easier to determine how these discussions contribute to our understanding of Avicenna's concepts of thingness and essence, and of his progression from the *kalām* problematic of *šay'* v. *mawğūd* to his own problematic of *māhiyya* v. *wuğūd*.

I think that when Avicenna asserts in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 that the final cause is prior in its *šay'yya* to the efficient cause, he is using the term in one of the two early *kalām* senses of thing: the notion that a thing (for example, the Day of Resurrection, or my great-great-granddaughter) can subsist mentally in God's – or anyone's – mind, before it exists in the real world. Here is an example of how thingness thus conceived works in final causation. I am thirsty and a bottle of soda is in the refrigerator. I want to quench my thirst by drinking that bottle of soda. Quenching my thirst exists in my mind as a final cause. My motion to the refrigerator – the efficient cause of my quenching my thirst – then comes into concrete existence in the outside world. But the quenching existed first in my mind – as a *thing* – before it existed concretely in the outside world. In this sense the final cause is prior in its thingness (prior as a thing, that is) to the efficient cause. This is why Avicenna asserts in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 that “its [i.e. the final cause's] thingness does not become a cause *unless it occurs as an image formed in the soul*” (292,9) and “In terms of thingness and *in terms of existence in the intellect*, there is no cause prior to the final cause” (293,8-9). Avicenna's assertions are echoed in the *Ta'liqāt*:

The end is prior in its thingness to all the causes and posterior in the existence it derives from them. The end which is absolutely non-existent (*al-*

ḡāya al-ma'dūma 'alā al-iṭlāq) is not a cause. Instead, *it must exist in the mind of the agent in order to perform its action.*⁶³

When *ṣay'iyya* is used in this way, as the basis for the priority enjoyed by things which are in the mind but which have not yet come into being in the outside world, it helps Avicenna flesh out an Aristotelian assertion: that the efficient and final causes can be seen to be causes of each other. In *Physics* 2.3 Aristotle briefly discusses the reciprocity between efficient and final causes:

Sometimes things are causes one of the other (*esti de tina kai allēlōn aitia = wa-qad takūnu aṣyā'u ba'ḡuhā sababun li-ba'ḡihā*). For example, hard work is the cause of the body's well-being and the body's well-being is the cause of hard work, though not in an identical way (*all' ou ton auton tropon = ḡayra anna ḡālīka laysa min waḡhin wāḡidin*); the body's well-being is a cause in that it is an intended end, while hard work is a cause in that it is the origin of motion.⁶⁴

The challenge facing Avicenna here was to uphold Aristotle's relatively straightforward idea – that the efficient can be seen as the cause of the final and the final can be seen as the cause of the efficient – without falling into the trap of circularity. For if the final cause is *simply* the cause of the efficient cause, and the efficient is *simply* the cause of the final, each will be the cause of the cause of itself, and circularity will result. Avicenna had to find some way defend Aristotle's assertion by providing a metaphysical basis for the distinction between the ways in which the final cause and the efficient cause operate.

This is where the *kalām* distinction between *ṣay'* and *mawḡūd* came in handy. Understood as a thing, the final cause can have a *ṣay'iyya* in the mind before it comes into existence concretely in the outside world. In terms of its being a *ṣay'* in the mind – in terms of its *ṣay'iyya*, that is – the final cause can be seen to be the cause of the efficient cause. On the other hand, the efficient cause comes into concrete existence in the outside world before the final cause comes into concrete existence in the outside world. My motion to the refrigerator exists concretely before my quenching exists concretely. By distinguishing between the final

⁶³ Ed. 'A. Badawī, *al-Ta'liqāt* (Cairo, 1973), 128,17-19; also see 158,14.

⁶⁴ *Phys.* 2.3, 195a9-12 (= *Aristūṭālīs: al-Ṭabī'a* 1, ed. 'A. Badawī [Cairo, 1964], 103,8-13). This is echoed in *Metaph.* 5.2, 1013b9-12 (= *Mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a II*, 486,9-10). In *Metaph.* 1.3, 983a32, Aristotle asserts that the final cause is the "opposite" (*antikeimenē*) of the efficient.

cause's priority as thing and the efficient cause's priority as concrete existent, Avicenna has managed to wriggle out of the hole of circularity.

But while Avicenna's analysis in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 helps him flesh out Aristotle's assertion about the reciprocity between efficient and final causes, it raises two serious problems. The first is this: Let us assume, as Avicenna says, that all final causes are prior in their thingness to the efficient causes with which they are paired. It follows that nothing without priority in thingness will be a final cause; in other words, being prior in thingness will be a necessary condition of being a final cause. But this description of how the final cause works will exclude all natural phenomena from the domain of entities that occur for a final cause. This is because natural things – a tree, or a rock – possess no mind or consciousness in which the *šay'iyya* of an intended end can subsist before it exists in the outside world as a concrete existent. Thus natural processes – a tree's growth, or a rock's fall to the ground – will not operate according to final causation, and final causation will be restricted to intentional acts.⁶⁵

Avicenna appears to be aware of the problematic implications of using *šay'iyya* as the basis on which the priority of the final cause rests when he appeals – again in his *Ta'liqāt* – to another Aristotelian assertion: that form and end are often identical, particularly in natural phenomena.⁶⁶ In other words, simply completing the natural process by which a form inheres in a properly disposed matter can itself be regarded as a final cause, with the result that there is no need to appeal to intentionality or consciousness:

The form is sometimes the same as the end, as in the case of health: it is a form and it is the same as the end. *The ends of natural entities are the same as the existence of the form in the matter, because an individual nature will move only in order for a form to inhere in a matter.*⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For an example of this line of argument see Rāzī, *Šarḥ al-išārāt*, 194,1-6.

⁶⁶ *Phys.* 2.7, 198a25 (= *Ṭabī'a* 137,20-138,1) and 198b3 (= *Ṭabī'a* 140,12-13); *Metaph.* 5.24, 1023a34 (= *Tafsīr mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a II* 655,9-10) and 8.4, 1044a36-b1 (= *Tafsīr mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a II* 1074,1-2); and *GC* 1.7, 324b13-18. Following Aristotle and his commentators, Avicenna uses the notion of perfection (*entelekheia* = *kamāl* and *tamām*) to link the intrinsic causality of the form and the extrinsic causality of the end; on this see my "Avicenna on perfection and the perfect," in R. Wisnovsky (ed.), *Aspects of Avicenna*, Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, forthcoming.

⁶⁷ *Al-Ta'liqāt*, 128,17-25.

But why has Avicenna not felt free to restrict the final cause to intentional action and be done with it? Apart from violating a fundamental Aristotelian belief in natural teleology, restricting the final cause's causality to intentional action would also undermine almost universal Peripatetic assertions of the priority of the science of final causality. Aristotle is clear in holding that knowledge of the final cause is superior to that of the other causes.⁶⁸ Following him, Avicenna not only says that knowledge of the final cause is the most excellent part of metaphysics (*al-ḥikma*), but implies that teleology can be seen as its sum and substance.⁶⁹

What is more, if final causation were restricted to intentional acts, Avicenna would face a second problem: that of unrealized ends. In intentional acts a final cause need not come into concrete existence for its effect to come into concrete existence. Let us say, for example, that unbeknown to me my son has drunk the bottle of soda in the refrigerator. My motion to the refrigerator will come into concrete existence even if the bottle of soda is not there, that is, despite the fact that my quenching will fail to come into concrete existence. In *Mubāḥaṭa* 5 Avicenna seems to be grappling with this problem:

If it [the existence of the effect] were to issue as a result of the thingness of something else whose existence is conceived, it [what was conceived] would be a cause whether or not it existed [in the outside world]; yet a thing's existence will not be causally dependent upon that whose non-existence and whose existence is all the same to it. As long as the cause of existence does not exist, its effect will not exist. Were something to exist regardless of whether some other thing existed or not, [the latter] would have no effect in its existence other than straightforward simultaneity [*al-ma'iyya al-sādiḡa*]; but causality is more than simultaneity, even though it goes hand in hand with simultaneity.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Metaph.* 1.2, 982b5-11. At least this is how Alexander of Aphrodisias understood the above passage: in *Metaph.* 1.2 (*CAG I*), 14,3-4; cp. in *Metaph.* 1.3 (*CAG I*) (ad 983a31-33), 22,7-13; in *Metaph.* 3.2 (*CAG I*), 184,21-4; in *Metaph.* 5.2 (*CAG I*), 346,14ff. and 350,28-32.

⁶⁹ *Ilāhiyyāt*, 300,7-9. Despite Avicenna's bald assertion of the primacy of teleology, most scholarly interest in Avicenna's theory of causality has focused almost entirely on the efficient cause; see E. Gilson's two articles, "Avicenne et la notion de cause efficiente," *Atti del XII Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia* (Florence, 1960), 121-30, and "Notes pour l'histoire de la cause efficiente," *AHDLMA*, 29 (1962): 7-31; and M. Marmura's two articles, "The metaphysics of efficient causality in Avicenna," in M. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Albany, 1984), 172-87, and "Avicenna on causal priority," in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (Delmar, N.Y., 1981), 65-83 (esp. 65-72).

⁷⁰ *Al-Mubāḥaṭāt*, ed. M. Bidārfar (Qom, 1992), 116,15-117,2 (= *Mubāḥaṭa* 5, #277); compare 93,5-8 (= *Mubāḥaṭa* 4, #177). Concern about how the final cause's possible

In other words, if it makes no difference whether or not the final cause exists concretely for its effect to exist concretely, the final cause will not fulfill the basic criterion of causality: being that whose existence necessitates the effect's existence. At best the final cause will be a cause only metaphorically.

Now Avicenna is clear that mental existence fully warrants being called existence. So he could defend himself by saying that even in the case of unrealized ends the final cause *did* exist and its existence *did* necessitate the effect's existence; the final cause simply existed in the mind, not in concrete reality. Nevertheless, the fact remains that in Mu'tazilite ontology the *šay'* which is in the mind alone qualifies as a *ma'dūm*, and not as a *mawğūd*. Avicenna's use of *šay'iyya* in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 to describe how the final cause operates could therefore be *interpreted* as implying that an unrealized end – that is, a final cause which only ever “exists” in the mind – was a *šay' ma'dūm*. And given that only a *mawğūd*, not a *šay' ma'dūm*, can be properly spoken of as a cause, the final cause would be seen as not satisfying the basic criterion of causality.

Avicenna seems aware of this problem in the *Nağāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.11 passage on final and efficient causes. There he asserts that “an object [*al-ma'nā*] has an existence in concrete reality and an existence in the soul *as well as something common [to both]: what is common [to both] is thingness.*” Avicenna is implying that for thingness to serve as the basis on which the final cause's priority rests, we will need to add the condition that the end must be realized concretely. Only then will thingness link the object's existence in the mind with its concrete existence in the outside world. Things which have a mental existence but no corresponding concrete existence – unrealized ends, that is – will not be much use in pointing to the final cause's priority.

It is my view that Avicenna moved from *šay'iyya* in *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5 and *Nağāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.11 to *māhiyya* in the *Išārāt* precisely to skirt these various problems. Avicenna starts using *šay'iyya* in order to pre-empt one Aristotelian problem – the possibility of circularity in the relation between efficient and final causes – and then later discards *šay'iyya* in favor of *māhiyya* because using *šay'iyya* created the two further problems just discussed, each of which undermined the primacy of the final cause.

non-existence affects its causality is also evident in Awhād al-Zamān Abū al-Barakāt al-Bağdādī, *Kitāb al-mu'tabar fī al-ḥikma III* (Haydarabad, 1938-39), 52,12-53,5.

Avicenna's chronological progression from *šay'iyya* to *māhiyya* can be detected in his discussions of efficient and final causality, for his assertions about the basis on which the final cause's priority rests change from *šay'iyya* and *ḥaqīqa* in the *Ilāhiyyāt* and the *Nağāt* (middle period), to *ḥaqīqa* and *māhiyya* in the *Išārāt* (late period).⁷¹ This becomes even clearer when we look carefully at the progression of Avicenna's thought within the middle period. According to Gutas' careful reconstruction, Avicenna started writing the *Kitāb al-šifā'* with *Ṭabī'iyyāt* 1 (i.e., *al-Samā' al-ṭabī'i*) but stopped after finishing only twenty folios; then wrote *Manṭiq* 1 (i.e., *al-Madḥal*); then completed *Ṭabī'iyyāt* 1; and then wrote the entire *Ilāhiyyāt*.⁷² After completing the rest of the *Kitāb al-šifā'* Avicenna wrote the *Nağāt*.

The fact that Avicenna had already written the *Madḥal* but had not yet started the *Ilāhiyyāt* is clear from his discussion of the relationship between efficient and final causality in *Ṭabī'iyyāt* 1:

The agent is, in a way, a cause of the end; how could it not be so, when the agent is what makes the end occur as an existent? The end is, in a way, the cause of the agent; how could it not be so, when the agent acts only on account of it [the end]; otherwise, why would it be acting? For the end sets the agent in motion towards being an agent... The agent is not a cause of the end's becoming an end, nor of the end's essence (*māhiyya*) in itself; rather it is a cause of the existence of the end's essence in concrete reality. *The difference between essence and existence is as you already know.* The end is a cause of the agent's being an agent, for it [the end, reading *fa-hiya*] is the cause of [the agent's] being a cause, whereas the agent is not a cause of the end in terms of [the end's] being a cause. *This will be made clear in First Philosophy.*⁷³

Having taken into account all the new evidence from Parts 2 and 3, I can make the following additions (in bold) to my earlier

⁷¹ Michot (J. Michot, "La réponse d'Avicenne à Bahmanyār et al-Kirmānī," *Le Muséon*, 110/1-2 [1997], 143-221) has recently argued for an earlier dating of the *Išārāt*, based on evidence contained in *Mubāḥaṭa* 3. Given our current uncertainty about the *Mubāḥaṭāt* – in particular, if they constitute a single work from a single period or are, as it seems to me, a grab-bag of many separate discussions recorded over Avicenna's lifetime – I feel Michot's conclusion remains highly tentative, and the traditional late dating of the *Išārāt* should be retained. Avicenna does use the term *šay'iyya* once in the *Manṭiq* of the *Išārāt* (*Kitāb al-išārāt wa al-tanbihāt*, 15,6-8; *šay'iyya* appears on line 8) but in the context of describing the function of the specific difference (*al-faṣl*), not in the context of final and efficient causality.

⁷² Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 101-12. Compare al-Ğüzğānī's prologue to the *Šifā'* in *Manṭiq* (1), 2,13-3,17 and his description of the composition of the *Šifā'* contained in his biography of Avicenna (Gohlman, *Life*, 54,1-60,7).

⁷³ *Al-Samā' al-ṭabī'i min kitāb al-šifā'*, ed. J. Āl Yāsīn (Beirut, 1996), 114,3-11.

chart of the progression in Avicenna's thought about thingness and essence:

1) *Madḥal* 1.2: The essences of things (*māhiyyāt al-ašyā'*) are sometimes found in concrete objects in the outside world, and other times are conceived of in the mind. But essence has *three* aspects: as a concrete, external existent; as a mental, internal existent; and a third aspect, in which it is unrelated to either concrete or mental existence.

2) *Madḥal* 1.12: Genera and species may be divided into those which are *before* a state of multiplicity (that is, those contained in the active intellect and the other celestial intellects), those which are in a state of multiplicity (that is, those contained individually in sublunary concrete existents), and those which are *after* a state of multiplicity (that is, those contained as abstracted universals in human intellects). Taken in itself a genus or a species is a thing. "Animal," taken in itself, is an object (*ma'nān*), regardless of whether it is a concrete or a mental existent, or whether it is general or specific (*wa-laysa fī nafsihi bi-‘āmmīn wa-lā ḥāṣṣīn*).

2.5) *Ṭabi‘iyyāt* 1.11: The efficient cause causes the final cause to exist in concrete reality, that is, to exist in an absolute or affirmative sense; the final cause causes the efficient cause to exist as an efficient cause, that is, to exist in a special sense.

3) *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.5: "Thing" and "existent" are primary, indefinable categories. Whatever is predicable of thing will also be predicable of existent, and whatever is predicable of existent will also be predicable of thing. Although they are co-implicated, thing and existent have different meanings.

4) *Ilāhiyyāt* 5.1: A universal (*kullī*) such as "horseness," taken in and of itself (*fī nafsihi*) – that is, without considering whether it is one or many (*lā wāḥid wa-lā kaṭīr*), a concrete existent in the outside world or a mental existent inside the soul (*lā mawḡūd fī al-a'yān wa-lā mawḡūd fī al-nafs*), in potentiality or in actuality (*lā bi-al-quwwa wa-lā bi-al-fī‘l*) – is a thing (*šay'*).

4.5) *Ilāhiyyāt* 6.5: The other causes are prior to the final cause in terms of existence; the final cause is prior to the other causes in terms of thingness. The other causes are the causes of the final cause's existence; the final cause is the cause of the other causes' thingness. Thing is logically prior to existent ("the difference between thing and existent is just like the difference between some entity and its concomitant" – 292,2-3); thingness is operative only when existent in the soul, i.e. in intentional action.

5) *Ilāhiyyāt* 7.1: "One" (*al-wāḥid*) and "existent" (*al-mawǧūd*) are equally predicable of things (*qad yatasāwiyāni fi al-ḥaml 'alā al-ašyā'*); all that may be characterized by "one" may also be characterized by "existent," but the two terms do not have the same meaning as each other.

6) *Nağāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.9: "One" is a necessary accident of things (*min al-a'rāḍ al-lāzima li-al-ašyā'*). Essence is a thing (*bal takūnu al-māhiyya šay'an*), be it a man or a horse, an intellect or a soul; that thing is only subsequently characterized as being one or existent.

7) *Nağāt/Ilāhiyyāt* 1.11: The other causes are prior to the final cause in terms of existence; the final cause is prior to the other causes in terms of thingness; thingness is what is common to both mental existence and concrete existence.

8) *Išārāt/Fī al-wuǧūd wa-'ilalihi*: The final cause is a cause, through its essence, of the causality (*'illiyya*) of the efficient cause; the efficient cause is a cause of the existence of the final cause.

Avicenna's use of *māhiyya* when discussing the final cause's priority in the *Išārāt* suffered from none of the obstacles strewn across the path of his earlier uses of *šay'iyya*. Unlike *šay'iyya*, *māhiyya* was clearly identified with form, so natural phenomena with forms but no intentionality could more easily be accommodated in a universal teleology. Unlike a *šay'iyya* in the mind, which smacked of the Mu'tazilites' non-existent thing, the mental existence of a *māhiyya* was explicitly allowed for, so unrealized ends with mental but no concrete existence could more easily satisfy the basic criterion of causality. And unlike *šay'iyya*, *māhiyya* was clearly held to be logically prior to existence, so the primacy of final causation could be more easily upheld. For all these reasons Avicenna opted for *māhiyya*, and in so doing went some way to resolving the tension between his inconsistent uses of the term *šay'*, and by extension, between his concepts of thingness and essence.

CONCLUSION

Any claims of definitiveness would be presumptuous in an article which focuses on two of the most complex and wide-ranging topics in Avicenna's philosophy, essence and causality. This is

why my article can only be called “Notes.” I have marshaled enough evidence merely to justify offering the following hypotheses: that the discussions of things and existents by the *mutakallimūn* and by Fārābī were the immediate backdrop to Avicenna’s distinction between essence and existence; that *šay’iyya* served to link these discussions and Avicenna’s distinction; that despite some indications otherwise Avicenna uses the term *šay’iyya* to explain how the final cause is prior to the efficient cause; and that Avicenna’s incompatible ideas about thingness and essence, in the course of their being applied to the problem of distinguishing final and efficient causality, approach resolution.

But offering hypotheses and proving them are different matters. In Part 1, I would need to examine all available works of the early *mutakallimūn* to determine whether a tradition of using *šay’iyya* existed before Māturīdī and Avicenna. It seems to have begun with Māturīdī, but I can claim only to have looked for *šay’iyya* in what I considered to be the obvious places; perhaps it can be found in less obvious places. In Part 2 I would need to examine all available manuscripts of the *Ilāhiyyāt* and the *Nağāt* to be absolutely sure that a mistranscription of *šay’iyya* for *sababiyya* did not occur early on in the manuscript traditions of those two works. I feel the balance of evidence which I presented in Part 2 compels us to retain *šay’iyya*, but the evidence is far from unequivocal, and my conclusion will necessarily be tentative. In Part 3, I would need to be more certain of the chronology of Avicenna’s writings – and particularly the dating of the *Išārāt* – than is possible now. This will require closer analysis of the entire *Mubāḥaṭāt* and *Ta’līqāt*. My hypothesis that Avicenna’s thought progresses from *šay’iyya* to *māhiyya* squares more easily with the traditional late dating of the *Išārāt* than it does with an earlier dating. That of course is not in itself evidence for the *Išārāt*’s late dating, for my hypothesis is too contingent on other suppositions to qualify as evidence itself.

But several lessons can still be learned from this story. The lesson from Part 1 is that analysis of the texts tells us that despite their frequent use of the oppositional labels “*mutakallim*” and “*faḥlasūf*,” and despite our own tendency to see *mutakallimūn* and *faḥlasūf* as naturally opposed categories, Arabic thinkers of the pre-Avicennian period had much in common conceptually as well as terminologically. The lesson from Part 2 is that just as

Arabists should make a distinction between Aristotle's works in the original Greek and their ninth- and tenth-century Arabic translations, so Latinists must be careful to qualify their claims about Arabic philosophy when they base those claims solely on its Latin versions. Many mistranslations are trivial, but some are crucial. The lesson from Part 3 is that an author as prolific as Avicenna will often defy our attempts to systematize his thought. The corpus of his work is organic and complex, not static and unitary. It contains serious contradictions, and while some may be shown to be irreconcilable, and some may be shown to be superficial, others can be explained as signs of his intellectual development.