ONE ASPECT OF THE AVICENNIAN TURN IN SUNNĪ THEOLOGY*

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Most scholars of Islamic intellectual history now agree on the distortedness of the traditional Western portrayal of al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) as the defender of Muslim orthodoxy whose *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*) was such a powerful critique that it caused the annihilation of philosophical activity in Islamic civilization. Some in fact are coming to the conclusion that al-Ġazālī's importance in the history of Islamic philosophy and theology derives as much from his assiduous incorporation of basic metaphysical ideas into central doctrines of Sunnī *kalām*, as from his far more celebrated bashing of the *falāsifa*. What is less well known is that al-Ġazālī's role in the ''philosophizing'' of Sunnī theology was not a lonely struggle by a single genius, but part of a broader trend that seems to have begun during Avicenna's lifetime and that picked up speed in the first and second generations after Avicenna's death in 1037, with the work of al-Ġazālī's teacher, the Ašʿarite al-Ġuwaynī (d. 1085), as well as of the Māturīdite al-Bazdawī (d. 1099), work that was carried forward by dozens of subsequent members of those two major Sunnī theological schools. It is clear, in fact, that the dividing line between the Sunnī theologians commonly referred to in the later Islamic tradition as *mutaqaddimūn* (''early'' or ''ancient''), and those referred to as *mutaʾaḫḫirūn* (''late'' or ''modern''), lies not with al-Ġazālī but with Avicenna himself, and that the turn in Sunnī *kalām* was therefore Avicennian, not Ġazālian.

We can gain a panoramic view of the Avicennian turn in Sunnī theology by training our eyes on al-Māturīdī's (d. 944) *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, a book whose sources, contents and influence we are much better able to assess since the publication of Ulrich Rudolph's recent monograph.[1] It turns out that while al-Māturīdī made a number of important conceptual contributions to *kalām* debates about specific problems – most notably his arguments for the eternality of God's attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-fiʻl*), to which I shall briefly return later in this article – just as significant was the way he structured his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. This is because al-Māturīdī's ordering of topics in the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* provided a template which most subsequent Sunnī *mutakallimūn* followed in their own independent treatises and textbooks. In the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī begins with a general discussion of epistemology (pages 3–11 in F. Kholeif's Beirut, 1970 edition); turns to establishing the world's createdness and God's existence (11–37); discusses divine oneness and problems associated with God's attributes (38–85) and criticizes corresponding Muslim and non-Muslim doctrines (86–176); analyzes prophecy (176–215); and finally articulates a moderate position on God's determination of human actions (215–323), on sin and punishment (323–72) and on faith (373–401).

Al-Māturīdī's template was particularly significant because the newly standardized order of topics – particularly the first three topics: (1) epistemology > (2) God's existence > (3) God's oneness and attributes – provided a framework in which Avicennian metaphysics, and particularly Avicenna's distinctions between essence (*māhiyya*) and existence (*wuǧūd*) and between the necessary of existence in itself (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd bi-ḏātihi*) and the necessary of existence through another/ possible of existence in itself (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd bi-ġayrihi/ mumkin al-wuǧūd bi-ḏātihi*), could be progressively integrated into subsequent *kalām* treatises. In the case of topic (1), epistemology, pre-Avicennian Sunnī-*kalām* distinctions between three means to knowledge – perception (*ḥiss*), report (*ḫabar*) and speculation (*naẓar*) – and between two types of knowledge – acquired (*muktasab*) and *a priori* (*ḍarūrī*) – were eclipsed by post-Avicennian Sunnī-*kalām* distinctions between

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[1] U. Rudolph, *al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden, 1996).

the two most basic objects of knowledge – essence (*māhiyya*) and existence (*wuǧūd*) – and between three modes of knowledge – necessary (*wāǧib*), possible (*ǧā'iz* or *mumkin*) and impossible (*mustaḥīl* or *mumtani'*). As for (2), the proofs of God's existence, the pre-Avicennian Sunnī-*kalām* distinction between God's being eternal (*qadīm*) and the world's being originated (*muḥdat*) ceded ground to the post-Avicennian Sunnī-*kalām* distinction between God's being necessary of existence in itself (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd bi-dātihi*) and the world's being possible of existence in itself (*mumkin* [or *ǧā'iz*] *al-wuǧūd bi-dātihi*). And in the case of (3), God's oneness and attributes, pre-Avicennian Sunnī-*kalām* debates over the precise nature of the divine attributes' eternality (*qidam*) were superseded by post-Avicennian Sunnī-*kalām* debates over the precise nature of the attributes' necessity (*wuǧūb*).

Some important though still preliminary work has already been undertaken on the history of the epistemological transition (most prominently by van Ess), and on the history of the use of necessity and possibility in post-Avicennian *kalām* proofs of God's existence (most prominently by Davidson), but to my knowledge no one has begun to investigate the arc described by the Avicennian turn in Sunnī-*kalām* discussions of God's attributes (*ṣifāt*).[2] My aim in this article is to locate Avicenna's theory of the necessary of existence in itself in the history of this last aspect of Sunnī theology.

In particular, I hope to show that in order to explain the nature of the eternality possessed by God and His attributes, Sunnī *mutakallimūn* moved away from earlier, pre-Avicennian attempts to argue that when we define an eternal thing as ''that whose existence has no beginning'' (*mā lā awwala li-wuǧūdihi*), what we really mean is that an eternal thing *is uncaused*; to later, post-Avicennian attempts to argue that when we define an eternal thing as ''that which has never ceased to be nor will ever cease to be'' (*mā lam yazal wa-lā yazālu*), what we really mean is that an eternal thing *cannot possibly not exist*, and that therefore an eternal thing *is necessary of existence*. What is more, the different ways in which Avicenna constructed his theory should not only be seen as

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[2] J. van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des 'Aḍudaddīn al-Īcī* (Wiesbaden, 1966), and H. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford, 1987).

influencing later *kalām* ideas, but also, in some important respects, as responding to earlier *kalām* discussions.[3]

I shall begin by focusing on the doctrinal commitments evident in pre-Avicennian *kalām* discussions of God's *ṣifāt*, and then analyze the philosophical dilemmas that arose as a result of those commitments. Then I shall turn briefly to the immediate sources of Avicenna's distinction between *wāǧib al-wuǧūd bi-ḏātihi* and *wāǧib al-wuǧūd bi-ġayrihi/mumkin al-wuǧūd bi-ḏātihi*, and discuss Avicenna's two earliest formulations of the distinction, the first (dating from 1001) an attempt – at least in part – to resolve those earlier *kalām* dilemmas, and the second (dating from 1013) nearly identical to a (probably) contemporaneous Ašʿarite discussion. Finally, I shall survey a number of passages taken from Sunnī *kalām* texts of the late-11th century, in order to highlight the rapid and widespread appropriation of Avicenna's theory.[4]

I. BEFORE

In the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. God's eternality (*qidam*) was held by Muslim theologians to be the most important of the divine attributes. This was because when a theologian said that God is eternal (*qadīm*) he used the term for two distinct purposes. The Muʿtazilite and then the Sunnī *mutakallimūn* based one of their proofs for the existence of God on the contradictory nature of the opposition between the eternal and the originated. Given the fact that nothing exists apart from what is eternal (*qadīm*) and what is originated (*muḥdaṯ*), and given the fact that everything originated (*muḥdaṯ*) requires an originator (*muḥdiṯ*), then – in order to avoid an infinite regress – the chain of originated things and originators must terminate

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[3] For a brief survey of the attempts by post-Avicennian *mutakallimūn*, both Sunnī and Šīʿite, to appropriate Avicenna's distinctions between essence and existence, and between the necessary of existence in itself and the necessary of existence through another/possible of existence itself, see my ''Avicenna and the Avicennian tradition'', in P. Adamson and R. Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2004).

[4] Detailed discussions of the Aristotelian (Chapter 11), Neoplatonic (Chapter 10) and Fārābian (Chapter 12) background to Avicenna's theory, as well as of the evolution of Avicenna's own formulations of the theory (Chapter 14), can be found in my *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (London/Ithaca, N.Y., 2003). The first two parts of this article largely reproduce material from Chapter 13 of that book, though with a number of revisions; the third and final part is entirely new.

in an originator that is not originated. Since there is nothing –
apart from the eternal – that is not originated, this ultimate
originator must be eternal. This eternal, ultimate originator is
God.

The Sunnī *mutakallimūn* also used God's eternality for an-
other purpose: to stress their basic difference with the Muʿta-
zilites concerning the issue of the reality and distinctiveness of
divine attributes such as God's knowledge (*ʿilm*), power
(*qudra*), life (*ḥayāt*) and so on. The Sunnīs, calling themselves
"Upholders of the attributes" (*Aṣḥāb al-ṣifāt*) and following
the early anti-Muʿtazilite *mutakallim* Ibn Kullāb (d. ca. 855),
held that God's attributes (*ṣifāt*) were entities whose existence
was real and distinct enough that they could not simply be
identified with or subsumed under God's self (*ḏāt* or *nafs*), as
early Muʿtazilites such as Abū al-Huḏayl (d. 841) and al-
Naẓẓām (d. ca. 840) had maintained. The Sunnīs reasoned that
since the attributes were both real and divine, they were
eternal just as God Himself is eternal.

In short, God's eternality performed a double service to
Sunnī theologians, helping them demonstrate a created world's
need for an eternal Creator, and helping them argue for the
eternal and distinct reality of God's attributes. And yet a
fundamental incompatibility existed between these two uses of
eternality, the first directed against atheist Materialists
(*dahriyya*), who believed in the eternity of the world, the
second directed against the Muʿtazilites, who denied that the
divine attributes enjoyed any meaningful distinctiveness or
eternality. Resolving, or at least skirting, this problem of
incompatibility was the engine that drove this aspect of the
Avicennian turn in Sunnī theology.

One of the consequences of the use to which both Muʿtazilite
and Sunnī *mutakallimūn* put God's eternality in their proofs of
His existence, was that the term *qidam* (eternality) underwent
a semantic shift, from referring to *beforeness* to referring to
uncausedness.[5] According to ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār (d. 1025), the
Muʿtazilite al-Ǧubbāʾī (d. 915), who taught al-Ašʿarī (d. 935)
before al-Ašʿarī's defection to Kullābism, defined *qadīm* as
"that which comes before in existence" (*mutaqādim fī*

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[5] On *qidam* in general see D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam* (Paris, 1988),
pp. 164–9.

al-wuǧūd).[6] In other books, according to ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār,
al-Ǧubbāʾī defined *qadīm* as ʿʿthat whose existence has no
beginning'' (*mā lā awwala li-wuǧūdihi*).[7] Despite al-Ašʿarī's
defection from the Muʿtazilites, both of al-Ǧubbāʾī's definitions
turn up in the works of later Ašʿarites. Ibn Fūrak (d. 1015), for
example, uses the ʿʿexistential beforeness'' definition, implying
that it is the one al-Ašʿarī himself used.[8] Another Ašʿarite,
al-Ḥalīmī (d. 1012), applied the ʿʿbeginningless'' definition to
qadīm; but al-Ḥalīmī uses the term *ibtidāʾ* (ʿʿorigin'') in place of
awwal (ʿʿbeginning''), reflecting, I believe, the beginnings of
the semantic shift I mentioned.[9] This is because ʿʿorigin'' is
ambiguous: like the Greek term *arkhê*, the Arabic *ibtidāʾ* can
mean both a starting-point in time (*awwal*), as well as a
principle (*mabdaʾ*).

The rationale for this shift from beginninglessness to un-
causedness is quite plain. If, as a *mutakallim*, my main interest
in eternality is using it in proofs of God's existence, I shall want
the contradictory nature of the opposition between eternal
(*qadīm*) and originated (*muḥdat*) to be basic to the meaning of
the two terms. In other words, I shall have an easier time
proving God's existence if I define *qadīm* in such a way that it
means not only ʿʿbeginningless'' but also ʿʿuncaused''. This is
because ʿʿuncaused'' will satisfy my intuitions about what an
opposite of the passive participle *muḥdat* (ʿʿoriginated'')
should look like, more completely than ʿʿbeginningless'' will.

According to ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, al-Ǧubbāʾī had treated *qadīm*
(eternal) and *muḥdat* (originated) as contradictories: holding
a single thing to be *qadīm* and *muḥdat* results in mutual
contradiction (*yatanāqaḍu*).[10] And for a Muʿtazilite, this seems
obvious enough, given that God is the only thing which is
eternal, everything other than God being originated. As with
all contradictories, there is no middle ground between *qadīm*
and *muḥdat*. As a Sunnī *mutakallim*, however, I shall have
made another commitment concerning eternality which dulls

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[6] ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, *al-Muġnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-al-ʿadl*, ed. M.M. Ḥilmī *et al.*,
16 vols. (Cairo, 1958f.), vol. V, pp. 233.17–18; 234.15 and 235.1; see also
al-taqaddum fī al-wuǧūd at p. 234.6–11.

[7] ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, *al-Muġnī*, V, pp. 233.1–2 and 234.7–9.

[8] Ibn Fūrak, *Muǧarrad maqālāt al-Ašʿarī*, ed. D. Gimaret (Beirut, 1987),
pp. 26.19–20; 27.19–20; and 42.19–20.

[9] Al-Ḥalīmī, *K. al-Minhāǧ fī šuʿab al-īmān* (*ap.* al-Bayhaqī, *K. al-Asmāʾ
wa-al-ṣifāt*, ed. M.Z. al-Kawtarī [Beirut, 1970], pp. 29.12–30.5).

[10] ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, *al-Muġnī*, V, p. 233.5.

this otherwise sharp opposition. For unlike my Muʿtazilite counterpart, I believe that God Himself is not the only subject of which "eternal" (*qadīm*) may be predicated: God's attributes (*ṣifāt*), after all, are held to be eternal as well. I shall briefly review the history of the problem of the divine attributes' eternality, and then explain why this produced a dilemma for Sunnī theologians.

In order to buttress their strict understanding of God's unity, the Muʿtazilites had divided God's attributes into "attributes of the self" (*ṣifāt al-ḏāt*) and "attributes of the act" (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*). Attributes of the self, such as God's "knowledge" (*ʿilm*), could be predicated of God without referring to His creation. Attributes of the act, such as God's "providing" (*rizq*), could be predicated of God only with reference to His creation. According to the Muʿtazilites, the attributes of the self, including God's knowledge, power and life, were in no sense to be understood as separate entities. Instead, God is "a knower in Himself" (*ʿālimun bi-nafsihi*).[11] Abū al-Huḏayl went so far as to claim that an attribute of the self was identical to God, asserting that God is "a knower through a knowledge which is identical to Him" (*ʿālimun bi-ʿilmin huwa huwa*).[12] Al-Naẓẓām phrased it differently, saying that God "never stops being" His attributes of the self. For example, God "never stops being a knower in Himself" (*lam yazal ʿāliman bi-nafsihi*).[13] Included in Abū al-Huḏayl's and al-Naẓẓām's lists of attributes of the self was God's being eternal (*qadīm*). According to Abū al-Huḏayl's formula, therefore, God is "eternal through an eternality which is identical to Him" (*qadīmun bi-qidamin huwa huwa*); according to al-Naẓẓām's formula, God "never stops being eternal in Himself" (*lam yazal qadīman bi-nafsihi*).

At first glance Ibn Kullāb's view seems like a combination of Abū al-Huḏayl's and al-Naẓẓām's formulae. According to Ibn Kullāb, God "never stops being a knower through a knowledge" (*lam yazal ʿāliman bi-ʿilmin*). However, Ibn Kullāb resists Abū al-Huḏayl's identification of the attribute with God,

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[11] Al-Ašʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter, vol. I–II (Istanbul, 1929–30), p. 164.13–14. On Muʿtazilite theories of attributes generally, see *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, pp. 164.10–165.13 and 484.5–487.14.

[12] Al-Ašʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, p. 165.5.

[13] Al-Ašʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, p. 486.11–12.

saying instead that God is a knower through a knowledge which ''He possesses (*lahu*)'', and which ''is subsistent in [or 'with'] Him (*qā'im bihi*)''. Ibn Kullāb's new formula is then applied in an identical way to 29 further attributes which he lists in addition to knowledge. In general, he claims, the attributes ''belong to His self'' (*li-dātihi*) and are ''neither identical to God nor other than He'' (*lā hiya Allāhu wa-lā hiya ġayruhu*).[14] What is striking about the description of Ibn Kullāb's doctrine is that ''eternal'' is not included in his list of 30 attributes. Instead, Ibn Kullāb appends a rather cryptic parenthesis to the end of his list, saying about God that ''He is an eternal [thing] who never stops being [so] in [or 'with'] His names and attributes [*innahu qadīmun lam yazal bi-asmā'ihi wa-ṣifātihi*)''.[15]

Why did Ibn Kullāb single out ''eternal'' for special treatment when Abū al-Huḏayl and al-Naẓẓām had seen it as just another attribute of the self? My guess is that Ibn Kullāb was hinting that *qadīm* is special because it is a meta-attribute rather than a regular attribute. The most important characteristic of meta-attributes such as *qadīm* is that they are attributable not only to God Himself but also to some or all of God's regular attributes.[16] For example, once a Sunnī *mutakallim* had determined that God was a *mawǧūd* (existent), and that God

[14] Al-Ašʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, pp. 169.2–170.3.

[15] Al-Ašʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, p. 169.9–10.

[16] I shall comment only briefly on the problem of whether some or all of the attributes are eternal. As far as the classical Ašʿarites were concerned, only the attributes of the self could be called eternal, the attributes of the act being originated. Their reasoning was that if an attribute of the act, such as ''providing'' (*rizq*), were eternal, then the object of that act – namely, the creatures for whom God provides – would also have to be eternal. According to the Māturīdites, who were probably following the lead of the Ḥanafite scholar al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī (d. 953) on this point, attributes of the act as well as attributes of the self are eternal. The Māturīdites explained the eternality of the attributes of the act by appealing to a distinction that for all intents and purposes is the same as Aristotle's famous distinction, in *De anima* 2.1, between first *entelekheia* and second *entelekheia*. According to the Māturīdites, the transition from possessing the capability to provide (first *entelekheia*) to exercising that capability (second *entelekheia*), like the transition from knowing how to write but not writing, to writing, does not fall under any of Aristotle's categories of change – from one substance to another, from one quality to another, from one quantity to another or from one location to another – but refers instead to a single thing's transition from one state of being to another state of being. Cf. al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī, *K. al-Sawād al-aʿẓam*, no ed. (Cairo, 1837–38), p. 21.18–21; and Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 983), *Šarḥ al-fiqh al-absaṭ li-Abī Ḥanīfa*, ed. H. Daiber (as *The Islamic Concept of Belief in the*

therefore possessed the attribute of *wuǧūd* (existence), he had to decide whether or not each of God's attributes likewise possessed the attribute of *wuǧūd*.

The reason why *qadīm* came to be seen by Ibn Kullāb as a meta-attribute, when the Mu'tazilites by contrast had seen it merely as one of several attributes of the self, is that Ibn Kullāb was so firmly committed to affirming the attributes' eternality. This was a stance he took in opposition to the 'Abbāsid Inquisition (*miḥna*) of 833–48, during which jurists were forced to confess the Mu'tazilite dictum that the Qur'ān was created.[17] By Ibn Kullāb's reckoning, the Qur'ān, conceived of as God's attribute of speech (*kalām*), was not only distinct in some sense from His self, but also co-eternal with Him. For this reason, it seems, Ibn Kullāb wished to distinguish God's attribute of eternality from His other attributes.

But the special status which Ibn Kullāb assigned to *qadīm* confused his followers, who had to decide between two alternatives. The first alternative was to hold that Ibn Kullāb's general principle of attributes, that ''God is P through a P-ness which he possesses'', applied equally to ''eternal''; in this case God will be eternal (*qadīm*) through an eternality (*bi-qidamin*) which He possesses. The second alternative was to hold that God's eternality (and by extension, His other meta-attributes, such as existence) was exempt from Ibn Kullāb's general principle of attributes; in this case God will be eternal in Himself (*bi-nafsihi*), and not through an eternality which He possesses.[18]

Neither alternative was free from difficulties. Although the first alternative enjoys the benefit of consistency, it forces its adherents into a sticky situation: let us allow, for the purpose

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4th/10th Century [Tokyo, 1995]), lines 527–626 (= pp. 138.4–160.3) at 568–569 (= pp. 147.4–148.1).

[17] On this see W. Madelung, ''The origins of the controversy concerning the creation of the Koran'', in J. Barral (ed.), *Orientalia Hispanica: sive studia F.M. Pareja octogenario dicata* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 504–25; J. van Ess, ''Ibn Kullāb und die Miḥna'', *Oriens*, 18–19 (1965–66): 92–142 (esp. pp. 102ff.) and ''Ibn Kullāb'', *Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition)*, Suppl., pp. 391–2; and H. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 235–303. On the attributes in general, see Wolfson's ''Philosophical implications of the problem of the divine attributes in the Kalam'', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 79 (1959): 73–80, and *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 112–234; and M. Allard, *Le problème des attributs divins dans la doctrine d'al-Aš'arī et de ses premiers grands disciples* (Beirut, 1965).

[18] Al-Aš'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, pp. 170.4–6; 171.16–172.3; 517.14–16.

of argument, that God is eternal through an eternality which He possesses. What about the other attributes, such as God's knowledge, power and speech – are they eternal or not? If they are not eternal, then God's attribute of speech will not be eternal either, and nor, therefore, will the Qur'ān be eternal. But this is precisely the Mu'tazilite position a Kullābite is so keen to steer clear of.

If, on the other hand, the attributes are eternal; and if it is correct to infer that since God is eternal through an eternality which He possesses, each attribute will similarly be eternal through an eternality which it possesses; then all the attributes will possess their own individual meta-attributes of eternality. Now what about the meta-eternalities which each of the regular attributes possesses – will each of these meta-eternalities also be eternal through a further meta-meta-eternality which each meta-eternality possesses? It seems that if a Kullābite goes down this route a proliferation of eternalities will be hard to avoid.[19]

The upshot was that in order to steer clear of the Mu'tazilite position that the Qur'ān is created, and in order to pre-empt the infinite-regress problem just described, a follower of Ibn Kullāb will be forced to maintain that Ibn Kullāb's general principle of attributes, that ''God is P through a P-ness which he possesses'', does *not* apply to meta-attributes, and that God is eternal not through an eternality but in Himself. True, the formula that God is eternal in Himself smacks of Mu'tazilism, since for all intents and purposes it is identical to al-Naẓẓām's formula mentioned above. Nevertheless, the specific concern with upholding the Qur'ān's uncreatedness at all costs and with avoiding a proliferation of eternalities trumped the worries about sounding too much like al-Naẓẓām.

Having decided in favor of God's being ''eternal in Himself'' (*qadīm bi-nafsihi*), a Kullābite is still left with the problem of how to describe the eternality which His attributes enjoy. Two options present themselves. On the one hand a Kullābite could claim that like God, each attribute (*ṣifa*) is eternal in itself (*qadīma bi-nafsihā*). This raises a couple of serious problems, however. First of all, attributes are not, strictly speaking,

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[19] For evidence that an infinite regress of meta-eternalities was a real worry to Sunnī thinkers, see the Aš'arite *mutakallim* and mystic al-Qušayrī (d. 1072), *Šarḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, ed. Ṭ.'A. Sa'd and S.Ḥ.M. 'Alī (Cairo, 2001), pp. 55.8 and 392.5–7.

selves (*anfus* or *ḏawāt*), but only things which are predicated of (or, by extension, possessed by) selves. Second, the more explicitly a Kullābite affirms that God's attributes are eternal, the more causally independent the attributes might appear to be, given the trend, described earlier, towards seeing uncausedness and not simply beginninglessness as basic to the idea of eternality. In other words, if a Kullābite explicitly asserts that the attributes are all eternal in themselves, he will run the risk of painting a picture in which all God's attributes can be viewed as separate, uncaused divinities; and that in turn will expose him to accusations of *širk*, or polytheism.[20]

On the other hand a Kullābite could stick like glue to Ibn Kullāb's rather ambiguous formula – that God ''is an eternal [thing] who never stops being [so] in [or 'with'] His names and attributes (*innahu qadīmun lam yazal bi-asmā'ihi wa-ṣifātihi*)'' – and thereby dodge any accusations of *širk* which might arise as a result of explicitly affirming that each of God's attributes is eternal.[21] The only danger of adhering to Ibn Kullāb's formula – apart from its opaqueness – is that it might tempt anti-Kullābites to misrepresent the Kullābite position by claiming that the Kullābites held God to be *caused* to be eternal *by* His attributes. This is because one of the derived meanings of the preposition *bi-* (at least in theological and philosophical texts) is causal: ''by'', ''through'' or ''by means of''. In short, if a Kullābite holds that God is eternal *bi-ṣifātihi*, he runs a risk – admittedly slight – of being accused of implying that God is eternal *through* or *by* His attributes, when what he means is simply that God is eternal *in* or *with* His attributes.

When al-Aš'arī abandoned Mu'tazilism in favor of Kullābism, these were the dilemmas he found himself facing. If al-Aš'arī held both that God was eternal through an eternality (*qadīm bi-qidamin*) and that the divine attributes were eternal, he might be seen to be committing himself to the position that each of God's attributes was eternal through a further attribute of eternality (*qadīma bi-qidamin*); and an infinite regress of meta-eternalities would result. If, on the other hand, al-Aš'arī held that God was eternal in Himself and that the

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[20] This is precisely the trap which the Mu'tazilite-influenced Šī'ī *mutakallim* al-Šayḫ al-Mufīd (d. 1022) accuses al-Aš'arī of having fallen into: al-Šayḫ al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-maqālāt fī al-maḏāhib wa-al-muḫtārāt*, ed. M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1993), pp. 11.20–12.8.

[21] Al-Aš'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, pp. 172.1–3.

divine attributes were eternal, he might be seen to be commit-
ting himself to the position that each of God's attributes was
eternal in itself (*qadīma bi-nafsihā*); and a pleroma of causally
independent attribute-entities would result. Al-Ašʿarī could, of
course, avoid this particular dilemma by denying that the
attributes were eternal at all; but that was unacceptable
because it would force him to admit that the Qurʾān, *qua* God's
attribute of speech, was created. Alternatively, he could adhere
to Ibn Kullāb's cryptic formula – that God ''is an eternal
[thing] who never stops being [so] in [or 'with'] His names and
attributes (*innahu qadīmun lam yazal bi-asmāʾihi wa-ṣifātihi*)''
– and leave it at that; but philosophically speaking that would
represent a retreat into ambiguity rather than an advance
towards greater precision, an ambiguity which opponents
could exploit.

Al-Ašʿarī clearly saw himself as a Kullābite as far as the
eternality of the divine attributes was concerned, claiming at
one point that the ''evidence points to the eternity of the
Creator *and* His knowledge''.[22] But al-Ašʿarī never decided
whether God should be seen as ''eternal through an eternality''
or ''eternal in Himself'', probably because of the serious
consequences that arose from choosing one option or the other.
In fact the Ašʿarite *mutakallim* Ibn Fūrak admitted that
opponents of his school were correct in criticizing al-Ašʿarī for
flip-flopping on this issue. According to Ibn Fūrak, al-Ašʿarī
adopts a strict-constructionist interpretation of Ibn Kullāb's
view (that God is ''eternal through an eternality'' – *qadīm
bi-qidamin*) in some texts, and a loose-constructionist
interpretation (that God is ''eternal in Himself'' – *qadīm
bi-nafsihi*) in other texts.[23] In commenting on al-Ašʿarī's
ambivalence Ibn Fūrak confirms that the strict-constructionist
interpretation is the one that reflects Ibn Kullāb's genuine
opinion, a judgment repeated a century later by the Māturīdite
mutakallim Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 1114), who claims that

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[22] Al-Ašʿarī, *K. al-Lumaʿ*, ed. R.J. McCarthy (in his *The Theology of al-Ašʿarī*
[Beirut, 1953]), pp. 12.21–13.2.

[23] Ibn Fūrak, *Muǧarrad maqālāt al-Ašʿarī*, p. 326.7–12; see also p. 28.12–17. The
texts Ibn Fūrak refers to explicitly are *al-Īḍāḥ* (= *K. Īḍāḥ al-burhān fī al-radd
ʿalā ahl al-zayġ wa-al-ṭuġyān*: Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tabyīn kaḏib al-muftarī fī-mā nusiba ilā
al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ašʿarī*, no ed. [Damascus, 1928], p. 130.3–4), where
al-Ašʿarī adopts the *qadīm bi-qidamin* view; and *al-Muḫtazan* (Ibn ʿAsākir,
p. 133.2–5), where he follows the *qadīm bi-nafsihi* line.

the Māturīdites are the true heirs of Ibn Kullāb on this issue and condemns al-Ašʿarī for straying from Ibn Kullāb's view.[24] Ibn Fūrak's Ašʿarite contemporary, al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), however, follows the loose-constructionist line, holding that God is eternal in Himself (*id̠ li-nafsihi kāna qadīman*).[25]

A Sunnī *mutakallim* such as al-Bāqillānī could feel that, having departed from Ibn Kullāb's formula by maintaining that God is eternal in Himself and not through an eternality, he had at least skirted the Kullābites' original dilemma, namely, affirming God's eternality without allowing an uncontrollable proliferation of meta-eternalities. This choice, however, forced Sunnī *mutakallimūn* not only to come to grips with the obvious question of whether or not God's attributes were similarly ''eternal in themselves'', but also to rethink their use of *qadīm* in proofs of God's existence.

As I mentioned earlier, the Muʿtazilite al-Ǧubbāʾī had treated *qadīm* (eternal) and *muḥdat̠* (originated) as contradictories: holding a single thing to be *qadīm* and *muḥdat̠* results in mutual contradiction (*yatanāqaḍu*). But a Sunnī *mutakallim*, having avoided the old Kullābite dilemma by holding that God is eternal in Himself (*qadīm bi-nafsihi*) rather than eternal through an eternality (*qadīm bi-qidam*), will now be inclined to articulate the two opposites as eternal in itself (*qadīm bi-nafsihi*) and originated in itself (*muḥdat̠ bi-nafsihi*), and this is exactly what al-Bāqillānī does (though using the slightly less causative *li-nafsihi*).[26]

Strictly speaking, however, al-Bāqillānī's opposition between eternal in itself (*qadīm li-nafsihi*) and originated in itself (*muḥdat̠ li-nafsihi*) is one between contraries, not contradictories, because there is a middle position between them. For although it is impossible to be both *qadīm li-nafsihi* and *muḥdat̠ li-nafsihi* at the same time, it is possible to be neither. One of God's attributes (*ṣifāt*), for example, is eternal (*qadīma*) – it most certainly is not originated (*muḥdata*) – but it is difficult to see how an attribute can be eternal in itself (*qadīma li-nafsihā*). As I mentioned above, this is because attributes in general, and the divine attributes in particular, are not selves, but only things which are predicated of (or, by extension,

[24] Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, *K. Tabṣirat al-adilla*, ed. C. Salamé (Damascus, 1993), p. 56.2–10.

[25] Al-Bāqillānī, *K. al-Tamhīd*, ed. R.J. McCarthy (Beirut, 1957), p. 29.18.

[26] Al-Bāqillānī, *K. al-Tamhīd*, pp. 29.17–30.2.

possessed by) selves; and also because holding that an attribute is eternal in itself would assign it too much causal independence, given that uncausedness was so basic to the *kalām* conception of eternity.

This raised a serious problem precisely because it was the contradictory, not contrary, nature of the opposition between the terms *qadīm* and *muḥdat*, which served as the basis for the *mutakallimūn*'s proof of God's existence: given that everything which is *muḥdat* (originated) requires a *muḥdit* (originator), we must terminate eventually in something which is not *muḥdat* in order to avoid an infinite regress. And since the only thing which is not *muḥdat* is *qadīm*, the ultimate *muḥdit* will be *qadīm*. But this proof will not work if the terms in use are contraries rather than contradictories. If the terms are contraries, as *qadīm li-nafsihi* and *muḥdat li-nafsihi* appear to be, there will be things – the divine attributes, at least according to the Sunnīs – which are eternal but not eternal in themselves. Put another way, there will be things which are eternal, but not causally independent. The proof will only work if a new category is created – eternal through another (*qadīm li-ġayrihi*) – which could then somehow be identified with originated in itself (*muḥdat li-nafsihi*). Only then will eternal in itself (*qadīm li-nafsihi*) and originated in itself (*muḥdat li-nafsihi*) cover all possible entities, such that the contradictory nature of their opposition be preserved.

The first of these two steps – creating a new category of "eternal through another" (*qadīm li-ġayrihi*) – seemed to be acceptable to some Sunnī *mutakallimūn*. In his Qur'ān commentary, entitled *Interpretations of the Sunnīs*, al-Māturīdī (d. 944) claims that the verse "And therein [viz., in Heaven] shall they dwell forever" (*wa-hum fīhā ḫālidūna* = *Sūrat al-baqara* 25) can be understood as a refutation of the Jahmite ultra-monotheists who, in their zealousness to protect God's being the *only* First, Last and Eternal *a parte post* (*al-awwalu wa-al-āḫiru wa-al-bāqī*), felt constrained to maintain that Heaven would pass away. Otherwise, the Jahmites reasoned, both Heaven and God would be Eternal *a parte post*, and that would be a sin of *tašbīh*, or "likening" – likening anything created to God, that is.

Where the Jahmites got it wrong, al-Māturīdī reckons, is that they did not make the requisite distinction between *bi-ḏātihi* ("in itself") and *bi-ġayrihi* ("through another"). If they had

understood and applied this distinction they would have realized that God is eternal *a parte post* in Himself (*al-bāqī bi-ḏātihi*), just as He is First in Himself (*al-awwalu bi-ḏātihi*); whereas Heaven and all it contains are eternal *a parte post* through something other than them (*bāqiyatun bi-ġayrihā*).[27]

It would be too bold to call the distinction which al-Māturīdī offers in this passage a coherent and full-fledged theory. First of all, as the later Ašʿarite scholar al-Bayhaqī (d. 1066) pointed out, God's attribute of *baqāʾ* can be seen to encompass His eternality *a parte ante* as well as His eternality *a parte post*; whereas the *baqāʾ* of heaven and hell, which are created things, can refer only to their eternality *a parte post*.[28] Nor is al-Māturīdī's *bi-nafsihi*/*bi-ġayrihi* distinction here meant to help explain how an eternal God and His eternal attributes are eternal in different ways, the former eternal in Himself, the latter eternal through another. Finally, even if we allow the creation of a new category of thing, ''eternal through another'', identifying that new category with ''originated in itself'' (*muḥdaṯ li-nafsihi*) will still run counter to a *mutakallim*'s basic intuition that *qadīm* and *muḥdaṯ* ought to be distinguished on temporal as well as causal grounds.

II. DURING

In the metaphysics section of his earliest philosophical *summa*, the *Ḥikma ʿArūḏiyya*, composed in 1001 when he was only 21, Avicenna, like al-Māturīdī before him, embraces the distinction between ''eternal in itself'' and ''eternal through another'' which is implicit in al-Bāqillānī's attachment of the rider *li-nafsihi* (''in itself'') to *qadīm* (''eternal''). And like al-Māturīdī Avicenna also resists applying the distinction between ''in itself'' and ''through another'' to *muḥdaṯ* (''originated''), let alone equating *qadīm bi-ġayrihi* (''eternal through another'') with *muḥdaṯ bi-nafsihi* (''originated in itself''):

Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ḥikma al-ʿArūḏiyya*, MS Uppsala, Or. 364, fol. 4r14–17

''Eternal'' is said of all that has never been non-existent. Something may be eternal in itself [*qadīman bi-ḏātihi*] and it may be eternal through

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[27] Al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna* (= *Tafsīr al-Māturīdī al-musammā Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna* [Cairo, 1971]), vol. I, pp. 76.16–77.4; cf. also p. 131.13. Al-Māturīdī also appeals to the *bi-ḏātihi*/*bi-ġayrihi* distinction at *K. al-Tawḥīd*, ed. F. Kholeif (Beirut, 1970), p. 43.8–9.

[28] Al-Bayhaqī, *K. al-Asmāʾ wa-al-ṣifāt*, p. 33.6–12.

another [*qadīman bi-ġayrihi*]. Now ''originated'' [*al-muḥdaṯ*] and ''brought-into-being'' [*al-mutakawwin*] consist in that which did not exist at some time or other [*alladī kāna laysa fī waqtin mā*], and which will not exist except through another. It cannot help but come from matter, because all that is brought into being has been preceded by the possibility of some existence [*fa-qad taqaddamahu imkānu wuǧūdin*]; otherwise it would not exist.[29]

The problem remains, then, that even if by identifying ''originated in itself'' with ''eternal through another'', he were seen to be referring to an intelligible category of thing, an Ašʿarite such as al-Bāqillānī will resist describing the attributes as either *muḥdaṯa li-nafsihā* (''originated in themselves'') or *qadīma li-ġayrihā* (''eternal through another''), because doing so raises further *kalām*-specific problems, some familiar, others new. On the one hand, if an attribute is said to be *muḥdaṯa li-nafsihā* or *li-dātihā*, its possessing a *nafs* or *dāt* (''self'') will assign it too much ontological independence, when – as mentioned above – an attribute is not, strictly speaking, a self but only something predicated of (or, by extension, possessed by) a self. What is more, given that *muḥdaṯ* must mean originated *in time* if it is to be useful in proofs of God's existence which rely on an equation of prior non-existence and causedness, the attributes, if described as *muḥdaṯa*, will be seen to be temporally bounded rather than eternal, and the Qur'ān, understood as God's attribute of speech, will be seen to be created instead of uncreated.

On the other hand, if the attributes are *qadīma li-ġayrihā*, an alarming degree of otherness (*ġayriyya*) will infect the relationship between God's attributes and God's self, with the result that the attributes will fail to satisfy Ibn Kullāb's condition of being neither identical to nor other than God. What is worse, positing a significant degree of otherness between God and His attributes will run the risk of allowing a host of eternal entities to proliferate – entities which are caused by something other than them, it is true, but which are still eternal and separate. In short, the ambiguous status of the attributes – eternal, yet not causally independent – flushes out the problems latent in the pre-Avicennian Sunnī trend towards seeing uncausedness as basic to eternality.

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[29] For a transcription of this passage, see my *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, p. 278.

In attempting to grapple with this problem the Aš'arites al-Bāqillānī and al-Ḥalīmī offer another meaning for *qadīm*: ''that whose non-existence is impossible''.[30] They could even cite the founder of their school for support of their new definition:

Al-Aš'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, p. 11.14–15

If the opposite of knowledge were eternal [*qadīm*], it would be impossible for it not to exist [*la-istaḥāla an yabṭula*].

At first glance, it is hard to see how this new definition does al-Bāqillānī and al-Ḥalīmī much good. For even if they apply the new understanding of the eternal – as that whose non-existence is impossible – to their argument for God's existence, they will still run aground on the rocky shores of the divine attributes. This is because their proof remains reducible to an appeal to the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes and effects, so whichever phrase is chosen to describe the eternal, the term's basic meaning must remain ''uncaused'' if it is to be opposed to *muḥdaṯ* and thereby useful in their proof of God's existence. As before, the problem arises when that newly chosen phrase – ''impossible not to exist'' – is similarly applied to the attributes.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which, if another little step is taken, and being ''necessary of existence'' (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*) – not just being ''impossible of non-existence'' (*mustaḥīl al-'adam*) – is held to be the basic criterion of eternality, the horns of the old Kullābite dilemma will at least be blunted. Eternality, let us recall, was held to be predicable both of God's self and of His attributes, though perhaps in different ways. Necessity, by contrast, is not merely a meta-attribute but also a mode of predication, since necessity can be seen to govern the very act of predicating attributes of a subject.

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[30] Al-Bāqillānī, *K. al-Tamhīd*, p. 29.5: ''because the non-existence of the eternal is not possible (*li-anna al-qadīma lā yaǧūzu 'adamuhu*)''; al-Ḥalīmī, *K. al-Minhāǧ fī šu'ab al-īmān* (*ap.* al-Bayhaqī, *K. al-Asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*, 33,1–5): ''If He is existent neither from a beginning nor through a cause, then neither extinction nor non-existence will be possible for Him (*li-annahu iḏā kāna mawǧūdan lā 'an awwala wa-lā bi-sababin lam yaǧuz 'alayhi al-inqiḍā'u wa-al-'adamu*)''.

What I mean is that in propositions such as ''God is an existent'', ''God is a knower'' and ''God is a provider'', the modal qualifier ''necessary that'' (or ''necessarily'') could be added to describe *how* each of the predicates or attributes holds of its subject: for example, it is necessary that God be (or ''exist as'') a knower (*wāǧibun an yakūna* [or *yūǧada*] *Allāhu ʿāliman*). The result is that ''necessity of existence'' can be seen to obtain in the copula which binds the predicates (God's attributes) to the subject (God's self), and not simply to be predicable of the subject and of each of the attributes in turn, as was the case with meta-attributes.[31] Put in medieval Latin terms, the Sunnī *mutakallimūn* could take advantage of the absence, in Aristotle as well as in classical Arabic logic, of a sharp distinction between *de re* necessity, in which the necessity is held to obtain in the *thing* being predicated of the subject (S is ***necessarily – P***), and *de dicto* necessity, in which the necessity is held to obtain in the *statement* or predication itself (Necessarily: ***S is P***).[32] Partly because of this conflation, necessity of existence blunted the horns of the old Kullābite dilemma better than eternality did. For unlike eternality, necessity of existence can be held to describe the divine attributes *only* insofar as they are predicated of God's self, with the result that the danger of inadvertently positing a pleroma of causally independent attribute-entities is eliminated, or at least minimized.

Given the clear advantages of necessity over eternality, why were pre-Avicennian Sunnī *mutakallimūn* so reluctant to take that final little step and assert openly that since eternality is now to be defined as impossibility of non-existence, and since impossibility of non-existence is identical to necessity of existence, God's eternality will refer at the most basic level to His

[31] There is some evidence (in an admittedly very compressed and difficult passage: *ap.* Ibn Mattawayh, *K. al-Maǧmūʿ fī al-muḥīṭ bi-al-taklīf*, ed. J. Houben [Beirut, 1965], vol. I, pp. 152.7–154.17) that this move may have been anticipated by the Muʿtazilite al-Ǧubbāʾī, who appears to have maintained that God's distinctiveness from all other beings consisted in the necessity with which God possesses His essential attributes (*bi-wujūbi hāḏihi al-ṣifāti lahu*) of eternality, power, knowledge, life and so on (152.7–14). His son Abū Hāšim disagreed, apparently maintaining that this copulative necessity, being ultimately reducible to God's eternally warranting His attributes, is not real enough to account for God's distinctiveness from other beings (152.15–19).

[32] On this absence, and on Avicenna's new distinction between *waṣfī* and *ḏātī* readings of modal propositions, see now Tony Street, ''Logic'', in Adamson and Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*.

necessity of existence? The short answer is that they were uncomfortable using the term *wāǧib* in this way. When the early *mutakallimūn* wished to refer to a proposition's being axiomatic or intuitively necessary, in the sense that a necessary proposition expresses an *a priori* truth, they turned to the term *ḍarūrī*. For example, the proposition ''the whole is greater than any of its parts'' is *ḍarūrī*.[33]

By contrast, early *mutakallimūn* had understood the active participle *wāǧib* as connoting religious or moral obligation (*farḍ*), and used *wāǧib* with the preposition *'alā* to mean ''morally incumbent upon''.[34] It is true that many of those same *mutakallimūn* turned to the root *w-ǧ-b* to render the idea of logical entailment. For example, in his *Vindication of the Science of Kalām*, al-Aš'arī uses *waǧaba* in this way:

Al-Aš'arī, *Risālat istiḥsān al-ḫawḍ fī 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. McCarthy (in his *The Theology of al-Aš'arī*), p. 92.12–16

We say: If God were to resemble something, He would resemble it either in every respect or in one respect. If He resembled it in every respect, it would follow necessarily [*waǧaba*] that He be originated in every respect. And if He resembled it in one respect, it would follow necessarily [*waǧaba*] that like it He be originated to the extent that He resembled it, given that each of two similar things will be judged to be similar in the respect in which it resembles the other. Yet it is impossible for what is originated to be eternal, and for what is eternal to be originated.

The later *mutakallimūn* could, of course, justify adding syllogistic necessity to *wāǧib*'s semantic field by stressing the rather Mu'tazilite idea that knowledge of the concepts of right and

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[33] Examples of *bi-al-ḍarūra*, *ḍarūratan*, *ḍarūrat al-'aql*, *ḍarūrī* (and, less often, *bi-al-iḍṭirār*, which is usually paired with *bi-al-ṭab'*, ''by nature'', and contrasted with *bi-al-iḫtiyār*, ''by choice'') in an epistemological context in pre-Avicennian *kalām* include (for the Mu'tazilites) al-Aš'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, pp. 136.10–15; 393.5–14; 480.6–10; al-Nāši' al-Akbar (d. 906), *al-Kitāb al-Awsaṭ fī al-maqālāt*, ed. J. van Ess (Beirut, 1971), pp. 109.13–110.11 (= #148); and Sa'diyā al-Fayyūmī (*i.e.*, Saadia Gaon, d. 942), *Kitāb al-Amānāt wa-al-i'tiqādāt*, ed. S. Landauer (Leiden, 1880), pp. 12.17–13.10; 16.19–20.18; and (for the Sunnīs) al-Māturīdī, *K. al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 5.13; 7.11; 8.14–17; 42.20; al-Aš'arī, *K. al-Luma'*, pp. 41.10–42.15; al-Bāqillānī, *K. al-Tamhīd*, pp. 7.4–10; 8.6–13; 9.2–15; 52.4–7; and Ibn Fūrak, *Muǧarrad maqālāt al-Aš'arī*, pp. 12.1–20; 13.25–14.20; 18.21–19.6; 20.9–21.13; 222.16–19; 247.17–249.22; 284.15–18; 324.4; 328.14–19.

[34] On the distinction between *wāǧib* and *ḍarūrī*, see van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des 'Aḍudaddīn al-Īcī*, pp. 118–19. Instances where *wāǧib* and *farḍ* appear to be interchangeable include Ibn Fūrak, *Muǧarrad maqālāt al-Aš'arī*, pp. 16.3-6; 32.7–17; 180.17; and 199.8–9; and al-Bāqillānī, *K. al-Tamhīd*, p. 187.1.

wrong was both morally incumbent and intellectually neces-
sary, since a human endowed with responsibility for his actions
(a *mukallaf*, that is) both possessed an intuitive knowledge of
right and wrong, and was under a moral obligation to act
according to that intuitive knowledge.[35] Still, using the active
participle *wāǧib* – as opposed to the verb *waǧaba/yaǧibu* – to
denote the necessity of a proposition remained rare in pre-
Avicennian Sunnī *kalām*.

Unlike most *mutakallimūn*, a number of polymaths and litter-
ateurs of the late-tenth and early-eleventh centuries had no
qualms about concluding that since God is impossible of
non-existence, He is necessary of existence. For example, the
Iḫwān al-Ṣafā' (fl. ca. 985?) at one point refer to God as
al-wāǧib al-wuǧūd in their *Rasā'il*.[36] Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030),
who despite his death date was a generation or two older than
Avicenna, also argues that ''If, as we asserted, the existence in
Him is essential, He could not possibly be imagined to be
non-existent; thus He is necessary of existence, and whatever is
necessary of existence will be perpetual of existence, and
whatever is perpetual of existence will be eternal (*wa-iḏā kāna
al-wuǧūdu fīhi ka-mā qulnā ḏātiyyan fa-laysa yaǧūzu an yuta-
wahhama ma'dūman fa-huwa wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi wa-mā kāna
wāǧiba al-wuǧūdi fa-huwa dā'imu al-wuǧūdi wa-mā kāna
dā'ima al-wuǧūdi fa-huwa azaliyyun*)''.[37] And the phrase *wāǧib
al-wuǧūd* appears with the rider *bi-ḏātihi*, again in reference to
God, in the *K. al-Amad 'alā al-abad* of al-'Āmirī (d. 992).[38]

Al-'Āmirī in fact appears to be the most likely direct source
of Avicenna's distinction, for a number of reasons. First of all,
al-'Āmirī was the first to predicate the entire expression *wāǧib
al-wuǧūd bi-ḏātihi* (''necessary of existence in itself'') of God.
Second, though trained in Baġdād, al-'Āmirī moved to Buḫārā,
and was active in the same Sāmānid court and studied in the
same Sāmānid library where, only a decade or so later, the

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[35] Ibn Fūrak, *Muǧarrad maqālāt al-Aš'arī*, p. 285.7–20; al-Bāqillānī, *K.
al-Tamhīd*, pp. 8.4–5; 379.11–380.15.

[36] Iḫwān al-Ṣafā', no ed. (Beirut, 1957), *Rasā'il*, vol. II, p. 471.1.

[37] Rowson (*K. al-Amad 'alā al-abad*, ed. and trans. E. Rowson [New Haven,
Conn., 1988], p. 233) refers to the Cairo, 1907, edition of Ibn Miskawayh's *K.
al-Fawz al-asġar*: 15f.; in the edition I have access to (*K. al-Fawz al-asġar*, no ed.
[Beirut, 1901]), this sentence appears on p. 20.10–12.

[38] Al-'Āmirī, *K. al-Amad 'alā al-abad*, p. 78.12; *wāǧib al-wuǧūd* appears without
the rider *bi-ḏātihi* at p. 170.12.

21-year-old Avicenna would write his first philosophical *summa*, the *Ḥikma ʿArūḍiyya*, which is also the first Avicennian text in which *wāǧib al-wuǧūd bi-ḏātihi* appears. Finally, in his *Kitāb al-Taqrīr li-awǧuh al-taqdīr*, al-ʿĀmirī again makes the distinction between necessary, possible and impossible of existence, and illustrates what he means by necessary of existence with the example ''2 + 2 = 4'', the same example which Avicenna later used in both his *Ḥikma ʿArūḍiyya* (written in 1001) and in his *Mabdaʾ wa-maʿād* (written in 1013).[39] (I admit that ''2 + 2 = 4'' is such a prosaic example that its use in two or more texts does not constitute definitive proof of some kind of filiation between them.)

Al-ʿĀmirī also makes the distinction in the *Kitāb al-Taqrīr li-awǧuh al-taqdīr* between that which is necessary of existence in itself (*bi-al-ḏāt*) and that whose existence is necessary as a consequence of a relation (*bi-al-iḍāfa*), the same distinction which Avicenna was to make in his *Mabdaʾ wa-maʿād*.[40] Of course it is not certain whether Avicenna derived his ideas directly from the courtesy copies which al-ʿĀmirī doubtless left in the Sāmānid library, or whether Avicenna and al-ʿĀmirī read the same texts there and were independently influenced by them.

The appearance of ''necessary of existence'' (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*) – sometimes with the rider ''in itself'' (*bi-ḏātihi*), other times without – in descriptions of God, is also a characteristic of a small number of *kalām* texts produced during the thirty years between 985 and 1015, including those by the Muʿtazilite ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār and the Ašʿarite belletrist al-Rāǧib al-Iṣfahānī. In fact, some scholars have wondered whether there might be a causal link between, on the one hand, ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār's presence in Rayy between 1013 and 1015 and the occurrence of terms such as *wuǧūb al-wuǧūd* in ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār's works, and, on the other hand, Avicenna's presence in Rayy around 1014–1015 and Avicenna's own evolving ideas about necessary and possible existence. The assumption has generally been that if there were any influence, it must have come from the older

[39] Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-Taqrīr li-awǧuh al-taqdīr*, pp. 28–30 [MS Princeton 2163 (393B), fols. 26–76]; here I am following the synopsis by Rowson in his commentary on the *Amad*, pp. 232–3.

[40] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabdaʾ wa-al-maʿād*, ed. ʿA. Nūrānī (Tehran, 1984), p. 3.2–15.

'Abd al-Ǧabbār and towards the younger Avicenna.[41] This perception is reinforced by Averroes' famous comment in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* that Avicenna pinched the idea of distinguishing necessary and possible existence from the Mu'tazilites (*wa-huwa ṭarīqun aḫaḏahu Ibnu Sīnā min al-mutakallimīna* [. . .] *hāḏā huwa i'tiqādu al-Mu'tazilati qabla al-Aš'ariyyati*).[42]

What truth might there be to Averroes' claim? According to the *Kitāb al-Maǧmū' fī al-muḥīṭ bi-al-taklīf* 'Abd al-Ǧabbār does toy with the idea that God's eternality (*qidam*) can somehow be explained by referring to the necessity of His existence (*wuǧūb al-wuǧūd*).[43] 'Abd al-Ǧabbār also comes close to making a distinction in that work between intrinsic and derivative necessity (*al-wuǧūbu li-ḏātihi lā li-šay'in siwāhu*).[44] In his *Muġnī* the two trends are joined together a little more closely.[45] But in neither work does 'Abd al-Ǧabbār articulate the distinction clearly and coherently, let alone in the canonical way that Avicenna does. It is difficult to be definitive about this question because we do not possess the first three volumes of the *Muġnī*, the volumes which cover the topic of *tawḥīd* (divine oneness) and hence those which would have provided the obvious context for 'Abd al-Ǧabbār to expound most fully on the issue of *wāǧib al-wuǧūd*.

Of course, if we accept (as I think we should) that the Uppsala *Ḥikma 'Arūḍiyya* manuscript we now have access to is really an accurate copy of the very text which Avicenna composed when he was 21, in the year 1001, then the distinction appears in Avicenna's work a dozen years before Avicenna ever could have laid eyes on 'Abd al-Ǧabbār in Rayy, and we can dismiss any claim of 'Abd al-Ǧabbār's personal influence on purely historical grounds. Here is what Avicenna says in the *Ḥikma 'Arūḍiyya*:

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[41] On the possible relationship between Avicenna and 'Abd al-Ǧabbār, see now A. Dhanani, ''Rocks in the Heavens?! The encounter between 'Abd al-Ǧabbār and Ibn Sīnā'', in D. Reisman (ed.), *Before and After Avicenna* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 127–44.

[42] Ibn Rušd, *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1930), p. 276.4–9.

[43] 'Abd al-Ǧabbār *ap.* Ibn Mattawayh, *K. al-Maǧmū' fī al-muḥīṭ bi-al-taklīf*, I pp. 50.24; 99.21–22; 141.10–12; and 142.1.

[44] 'Abd al-Ǧabbār *ap.* Ibn Mattawayh, *K. al-Maǧmū' fī al-muḥīṭ bi-al-taklīf*, I p. 51.20–21.

[45] 'Abd al-Ǧabbār, *al-Muġnī*, IV, p. 250.4–15; and XI, p. 432.11–15.

Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ḥikma al-ʿArūḍiyya*, fols. 3v16–4r12

''The Necessary'' [*al-wāǧib*] is that which is necessary of existence in respect of the way it is [*al-ḍarūriyyu al-wuǧūdi ʿalā mā huwa ʿalayhi*], this being either in itself [*bi-ḏātihi*] (such as the principle of existents [*ka-mabdaʾi al-mawǧūdāti*]) or through another (such as the fact that two and two are four). The necessary is either eternal (such as the principle of existents) or is at one time and not another [*fī ḥālin dūna ḥālin*] (such as the eclipse of the moon at that moment). All that is necessary of existence in itself has no cause. Whatever has a cause will be neither necessary of existence in itself nor impossible of existence in itself (for otherwise, it would never come to exist); with respect to itself [*min ḥaytu ḏātihi*], therefore, it [*i.e.*, that which has a cause] will be possible of existence [*mumkinu al-wuǧūdi*], while [at the same time] being necessary of existence through its cause. Now the existence of whatever has no cause is not itself divisible into two states [*wa-mā lā ʿillata lahu fa-inna wuǧūda ḏātihi lā yanqasimu min ḥālatayni*], in virtue of which it [*i.e.*, the existence of whatever has no cause] would come to be caused in both states; for there would be no way out of being caused, nor any escape from causedness. All that is subject to change is in these two states, neither one of which it possesses in itself; rather, it possesses both of them through a cause (there being no alternative to them [*i.e.*, there being no alternative to being in the two states]). Thus all that is subject to change will itself be caused and possible, whereas all that is necessary of existence in itself will be necessary of existence in every respect, and no type of change whatsoever will be attributable to it. ''The possible'' is the existent which is not necessary [*laysa bi-ḍarūriyyin*]. ''The possible'' is said to be whatever is not impossible; and ''the possible'' is said to be whatever is not impossible and which exists and [then] is non-existent, and [in general] whatever does not exist at some time or other.[46]

This is not to say, of course, that ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār's works, or other Muʿtazilite works which are now lost, may have been contained in the Sāmānid library and read by Avicenna before he composed the *Ḥikma ʿArūḍiyya*. But given the lack of textual evidence that other Muʿtazilites thought of this distinction first; and given the hints at that distinction by al-ʿĀmirī, who worked in the Sāmānid library only a dozen years before Avicenna; my tentative conclusion is either that Avicenna's work influenced ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār's, or, as seems more likely, that Avicenna and ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār came up with the idea independently, the former in a sustained and precise way and building directly upon earlier work by al-ʿĀmirī, and the latter

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[46] For a transcription of this passage, see my *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, p. 278.

almost in passing. My guess is that Averroes' comment might well be an expression of his discomfort at the astonishingly rapid and widespread incorporation of Avicenna's distinction into Sunnī-*kalām* proofs of God's existence and into their discussions of epistemology and God's attributes, in the century or so following Avicenna's death.[47]

The one Aš'arite contemporary of Avicenna who uses the phrase *wāǧib al-wuǧūd* to describe God is al-Rāǧib al-Iṣfahānī. I shall not go into too much detail concerning the uncertainty over al-Rāǧib's death date. Rowson, in the most recent synopsis of this question, reckons that he flourished around 1010, and I am convinced by his arguments, which build upon earlier work by Madelung.[48] In his *I'tiqādāt*, al-Rāǧib argues that existents and originated things cannot help but terminate eventually in an existentiator and originator (*ilā mūǧidin wa-muḥditin*), and that this existentiator and originator must be One, Eternal, and Necessary of Existence in Himself (*wa-anna ḏālika al-mūǧida wa-al-muḥdiṯa yaǧibu an yakūna wāḥidan azaliyyan wāǧiba al-wuǧūdi li-ḏātihi*).[49] Later on, al-Rāǧib explains what he means when he says that God is necessary of existence:

Al-Rāǧib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-I'tiqādāt*, pp. 56.9–57.11

Proof that He, may He be exalted, is an existent which is necessary of existence [*mawǧūdun wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi*] consists in the fact that whenever we assume or imagine Him to be an existent, it must be in one of three ways: necessary of existence, impossible of existence, or possible of existence [*immā wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi aw mumtani'u al-wuǧūdi aw mumkinu al-wuǧūdi*]. The necessary of existence is that which, when postulated as non-existent, an absurdity is logically entailed, e.g., [when] the occurrence of four from the existence of two and two [is postulated as non-existent] [*fa-al-wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi huwa alladī iḏā furiḍa ǧayra mawǧūdin lazima minhu muḥālun ka-ḥuṣūli arba'atin min*

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[47] To be fair to Averroes, there may be evidence of Mu'tazilite anticipations of Avicenna's distinction currently unavailable to us. One possible precursor is al-Ka'bī al-Balḫī (d. 931), a prominent member of the (relatively) *falsafa*-friendly Baġdādī school of Mu'tazilism and a student of al-Ḫayyāṭ and of al-Ǧubbā'ī, since he was an active participant in debates in Ḫurāsān and Transoxania during the first third of the tenth century and may have left disciples there. But until al-Ka'bī al-Balḫī's work is fully edited – at the moment most remains in manuscript – and his influence studied, this must remain only a suggestion.

[48] E. Rowson, "al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī", *Encyclopaedia of Islam (New Edition)*, VIII, 389–90 and W. Madelung, "Ar-Rāǧib al-Iṣfahānī und die Ethik al-Ǧazālīs", in R. Gramlich (ed.), *Islamwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen Fritz Meier zum 60sten Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden, 1974), pp. 152–63.

[49] Al-Rāǧib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-I'tiqādāt*, ed. Š. al-'Aǧalī (Beirut, 1988), p. 48.15–20.

wuǧūdi itnayni wa-itnayni]. The impossible of existence is that which, when postulated as existent, an absurdity is logically entailed, e.g., [when] the occurrence of four from the existence of two and three [is postulated as existent]. The possible of existence is that which, when postulated as existent or non-existent, no absurdity is logically entailed, e.g., [when] the coming of rain in the winter [is postulated as existent or non-existent].

The necessary of existence is of two types: the necessary of existence not in itself but through something else [*wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi lā li-dātihi bal li-amrin āḫara*], such as the existence of four which follows necessarily from the occurrence of two and two; and the necessary of existence in itself, not through anything else, namely the Creator, may He be exalted [*wa-wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi li-dātihi lā li-šay'in āḫara wa-huwa al-bārī ta'ālā*]. The necessary of existence is that which, when postulated as non-existent, an absurdity occurs [*idā furiḍa ġayra mawǧūdin ḥaṣala minhu muḥālun*]; nor does it need, in its existence, anything to make it exist; and it is eternal, this being God, may He be exalted [*wa-lā muḥtāǧun fī wuǧūdihi ilā šay'in yūǧiduhu wa-yakūnu azaliyyan wa-dālika huwa Allāhu ta'ālā*] [. . .]. The necessary of existence is that which has no need, in terms of its existence, for anything other than itself [*wa-al-wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi huwa alladī lā yaftaqiru fī wuǧūdihi ilā šay'in ġayri dātihi*]. It is established therefore that it is correct to say that there is only one necessary of existence in itself, this being God, may He be exalted.

The wording of al-Rāġib's explanation – which we can date, following Rowson's conjecture, to around 1010 – is strikingly similar to that found in a corresponding passage from Avicenna's *al-Mabda' wa-al-ma'ād*, composed in 1013 (that is, twelve years after his first stab at the idea of necessary existence in the *Ḥikma 'Arūḍiyya*):

Ibn Sīnā, *Mabda' wa-ma'ād*, p. 2.5–17

The Necessary of existence is the existent which, when postulated as non-existent [*matā furiḍa ġayra mawǧūdin*], an absurdity occurs. The possible of existence is that which, when postulated as either non-existent or existent, no absurdity occurs. The necessary of existence is the necessary [*al-ḍarūrī*], while the possible of existence is that in which there is no necessity at all [*alladī lā ḍarūrata fīhi*], *i.e.*, neither in its existence or in its non-existence. This is what we mean by ''possible of existence'' in this context [. . .]. Next, the necessary of existence may be in itself [*bi-dātihi*] and it may be *not* in itself [*lā bi-dātihi*]. That which is necessary of existence in itself [*wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi bi-dātihi*] is that on whose account [*li-dātihi*] (and not on account of anything else, whichever thing that might be) postulating its non-existence becomes absurd. The necessary of existence *not* in itself is that which becomes necessary of existence on account of postulating [the existence of] something which is not [identical to] it, such as the fact that four is necessary of

existence not in itself, but [only] when two and two are postulated; and the fact that being burned and burning [*i.e.*, burning something else] are necessary of existence not in themselves, but [only] when contact between the natural active potentiality and the natural passive potentiality (I mean [the potentiality] to burn and be burned) is postulated.

As with ʿAbd al-Ǧabbār, because of the absence of whose *Muġnī* I–III we cannot definitively solve the problem of who influenced whom, so the uncertainty over al-Rāġib's dates forces us to be tentative about who came up with the new formulation first, Avicenna or al-Rāġib. Nevertheless, I believe the burden of proof lies with those who deny that al-ʿĀmirī is the most likely direct source of Avicenna's theory, since al-ʿĀmirī is the one author whose works were probably in the right place (Buḫārā) at the right time (ca. 1000) to spark the young Avicenna's metaphysical imagination.[50]

III. AFTER

What *is* certain is that in the century following Avicenna's first articulation of his theory, a number of prominent Sunnī *mutakallimūn* began to describe God explicitly as *wāǧib al-wuǧūd*. More precisely, it is the definition of the necessary of existence as that whose non-existence is inconceivable or impossible – the definition found in al-Rāġib and in Avicenna's *Mabdaʾ wa-maʿād* – that resonated most powerfully with post-Avicennian Sunnī *mutakallimūn*. Perhaps this was because al-Rāġib had come up with this definition at the same time as Avicenna, and could therefore provide the definition with an Ašʿarite provenance. But given al-Rāġib's marginal status as a *mutakallim*, the more likely reason is that the definition of the necessary of existence as that whose non-existence is inconceivable or impossible allowed a post-Avicennian Ašʿarite, at least, to identify the necessary of existence with the eternal by explicitly appealing to al-Bāqillānī's definition of the eternal as that whose non-existence is impossible. After all, citing al-Bāqillānī, a far more prominent Ašʿarite thinker than al-Rāġib, would more effectively ''Ašʿarize'' Avicenna's distinction.

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[50] As I mentioned in fn. 4, detailed discussions of the Neoplatonic, Aristotelian and Fārābian background to Avicenna's distinction can be found in my *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, Chapters 10–12. Other intriguing evidence that Avicenna inherited rather than invented the distinction has been highlighted by A. Hasnaoui, ''Un élève d'Abū Bišr Mattā b. Yūnus: Abū ʿAmr al-Ṭabarī'', *Bulletin d'études orientales*, 48 (1996): 35–55 at p. 37.

Admittedly, most Sunnī *mutakallimūn* of the first and second post-Avicennian generations – including the Ḥanbalite Abū Yaʿlā ibn al-Farrāʾ (d. 1066), al-Fīrūzābādī al-Šīrāzī (d. 1083), who seems to have wavered between Ašʿarism and Ḥanbalism, and the Ašʿarite al-Mutawallī (d. 1086) – held back from reasoning that since God is eternal, since the eternal is impossible of non-existence, and since what is impossible of non-existence will also be necessary of existence, God will therefore be necessary of existence. Instead they stuck to al-Bāqillānī's earlier assertion that whatever is eternal will be impossible of non-existence.[51]

In spite of the hesitation of his Sunnī colleagues, al-Ġazālī's teacher, the Ašʿarite scholar Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Ġuwaynī (1028–1085) takes the plunge, by openly arguing that since eternality implies impossibility of non-existence, and since impossibility of non-existence implies necessity of existence, eternality and necessity of existence will be co-implied:

Al-Ġuwaynī, *al-Šāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. ʿA.M.M. ʿUmar (Beirut, 1999)

292.19–20: We say: necessity of existence is an expression for the negation of the possibility of non-existence, and [as such] is not reducible to the affirmation of an attribute. So in terms of its necessity of existence, ''eternal'' is not an essential attribute; instead, what is meant by that is the negation of the possibility of non-existence.
308.9–10: [We say:] The eternal is that whose existence is necessary, the impossible that whose negation is inescapable. This is the meaning of the Imāms' assertion that the Eternal is what is necessary in respect of its existence, while the originated is what is possible in respect of its existence.

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[51] Ibn al-Farrāʾ, *K. al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. W.Z. Ḥaddād (Beirut, 1974), p. 47.15–16: ''Non-existence is not possible for Him [. . .] non-existence is impossible for Him (*wa-lā yaǧūzu ʿalayhi al-ʿadamu* [. .] *istaḥāla ʿalayhi al-ʿadamu*)'' and 48.8–9: ''Evidence pointing towards the fact that he is eternal *a parte post* (*bāqin*) [. . .] consists in what has been covered previously regarding the existence of the fact that He is eternal unendingly [in the past and future] (*fī-mā lam yazal wa-lā yazālu*), and in the fact that non-existence is impossible for Him (*wa-anna al-ʿadama yastaḥīlu ʿalayhi*)''; al-Fīrūzābādī al-Šīrāzī, *al-Išāra ilā maḏhab ahl al-ḥaqq*, ed. Marie Bernand (in *La profession de foi d'Abū Isḥāq al-Šīrāzī*) (Cairo, 1987), p. 20.13–18: ''The non-existence of the eternal is impossible (*al-qadīm yastaḥīlu ʿadamuhu*)''; al-Mutawallī, *Kitāb al-Muġnī*, ed. M. Bernand (Cairo, 1986), p. 6.5: ''Because the non-existence of the eternal is impossible (*li-anna al-qadīma yastaḥīlu ʿadamuhu*)'' (followed by an explanation at 6.10–19); p. 21.4–5: ''For the non-existence of the eternal is impossible (*fa-inna al-qadīma yastaḥīlu ʿadamuhu*)''; and p. 31.11: ''The non-existence of the eternal is impossible (*wa-yastaḥīlu ʿadamu al-qadīmi*)''.

Al-Ǧuwaynī, *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*, ed. M.Z. al-Kawt̲arī (Cairo, 1948)

23.4–5: It is necessary to be unambiguous about the fact that God, may He be exalted, is eternal *a parte post*, and [that] the non-existence of that whose eternality is necessary is impossible. Thus the eternal is that which the intellect determines to be necessary of existence [*yaǧibu al-qaṭʿu bi-anna Allāha taʿālā bāqin wa-mā waǧaba qidamuhu istaḥāla ʿadamuhu fa-inna al-qadīma huwa allad̲ī qaḍā al-ʿaqlu bi-wuǧūbi wuǧūdihi*].

Al-Ǧuwaynī, *Lumaʿ fī qawāʿid Ahl al-sunna wa-al-ǧamāʿa*, ed. Michel Allard (in *Textes apologétiques de Ǧuwaynī*) (Beirut, 1968)

137.9–10: The Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, is eternal *a parte post*, [and] necessary of existence [*al-rabbu ʿazza wa-ǧalla bāqin wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi*], since his eternality [*qidamuhu*] has been established in what we said earlier, and the eternal is impossible with respect to its non-existence [*wa-al-qadīmu yastaḥīlu ʿadamuhu*] by general agreement among scholars [*bi-ittifāqin min al-ʿuqalāʾ*], and this makes clear that He is eternal *a parte post* and continuous of existence [*bāqiya mustamirra al-wuǧūdi*].

Probably for the reasons mentioned earlier, al-Ǧuwaynī hints that al-Bāqillānī himself was the first to draw this conclusion, and again claims that God's being necessary of existence is a matter of near unanimity, at least among Sunnī scholars:

Al-Ǧuwaynī, *al-Šāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*

365.7–11: The Qāḍī [al-Bāqillānī] often refined his point in another way, saying: It has been established that for the originator of the world to require an originator is impossible, since that leads to infinite regress. Every existence which has been established as not requiring a cause is necessary.
358.11–13: Know that those who affirm the existence of the Maker are in agreement over the necessity of His existence. Not one of them is said to disagree on this issue, with the exception of the Bāṭiniyya and the Zanādiqa – may God curse them! – for they refrain from using the terms existence and non-existence when describing the Maker.

But what about the attributes – are they necessary of existence as well? The farthest al-Ǧuwaynī is willing to go is to assert that the divine attributes are necessary of God. That is to say, he takes advantage of the fact, discussed above, that existential necessity can be seen both as a predicate of God (''God is

necessary of existence'') as well as a modal qualifier which modifies the copula tying God *qua* subject to His attribute *qua* predicate (''It is necessary that God be [or 'exist as'] a knower''). Al-Ǧuwaynī follows roughly the same route in his *'Aqīda niẓāmiyya* and his *Iršād*, discussing in separate chapters ''what is necessary [to predicate] of God'' (*al-kalām fī-mā yaǧibu li-Allāhi ta'ālā*: *'Aqīda*, 16.19ff.; *bābu al-qawli fī-mā yaǧibu li-Allāhi ta'ālā min al-ṣifāti*: *Iršād*, 17.16ff.); ''what is impossible [to predicate] of God'' (*al-kalāmu fī-mā yastaḥīlu 'alā Allāhi ta'ālā*: *'Aqīda*, 14.12ff; the *Iršād* does not devote a separate chapter to this category of predications) and ''what is possible [to predicate] of God'' (*al-kalāmu fī-mā yaǧūzu fī aḥkāmi Allāhi ta'ālā*: *'Aqīda*, 25.3ff.; *bābu al-qawli fī mā yaǧūzu 'alā Allāhi ta'ālā*: *Iršād*, 94.3ff.).[52]

In categorizing the divine attributes according to the modal qualifier that describes how an attribute may be predicated of God, al-Ǧuwaynī moves decisively beyond the Ḥanbalite Ibn al-Farrā', for example, who offers only the then-current subdivision of attributes of the self (*ṣifāt al-ḏāt*) into ''essence'' attributes (*ṣifāt nafsiyya*), such as God's self-subsistence, whose non-existence, if postulated, would lead necessarily to the non-existence of the divine self; and ''object'' attributes

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[52] The *Iršād* references are to J.-D. Luciani, ed. and [French] trans., *El-Irchad par Imam el-Haramein* (Paris, 1938). Al-Ǧuwaynī is followed in using ''necessary'' only to modify the copula that binds the attribute to God, by later Aš'arites such as al-Sanūsī (d. 1490), *al-'Aqīdat al-sanūsiyya* (*ap.* al-Bāǧūrī [d. 1860], *Ḥāšiya 'alā matn al-sanūsiyya*, no ed. [Cairo, 1856]), pp. 57.8–58.2 (marg.): [God's] independence from everything other than Him consists of the fact that existence, eternality *a parte ante*, eternality *a parte post*, otherness with respect to temporally originated things, and self-subsistence are necessary of Him (*wāǧibatun lahu*)''; Ibrāhīm al-Laqānī (d. ca. 1631), *Ǧawharat al-tawḥīd* (no ed. [Cairo, no date]), pp. 28.1 and 31.1: ''Everyone entrusted with obeying divine law must/Know what is necessary of God/And what is possible and impossible''; al-Faḍālī (d. 1821), *Kifāyat al-'awāmm fī 'ilm al-kalām* (*ap.* al-Bāǧūrī, *Ḥāšiya 'alā kifāyat al-'awāmm*, no ed. [Cairo, 1906]), pp. 31.1–33.1 (top): ''Know that understanding the fifty forthcoming creedal statements is based upon three things: the necessary, the impossible and the possible. The necessary is that whose non-existence is inconceivable to the intellect, that is to say, the intellect will not assent to its non-existence''; p. 38.2–4 (top): ''Thus if it is now said that power is necessary of God (*inna al-qudrata wāǧibatun li-Allāhi*), the meaning will be that the intellect will not assent to the non-existence of God's power''; p. 44.1: ''The first and foremost of the attributes that are necessary of God is existence''.

(*ṣifāt ma'nawiyya*), such as God's knowledge, whose non-existence, if postulated, would not lead necessarily to the non-existence of the divine self.[53]

Another adventurous Sunnī contemporary of al-Ǧuwaynī was the Māturīdite *mutakallim* Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 1099), who, like al-Ǧuwaynī, identifies the eternal with the necessary of existence, in the context of proving the originatedness of accidents:

Al-Bazdawī, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. H.P. Linss (Cairo, 1963), p. 15.7–11

Were accidents eternal their passing away would be inconceivable, since the eternal is necessary of existence, so neither passing away nor non-existence is conceivable for it [*fa-law kānat al-a'rāḍu qadīmatan la-mā tuṣawwiru buṭlānuhā li-anna al-qadīma wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi fa-lā yutaṣawwaru 'alayhi al-buṭlānu wa-al-'adamu*]. [This is] because if its non-existence were possible [*law ǧāza 'adamuhu*] at some time in the future, its non-existence would have been possible at some time in the past. Yet non-existence is inconceivable for this, just as it follows necessarily [*yaǧibu*] that when two is added to one there is three. If this is necessary [*wāǧiban*] then it is inconceivable for there to be a time in which [adding *fīhi*] when two is added to one there is not three.

Unlike al-Ǧuwaynī, who, as mentioned above, appears to have been content simply to allow eternality and necessity of existence to be co-implied, al-Bazdawī is somewhat clearer in preferring necessity of existence as God's most basic characteristic, with His eternality now seen to be in some way a derivative of His necessity of existence:

Al-Bazdawī, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 20.2–5

Because God is necessary of existence [*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*] – given that we have shown that originated things have no escape from an originator, and given that the non-existence of what is necessary of existence is impossible [*wa-mā kāna wāǧiba al-wuǧūdi yastaḥīlu 'adamuhu*], and if [its non-existence] is impossible, it will be specially characterized by eternality – He will also be eternal *a parte post* [*bāqin*], given that the non-existence of the eternal is impossible; given that the eternal is necessary of existence [*li-anna al-qadīma wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi*]; and given

[53] Ibn al-Farrā', *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 44.3–14. Allard refers to al-Ǧuwaynī's new, modal method of categorizing the divine attributes as ''Plan A'', with ''Plan B'' referring to the old method of distinguishing between *ṣifāt nafsiyya* (''les attributs essentiels'') and *ṣifāt ma'nawiyya* (''les attributs entitatifs''): Allard, *Textes apologétiques de Ǧuwaynī*, p. 11; see also his *Le problème des attributs divins dans la doctrine d'al-Aš'arī et de ses premiers grands disciples*, pp. 384–5.

that were its non-existence possible at one time, its non-existence would be possible at another time, and the eternality would be nullified.

Al-Bazdawī was less adventurous than al-Ǧuwaynī as far as the attributes were concerned, hesitating to call them necessary of God (as al-Ǧuwaynī had), let alone necessary of existence in themselves. However, al-Ǧuwaynī's star student, the Ašʿarite Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 1111), by clearly denying that the attributes are possible of existence, moved in that direction. Still, al-Ġazālī balks at openly affirming that the attributes are necessary of existence:

Al-Ġazālī, *Kitāb al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād*, no ed. (Cairo, 1971), p. 75.6–13

The [divine] attributes are all eternal. If they were generated, the Eternal, may He be praised, would be a substrate of generated things, which is impossible [. . .]. The first piece of evidence [showing that God cannot be a substrate of generated things] is that every generated thing is possible of existence [*ǧāʾiz al-wuǧūd*], while what is eternal is necessary of existence [*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*]. If possibility [*al-ǧawāz*] were applicable to His attributes, that would contradict the necessity of His existence, since possibility and necessity contradict each other. Thus everything which is essentially necessary cannot have possible attributes. This is self-evident.

Al-Ġazālī's hesitation here may well have resulted from his realization that to make an explicit affirmation of the attributes' necessity would expose him to the same danger earlier Kullābite *mutakallimūn* had faced in clearly affirming the attributes' eternality. In al-Ġazālī's case, however, the danger would have consisted in an uncontrollable proliferation of meta-necessities rather than in an uncontrollable proliferation of meta-eternalities.

Another sense in which al-Ġazālī moves a half-step beyond his master al-Ǧuwaynī is in identifying the eternal not simply with the necessary of existence, but with the necessary of existence in itself (*wāǧib al-wuǧud bi-ḏātihi*). And al-Ġazālī also moves slightly beyond al-Bazdawī by making it crystal clear that necessity of existence is basic, and eternality derivative:

Al-Ġazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī šarḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā*, ed. F. Šaḥāda (Beirut, 1971), p. 159.8–13

The eternal *a parte post* [*al-bāqī*] is the existent whose existence is necessary in and of itself. When it is related in the mind to the future, it

is called eternal *a parte post*, and when it is related to the past it is called
eternal *a parte ante* [*qadīm*] [. . .] When you say ''the existence necessary
in itself'' it comprises all of this; these names [*i.e.*, *al-qadīm* and *al-bāqī*]
are used only in so far as this [necessary] existence is related to past or
future.

The Māturīdite *mutakallim* Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 1114),
like his contemporary al-Ġazālī, also clearly saw necessity of
existence as basic and eternality as derivative:

Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, *Kitāb Tabṣirat al-adilla*, p. 61.12–15

[. . .] [This is] due to the fact that the eternal is something for which
non-existence is impossible, and this is because the eternal must be
necessary of existence [*li-anna al-qadīma yanbaġī an yakūna wāǧiba
al-wuǧūdi*], because were it not necessary of existence, it would be
possible of existence or impossible of existence, since there is no
category of that which occurs to the [human] mind above and beyond
these categories [*lā qismata li-mā yaḥṭuru bi-al-bāli warā'a hāḏihi
al-aqsāmi*]. (I mean that it is either necessary of existence, possible of
existence, or impossible of existence.)

The gradual subsuming of eternality under necessity of exist-
ence continued in Sunnī *kalām*, and as a result necessity of
existence increasingly came to replace eternality as God's core
meta-attribute.[54] But it is hard to avoid the conclusion that
necessary existence ended up performing the same risky double
role that had previously been demanded of eternality, both
proving God's existence and serving as His core meta-attribute;
and that this dual purpose created, for post-Avicennian Sunnī
mutakallimūn, many of the same dilemmas that had so chal-
lenged the pre-Avicennians. For just as eternality had been
used in two quite different contexts – to refer to uncausedness
in proofs of God's existence and yet to be predicable of God's
attributes in discussions of the *ṣifāt* – so too necessity of
existence was pulled in opposite directions. The result is that
when each of God's attributes was held to be necessary of

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[54] See, for example: the Māturīdites al-Ṣābūnī (d. 1184), *K. al-Bidāya min
al-kifāya fī al-hidāya fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. F. Kholeif (Alexandria, 1969), pp. 36.9–
37.15: ''If it is established that He is necessary of existence in and of Himself, it is
established that He is eternal, because His existence does not depend on anything
else'' (cf. p. 70.12 and 72.1–2); and Abū al-Barakāt ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad
al-Nasafī (d. 1310), *ʿUmdat al-aqīda li-ahl al-sunna wa-al-ǧamāʿa*, ed. W. Cureton,
in *Pillar of the Creed* (London, 1843), pp. 4.18–5.1: ''That whose survival is
impossible will not be eternal, because the eternal is the necessary of existence in
and of itself [*li-anna al-qadīma wāǧibu al-wuǧūdi li-ḏātihi*], and is thus impossible
of non-existence.''

existence – let alone necessary of existence in itself – the attributes gained a degree of causal autonomy that made every one of them, in effect, a little god. True, al-Ǧuwaynī's nifty idea of holding that necessity obtained in the divine attribute only insofar as the attribute was predicated of God, had made necessity of existence more attractive than eternality as a meta-attribute. But even apart from the conflation of *de re* and *de dicto* necessity lurking beneath the surface of al-Ǧuwaynī's move, he had still not solved the basic dilemma that arose when necessity of existence was used to attain two competing goals.

It is beyond the scope of this article to describe the contours of this problem's history in post-Avicennian Sunnī *kalām*. But as an illustration of the debate's complexity and dynamism I shall translate two passages from the commentary on the Nasafite Creed (*i.e.*, Naǧm al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī [d. 1142], *al-ʿAqāʾid*) by Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1389) (whose theology is a synthesis of Ašʿarite and Māturīdite *kalām*), in which al-Taftāzānī tries to reconcile these two seemingly incompatible objectives:

Al-Taftāzānī, *Šarḥ al-ʿaqāʾid al-nasafiyya*, no ed., Cairo, 1916 [top inside box]

59.2–60.2 [*ad* ''*al-qadīm*'' at 58.6]: Some [*mutakallimūn*] go so far as to assert that ''the necessary'' and ''the eternal'' are synonymous [*muta-rādifāni*]. But this is not correct, in light of a precise differentiation of the two concepts. Discussion of their equivalence will consist solely in taking into account what [the two terms] hold true of. Some maintain that ''the eternal'' is the more general [term], since the attributes of the Necessary may be said to be eternal, in contrast to ''the necessary'', which does not hold true of them; yet there is no impossibility in reckoning [that there are] a number of eternal attributes. What is impossible is reckoning that there are a number of eternal selves [*dawāt*]. Other modern [*mutakallimūn*] such as the Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Ḍarīr [d. 1267] assert that the necessary of existence in itself is God *and* His attributes, citing the axiom that whatever is eternal will be necessary in itself; and if it [an attribute] were not necessary in itself, it would be possible of non-existence in itself, and would require, in terms of its existence, something to individuate it, and would thus be origi-nated, since we mean by ''originated'' nothing other than that whose existence is dependent upon the existentiation of something else [. . .]. This is a discussion of the utmost difficulty, since to speak of reckoning [that there are] a number of [things to which the designation] necessary in itself [applies] is incompatible with [the principle of] divine oneness; while on the other hand speaking of the possibility of the attributes contradicts their assertion that every possible thing is originated.

72.1–10 [*ad* ''*wa-hiya lā huwa wa-lā ġayruhu*'' at 70.13]: It is indeed unimaginable for there to be a dispute amongst the Sunnīs about the multiplicity of the attributes and [about] their being reckoned to be mutually distinguishable or not. The most proper thing to say is that reckoning them to be eternal selves is impossible; but [what is] not [impossible is reckoning that there is] a [single] self with [many] attributes. [It is also most proper] not to go out on a limb [*an lā yaġtari'a*] by asserting that the attributes are necessary of existence ''in themself'' [*wāğibat al-wuğūd li-ḏātihā*]; instead it ought to be said that they are necessary not through something other than them [*wāğibatun lā li-ġayrihā*] but [necessary] through that which is neither identical to them nor other than them [*li-mā laysa 'aynahā wa-lā ġayrahā*] – I mean God's self [*ḏāt Allāh*]. This is the intention of one who says that the necessary of existence in itself is God *and* His attributes, meaning that they [the attributes] are necessary of the Necessary's self [*wāğibatun li-ḏāti al-wāğib*], whereas ''in themself'' they are possible [*wa-ammā fī nafsihā fa-hiya mumkinatun*]. There is no impossibility in the eternality of the possible as long as it [the eternality] subsists in the Eternal itself, is necessary of Him [*wāğiban lahu*], and is not distinct from him. Not every eternal thing is a god, so the existence of [a plurality of] gods will not be entailed by the existence of [a plurality of] eternals. On the contrary, it ought to be said that God is an eternal [thing] in [or ''with''] His attributes [*allāhu ta'ālā qadīmun bi-ṣifātihi*]. Saying ''eternals'' should not be extrapolated, lest one become deluded by the idea that each of them [the eternals] is subsistent in itself and is [itself] to be characterized by divine attributes. Because of the difficulty of this topic the Mu'tazilites and the *falāsifa* were led to deny [the real existence of] the attributes, the Karrāmites to deny their eternality, and the Aš'arites to deny [both] their otherness [from] and their identity [with His self].

What al-Taftāzānī suggests, in effect, is that when discussing the divine attributes' eternality, fellow *mutakallimūn* should fall back upon Ibn Kullāb's ambiguous formula from five centuries before, namely, that God is ''an eternal [thing] in [or 'with'] His attributes'' (*qadīmun bi-ṣifātihi*). This is because of the troublesome consequences (well known by this stage) that follow any more precise statement about the nature of the attributes' eternality. With necessity and possibility, however, al-Taftāzānī has more room to maneuver. God remains necessary in Himself. The attributes, by contrast, are now held to be ''necessary of the Necessary's self'' (*wāğibatun li-ḏāti al-wāğibi*), while ''in themself'' (they cannot be ''selves'', after all) they are only possible (*wa-ammā fī nafsihā hiya mumkina-tun*). In other words, al-Taftāzānī has appealed to the spirit of Avicenna's distinction between the necessary of existence in itself and the necessary of existence through another/possible of existence in itself, since al-Taftāzānī's and Avicenna's aims

are the same: providing a coherent way to distinguish between something eternal which is causally self-sufficient (God, for Avicenna; God's self, for al-Taftāzānī), and something eternal which is *not* causally self-sufficient (the celestial intellects, souls and spheres, for Avicenna; the divine attributes, for al-Taftāzānī).

By embracing a slightly modified version of Avicenna's distinction and then using it in a credal commentary to blunt the horns of an old Sunnī-*kalām* dilemma that arose from the ambiguous status of the divine attributes, al-Taftāzānī vividly demonstrates what A.I. Sabra has called, in reference to the history of Arabic science, the processes of appropriation and naturalization.[55] In al-Taftāzānī's case, however, what is being appropriated and naturalized is not Greek science but Avicenna's metaphysics.

In an article published in an earlier issue of this journal I argued that Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence owed as much to preceding *kalām* discussions about things and existents as it did to preceding Greek treatments of this issue, and that in some texts, Avicenna's position on how things and existents relate to each other is closer to that of tenth-century Ašʿarite and Māturīdite *mutakallimūn* than it is to that of al-Fārābī, his fellow *faylasūf*.[56] In another article I tried to make the case that the positions on essence and existence articulated by post-Avicennian *mutakallimūn*, both Sunnī and Šīʿite, are much closer to Avicenna's own position than the positions articulated by the post-Avicennian philosophers al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1641), whose radical essentialism and radical existentialism, respectively, placed them outside the bounds of what might meaningfully be called the Avicennian tradition.[57] In the present article I have attempted to show that Avicenna's formulation of the theory of the necessary of existence in itself was in part a response to preceding Sunnī *kalām* discussions of the eternality of God's attributes, and that later Sunnī *mutakallimūn* immediately

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[55] A.I. Sabra, ''The appropriation and subsequent naturalization of Greek science in medieval Islam: A preliminary statement'', *History of Science*, 25 (1987): 223–43.

[56] R. Wisnovsky, ''Notes on Avicenna's concept of thingness (*šayʾiyya*)'', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 10.2 (2000): 181–221.

[57] Wisnovsky, ''Avicenna and the Avicennian tradition''.

seized upon Avicenna's theory as a potential escape route from the dilemmas produced by those earlier discussions. In each article my ultimate conclusion has been that while *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* often presented their respective projects as being categorically dissimilar, the two strands of thought were so intertwined at the conceptual level that it is almost impossible to disentangle them without ripping apart the intricate tapestry of Islamic intellectual history.