

Being and Meaning: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Followers on the Identity of Knowledge and the Known

Ömer Türker*

Abstract: In this article, the problem of universals is discussed in terms of the relationship between knowledge and being, on the basis of the works of Ibn Sinā and his commentators. Problems pertinent to the discussion of universals stem mainly from Ibn Sinā's establishing the concept of essence (*māhiyya*) as something to be contemplated (*i'tibār*), and then employing essence as a thing (*shay'*). In Ibn Sinā's philosophy, all the determined conditions of the essence in itself are mixed with accidents, or specific instantiations (*araḍ*). The status of absoluteness, where the essence is unmixed with accidents, becomes manifest only in one's mental consideration; therefore, there is no external and mental space where an essence is completely abstracted from external and mental accidents. However, an impression is created in which the essence is made to look like part of an external "individual" when the process of the occurrence of an essence, along with that of its abstraction from individuals, is depicted. The arguments of Ibn Sinā led the commentators to the reconsideration of two fundamental problems regarding universals in a way compatible with the theory of essence. The first problem pertains to the existence of a universal in the mind, and the second problem to its existence in the external world. The first problem relates to the nature of knowledge, and the second problem concerns itself with the reality of a thing that exists in the external world. In connection with those problems, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's assessments in particular –which worked out the implications of Ibn Sinā's philosophy and early theological speculations– determined the sub-aspects of the problem of universals by giving a new direction to the discussions about the arguments of Ibn Sinā, offering a different perspective of the problems regarding the nature of what is known and the nature of an existing thing. The main question that this article seeks to answer is what the relation between knowledge and the known according to the works of Ibn Sinā and his commentators? To answer that question, the article primarily draws attention to a set of problems contained in the discussion of universals and the contexts in which Ibn Sinā addresses them. It then considers various commentaries on the arguments of Ibn Sinā, such as those offered by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Naşir al-Dīn al-Tūsī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjāni.

Keywords: Ibn Sinā, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Universals, Essence, Knowledge, Existence.

* Assoc. Prof., Marmara University, Faculty of Theology.
om.turker@gmail.com.

Metaphysical thought aims to explain a principle attained in the light of concepts that are considered to be self-evident and the relationship of multiplicity that arises from that principle or is made existent by it. In other words, the most important problem of metaphysics is determining how the relationship between unity and multiplicity should be established. Occasionally, that problem manifests itself in terms of explaining the relationship between a real existence that possesses unity, and things that arise from it; in other instances, it entails a quest to explain how a single meaning may exist in multiple objects. In this context, the relationship between universals and particulars is one of the core issues of metaphysics, and a study of this relationship involves almost all aspects of the metaphysical analysis of the relationship between unity and multiplicity. In the present article, the problem of universals will be examined in terms of the relationship between knowledge and being as articulated by commentators on the works of Ibn Sīnā, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 766/1364), and Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413). The basic question that the article aims to answer is what is it that is known, and what is it that exists? To answer that question, the article primarily draws attention to a set of problems contained in the discussion of universals and the context in which Ibn Sīnā addresses them, after which it considers various commentaries on the arguments of Ibn Sīnā, such as those offered by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī.

I. The Philosophical Context of the Discussion of Universals and the Avicennian Background

There are two main problems related to universals. The first concerns the presence of universals in the mind, and the second relates to their presence in the external world. The first problem is concerned with the nature of knowledge, and the second problem is another way of expressing the problem of how the essences become realized externally. Both problems have histories dating back to Plato, and in the pre-Islamic traditions of philosophy their discussion was focused more on ideas and the problem of predication.¹ Islamic philosophy considered the issue of universals under various headings, particularly through the influence of Ibn Sīnā.² The

1 For an examination of the problem of universals and discussions of it from Plato to the Neo-Platonic commentators, see R. Sorabji, "Universals Transformed: The First Thousand Years After Plato", pp. 105-127; R. Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD, A Sourcebook III*, pp. 128-64; L. Gerson, "Platonism and the Invention of the Problem of Universals", pp. 233-56.

2 For a description of the Avicennian conception of universals and absolute essences, see M. Marmura, "Quiddity and Universality in Avicenna", pp. 61-70; M. Marmura, "Avicenna's Chapter on Universals in

questions of whether universals exist in the mind and whether they are common between multiple individuals is part of the larger puzzle of the nature of knowledge and the meaning of its correspondence to the external world. Thus, the topic has been studied as a part of the problem of whether there indeed exists any mental state of being or, in other words, whether the concepts in our minds are the same as the essences of external objects. Additional aspects of universals pertaining to the theory of knowledge include how the meaning that is characterized as being universal is abstracted, how it can exist in the means of perception that reach the intellect from the external senses, and what the function of the agent intellect (*al-aql al-fa'āl*) is during the process of abstraction.

An examination into universals should be able to answer these questions: What is meant by universals? What does it mean to say that universals correspond to particulars? What kind of existence does a meaning that is characterized by being a universal possess in the external world, in the mind, and in and of itself (*fī nafs al-amr*)? What is meant by the statement “universal nature exists in the external world or in the mind”? Since an essence found in the mind as an image (*ṣūrah*) is abstracted from an individual (*fard*) or individuals (*afrād*) in the external world, and since the process of abstraction requires that the object in the external world be unified by being stripped of its own particular genus (*jins*) and differentia (*faṣl*), how does an essence in the mind exist in the external world? Do the genus and differentia that form this essence exist as the very essence of that object itself without any differentiation in the external world, or do they exist as parts of the essence of the object? If they are parts of the essence, is their separation defined by reality alone or by both reality and existence? Since a thing that exists in the external world as self-evident (*badīhi*) cannot have a shared essence in multiplicity, and since it must be composed of matter and an outward form, what, then, is the difference between genus-matter and differentia-outward form? How is it possible that a single thing, directly actualized from genus and differentia, acquires an existence despite the genus and differentia being two different things? It is undoubtedly possible to ask more such questions.

First, it is the common opinion of “later” philosophers and theologians such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī, Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taf-tazānī, and Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī – who are connected to the Avicennian tradition through Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī – that abstract forms cannot exist externally by them-

the *Isagoge* of his *Shifa*”, pp. 33-59; M. Marmura, “Avicenna’s Critique of Platonists in Book VII, Chapter 2 of the *Metaphysics* of his *Healing*”, pp. 355-69; T. A. Druart, “Shay’ or Res as Concomitant of ‘Being’ in Avicenna”, pp. 135-39; A. Bäck, “The Ontological Pentagon of Avicenna”, pp. 87-109.

selves. A consideration of that consensus makes it possible to shed light on many problems related to the external existence of universals. In *al-Shifā/al-Burhān* and *al-Shifā/Ilāhiyyāt*, Ibn Sinā explicitly rejects Platonic ideas.³ His criticism is based essentially on the impossibility of unity's existence independent from essence. All of the options that he articulates regarding his postulate that unity cannot exist independently are also valid for universals and all general concepts, all of which are predicates whose existence cannot be assumed in the absence of a subject. At first glance, it might be thought that Ibn Sinā falls into a contradiction because he accepts the existence of intelligible substances (*al-javāhir al-'aqliyya*). However, a more careful examination reveals no such contradiction, because acknowledging the presence of an absolute existence outside the mind, and recognizing the presence, for instance, of absolute beauty, are two different things. As the notion of existence involves being externally present, it is possible to assume a self-existent existence. However, concepts such as unity, beauty, and goodness do not necessarily involve being externally present, and they require the addition of existence in order to be externally present. Therefore, the existence of unity or beauty necessarily indicates the existence of a subject in which existence and unity or beauty combine, which, in turn, leads to the conclusion that an existent thing characterized by beauty, for example, is not the absolute beauty itself, but a substratum of it. Hence it becomes impossible to speak of an absolute intellect, absolute goodness, or absolute power unless existence is referenced. As well as precisely supporting the distinctions drawn by Ibn Sinā between necessary and possible, and between essence and existence, this situation explains how God is the absolute existence, on the one hand, and necessitates, on the other hand, that all existents apart from God be possessed of essences.⁴

However, the problem does not end there. Quite contrarily, the main problem troubling Avicennian thought arises at this point, namely how will the relationship between a subject and existence –in other words, between essence and existence– be established? Is what we call “essence”, in reality, something separate from existence, or if the distinction between the two is merely a conceptual one, is essence actually another form of existence? What does it mean to say that an object exists? When we say that a thing exists, are we saying that existence has become individualized into something, or are we saying that an essence represents nonexistence, as is un-

3 See Ibn Sinā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/al-Burhān*, pp. 187-89; cf. İbn Sinā, *İkinci Analitikler*, s. 133-35, 176; *Kitāb al-Shifā/Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 317-24; cf. İbn Sinā, *Metafizik II*, s. 62-69.

4 İbn Sinā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 31-24; cf. İbn Sinā, *Metafizik II*, s. 62-69. The third chapter of the first article in “Metaphysics”, in which İbn Sinā discusses the relationship between unity and multiplicity, is another text that should be considered regarding this topic.

derstood upon a first look at texts? If the former is true, what makes it possible for existence to be individualized? Is there something in existence that is non-existence so that existence becomes identical with it? If that is the case, what does it mean for existence to be a predicate? That is, in the phrases “the world exists,” “human beings exist,” “society exists,” or “the table exists,” what exactly is the distinction between existence as a predicate and existence as a subject?

According to the fifth article of the *Ilāhiyyāt* from *Kitāb al-Shifā*, Ibn Sīnā’s answer to those questions can be summed up as follows: Essence can be considered from various angles. Though an essence is something in itself, it is also another thing in the sense that it becomes associated with universality in terms of not constituting an obstacle to being predicated to multiplicity. Again, universality is something with respect to being absolute universality; however, it is something else in the sense that it is a subject that accrues to a nature or an essence. In other words, a universal *qua* universal and human being *qua* human being are quite different things. In that context, when we consider a meaning’s different states as it exists in the human mind, in the external world, and in itself, we are thinking of multiple situations such as universality, “human” as a universal and natural human existence (with its matter and accidents). Without a doubt, humanness is not contained in the definition of universality, nor is universality contained in the definition of humanness. Humanness has a definition and an essence that is not dependent on the definition of universality, but universality accrues to it. Furthermore, not only does the definition of humanness not include universality, it also does not include existence, unity, multiplicity, or being externally present. Humanness is whatever it is in itself; it cannot be identified with being in the mind or being in the external world, either potentially or actually. All these instances fall outside humanness and can only be attached to it. Thus, humanness can be one through unity, and it becomes individualized along with the attributes that render it capable of being pointed out. Moreover, when we cast our gaze at it purely from the perspective of its humanness, this gaze remains unmixed with foreign gazes.

At this point, it should be emphasized that humanness in one individual and humanness in another individual, or humanness actualized in numerous individuals, is the same in itself. However, it is not the same in number because humanness realized in each individual is surrounded by accidents that make it possible for that person to be individualized. Nevertheless, humanness in itself exists in each and every particular human being, and what makes it possible for an individual to be called a human is that s/he contains humanness in itself. Therefore, when an essence occurs in the external world as an individual, this may be considered in several ways. For instance, the human essence is called “a natural human” when considered along

with the accidents that enable individualization; it is only human when considered in terms of being itself. Ibn Sinā simply calls this “nature.” In such cases, absolute human being is considered as part of natural human being and it precedes natural human being, just as a part precedes the whole and simple precedes the compound.⁵

The key point here is that “human being” is capable of being considered only in terms of its being human, no matter how many accidents surround it; this consideration precedes all other considerations. The reason is that it is not possible for something that has no existence of its own to exist with an additional set of properties. That situation holds true also for intelligible substances whose genus is limited to their individual being; they do not need any matter in order to exist and continue their existence and they, for that reason, do not multiply through differentia, matter, or accidents when externally existent. In other words, the same principles can be applied to everything that possesses an essence. Hence, the consideration of an essence in itself precedes the consideration of essence in the human mind and in the external world. An essence in itself cannot be characterized by being a genus, species, or individual, or as having unity and multiplicity; it is whatever it is. Again, an essence realized in an individual cannot be attributed to other individuals in that it has become realized in that certain individual. For example, the human essence itself that has become realized in Ali is not shared between Ali and others. That essence has become individualized in the personality of Ali. However, it can be characterized by universality in the sense that its concept constitutes no obstacle to being shared in multiplicity, because even when it becomes particularized in an individual, it is still possible to consider it in terms of its being itself. Nevertheless, it cannot be characterized by universality in the external world in the sense of being abstracted from its accidents. When it is conditioned that an essence be nothing else (*bi-shart lā-shay'*), it exists in the mind alone.

As already noted above, it is not possible for such an essence to exist without a subject in the external world. Ibn Sinā calls the abstract essence that exists in the mind “intelligible form” (*al-ṣūra al-aqliyya*). Although this intelligible form is a single form in the individual intellect, it also exists in terms of corresponding to multiple individuals, and it is thus universal. Ibn Sinā takes the notion of universality to even more subtle dimensions by stating that this same form exists in other individual souls, and he notes that the relation of a singular form (intelligible form of horse in X) in a soul to other forms in other souls (other intelligible forms of horse in X') is universality.⁶

5 See Ibn Sinā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 203-6; cf. *İbn Sinā, Metafizik I*, s. 180-81.

6 Ibn Sinā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 205-6; cf. *İbn Sinā, Metafizik I*, s. 181.

II. Absolute Essence, Knowledge, and Existence

Ibn Sinā's statements about universals appear quite comprehensible at first glance. Almost all of the problems that occupied later prominent thinkers, such as al-Ṭūsī, al-Kātibī, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Ījī, al-Taftazānī, and Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī, stem from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's evaluations and criticisms of Ibn Sinā's suggestions about the distinction between essence and existence. Like Ibn Sinā, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī says that the state of an externally realized essence within itself is different from the properties that separate its individuals from one another.⁷ According to al-Rāzī, when a compound is externally present, the components that have formed it must also exist. In that sense, a human *qua* human, for example, is externally present, and "human" in itself is independent from the concrete accidents and additions. That being the case, knowledge regarding a human being is universal and abstract with respect to its humanness. But the reason for that is not that knowledge is universal and abstract within itself, but that the very act of knowing is universal and abstract. In Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's opinion, *al-mutaqa-ddimūn* were engaging in a metaphor when they defined such knowledge as universal and abstract, however, *al-muta'akhhirūn* accepted that metaphor literally, eventually presuming that there is actually both an abstract and a universal form in the mind.⁸

The kind of knowing that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī describes as universal is concerned with the capability of a single meaning being contemplated in relation to multiple particulars. The above-mentioned thinkers agree with his conclusion that meaning is a single thing within itself, and that what we call "universality" is a meaning's suitability for being shared among multiple individuals or its being related to multiple individuals. However, a problem arises as to whether the meaning is externally present. When it comes to a meaning's external presence, there is a consensus that the humanity in Zayd is not numerically identical in 'Amr, for example. So is the humanity that is predicated both to Zayd and 'Amr the humanity in either one of them in terms of its being predicated to both of them? The answer is no, says al-Ṭūsī, because the humanity in either one of them is not humanity in itself, but rather a part of humanity. Therefore, humanity *qua* humanity exists in the mind alone, and that is universal humanness. That form in the mind is particular in terms of its presence in Zayd's mind, but it is also universal in that it pertains to every human individual. The meaning of its abstraction is that it has been stripped of all of its external additions. According to al-Ṭūsī, that situation can be considered from

7 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, p. 209.

8 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, p. 209.

two angles. From the first angle it is seen and perceived in another thing. However, from the second angle it is itself the focus of contemplation. According to al-Ṭūsī:

The form mentioned by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is the reality (*ḥaqīqa*) of humanness, which is neither universal, nor particular. Al-Rāzī never touched upon the thing defined as universal by early scholars (*al-mutaqaddimūn*) whose definition later scholars (*al-muta'akhhirūn*) adopted and followed. When every nature is taken to be what it is in itself, it is possible to predicate it to multiplicity as well as a single being. What distinguishes these two cases are the particular meanings attached to them.⁹

Thus, according to al-Ṭūsī, humanness *qua* humanness exists only in the mind and, as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī maintained, it does not exist externally as a part of an individual. In his *al-Muḥākamāt*, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī suggests that humanness exists in the mind alone in terms of its being itself, adding –just like in al-Ṭūsī's statement above– that this form in the mind may be contemplated in two different ways with respect to its essence (*dhāt*) and its correspondence to individuals. According to Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, while humanness is a particular form in a particular soul in terms of its essence (*dhāt*), it is universal in terms of its correspondence to individuals. Intelligible form is not a part of its individuals in the external world, and its commonality (*al-ishtirāk*) simply means its correspondence (*al-muṭābaqa*) to its individuals.¹⁰

That being the case, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn Sinā state that essence is externally present with regard to its being itself, but al-Ṭūsī and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī hold that it exists in the mind alone with respect to its being itself. It seems that this is a literal difference rather than being a real disagreement, because in order for a meaning to be individuated in any case, it must be present itself in that particular case. But in such cases does that meaning exist in a differentiated state? In other words, does that meaning's existence within itself –as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī noted– require that it exist within itself abstracted from all of its additions? Is it that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is saying that a meaning realized in an external individual exists dissociated from the individuality of the individual? Or is he saying that a meaning can be contemplated in an abstracted state within itself? Even though it does not seem likely at first glance, the answer is the first option. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's statements necessitate that the human essence that is realized as Ali, for instance, not be the very existence possessed by 'Ali. Moreover, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who, in his *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, severely criticizes the notion of mental existence, an essence within itself must exist not in the mind, but in the external

9 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, p. 209.

10 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Muḥākamāt*, p. 230.

world.¹¹ That idea makes the presence of a meaning both in the mind and the external world problematic. For Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, abstractness and universality does not concern meaning or knowledge, but rather the act of knowing. In fact, al-Ṭūsī and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī think similarly about the universality of knowing. However, both philosophers avoid reducing the abstractness of meaning to that of knowing. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in particular, deepens the discussion by drawing attention to two different meanings of form. For him, form, in its first meaning, is an attribute that occurs in the mind, functioning as a mean (*āletun*) or mirror (*al-mir'āt*) by which the thing that the form belongs to can be contemplated. In its second meaning, it is what becomes differentiated and thus knowable in the mind through the first form. In other words, the first form is an attribute that is an instrument of reasoning, and the second form is the thing that becomes distinguished through that attribute. In Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's opinion, universality becomes added not to a particular attribute, which is an accident placed in the mind, but to what becomes distinguished through it. The form placed in the mind corresponds to many things, and the essence distinguished through that form corresponds to the same things. One of the concomitants of that correspondence is that, when a form exists externally and therefore becomes concrete through one of its individuals, it becomes that very form, namely, the essence itself. However, a form placed in the mind does not have such a concomitant.¹²

However, as was noted by Mullā Ḥanafī, one of the commentators on *ar-Risālah fī Taḥqīq al-Kulliyāt*, the fundamental question that needs to be answered is whether the second form that gets distinguished through the first form exists in the mind.¹³ Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's explanation suggests that this second form, too, is present in the mind. In that case, there are two things in the mind. The first is an attribute placed in the mind, and the second is what becomes known owing to that attribute. Mullā Ḥanafī, on the other hand, rejects that explanation on the grounds that it is a misinterpretation of the philosophers' argument.¹⁴ If the second form, i.e., the thing that is known, were in the mind, then it would have to be particular as well, in which case the distinguished and thus knowable thing is either externally present as an individuated entity, or it does not exist externally, and therefore it does not exist absolutely, i.e., that thing is either in the mind or in the external world, or else it does not exist in either one of them. According to Mullā Ḥanafī, certain evidence

11 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, pp. 209-210.

12 See Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyāt*, p. 22.

13 Mullā Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ Risālati taḥqīq al-kulliyāt*, pp. 60-62.

14 Mullā Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ Risālati taḥqīq al-kulliyāt*, pp. 32-34.

demonstrates that the thing characterized as universal is real.¹⁵ So, where is the essence characterized as being universal?

As noted above, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī asserts that essence is externally present. In this regard, the challenge of determining whether the forms in the mind are the essences of things, as was stated by Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjānī, or are the shadows of the external essences, which are different from the mental forms in terms of *ḥaqīqa*, becomes quite complex.¹⁶ Does a thing existing in the mind possess a mental existence? That is to say, is a form in the mind the same as the essence of an externally present object? Or is it a mental shadow, with the result being that the realities of objects become unveiled to a thinking subject on account of the special relationship between the external object and the mental image? When what is present in the mind is assumed to be an essence, the implication is that the essence has a real existence in the external world as well as a shadow existence in the mind. But when it is assumed to be a shadow, there will be a difference between the essence in the mind and the essence in the external world in terms of their realities. In that case, things can have only a metaphorical mental existence. Consequently, there is a form of fire in the mind, but that form is an accident. That accident has a special relation (*al-nisba*) to the essence of fire, and through that relation, that form causes the essence of fire to emerge in the mind. However, Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjānī contends that the proofs produced in order to demonstrate mental existence show that things that become presented in the mind possess essences whose existence is a shadow existence. According to him, an image that has occurred in the faculty of the intellect corresponds to many things when presented in a state isolated from all the concreteness attached to itself; that correspondence is due to the fact that the image in question has become presented in an individual soul. The meaning of that correspondence is as follows: if the form is existent in the external world, it has to be the same as that of the individuals, and if the individuals occur in the mind, they have to be the same as the form in the mind. In that case, it is not true that the first image mentioned by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī is absolutely an accident. On the contrary, the mental form of a thing that is externally present as an accident is an accident, and the mental form of a thing that is externally present as a substance is a substance. For instance, if the meaning of “animal” is externally present, then it is existent by itself, and the meaning of a substance is its existence by itself (*qāim bi-dhātihī*).¹⁷

15 Mullā Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ Risālati taḥqīq al-kulliyāt*, p. 60.

16 See al-Jurjānī, *Ḥāshiya ‘alā Lavāmi’*, p. 120.

17 Al-Jurjānī, *Ḥāshiya ‘alā Lavāmi’*, p. 120. For the details of Sayyid Sharif’s opinion see Ömer Türker, *Seyyid Şerif el-Cürçânî’nin Tevil Anlayışı: Yorumun Metafizik, Mantıkî ve Dilbilimsel Temelleri*, pp. 88-95.

However, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī offered the example of animal and stated that its mental form is an accident. That being the case, disagreements are partially rooted in the differences of opinion regarding whether the essence in the mind and the essence in the external world are identical with each other in terms of their realities. If the mental essence and the external essence are one and the same thing in terms of their realities, in every case in which there is any kind of individuation the essence is possessed of an existence within itself. For example, if “human” in the mind and “human” in the external world possess the same reality, this means that both have humanness within themselves. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā’s explanations in his *al-Shifā’/Ilāhiyyāt* are of that nature. But in the event the human in the mind and the human in the external world do not have the same reality, it must be said that the essence within itself exists only externally yet it is surrounded by concrete accidents. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī does not accept that the essences in the mind and in the external world do not have the same reality; rather, he asserts that the essence in itself is in the external world.

So, does the essence in the external world exist within itself in a state dissociated from all material accidents? In other words, does an essence abstracted from individual accidents have any means of realization? These questions leave us facing a more fundamental problem. It was stated earlier that Ibn Sīnā and his commentators reject the Platonic ideas, which hold that essences exist in the external world each as an intelligible substance. Therefore, the discussion at hand is about whether the essence composed of an external genus and differentia and realized in individual entities is also externally compound, and about the nature of its relationship to material-individual accidents. In his *al-Risāla fī Taḥqīq al-Kulliyāt*, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī states that there are three different opinions about the compositeness of essences. According to the first opinion, genus and differentia are two parts of a species in the external world and they have thus become separated from one another in terms of reality and existence (*al-ḥaqīqa wa al-wujūd*). But the separation of genus and differentia in terms of reality and existence cannot be perceived by the senses. In other words, an object that is a member of any species in the external world is composite in terms of its external existence; however, that compositeness can be grasped not through the senses but through the intellect. According to the second opinion, genus and differentia are two parts of a species in the external world, but though they are one with the species in existence, they are different from it in essence (*muttaḥidun fī al-wujūd, mutaghāyirun fī al-dhāt*). Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī notes that most of the later thinkers adopted this second opinion. According to the third opinion, species is simple, and compositeness exists only in the mind. Quṭb al-Dīn

al-Rāzī notes that this is the opinion of thinkers who are verifiers (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*).¹⁸ This opinion is also clearly presented, in particular, in passages in the fifth article of Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifāʾ/Ilāhiyyāt* in which he explains the relation of genus and differentia. However, Ibn Sīnā's texts about this subject also serve as the basis for the difference of opinion between commentators.

Ibn Sīnā addresses that problem in the context of the relationship between genus and differentia, which he examines in *al-Madkhal*, *al-Burhān* and *al-Ilāhiyyāt* of his *al-Shifāʾ*. According to his explanations, since it is impossible to give a matter a form that it is incapable of possessing, all the forms added to a body until it becomes an individual are properties that the body is capable of possessing. When considering that problem from the perspective of capability, the superordinate material potentiality contains all the subordinate forms; but when considering it from the perspective of the addition of forms, every newly added form renders the matter distinct from the aspect to which it has been added, although it is indistinct from other aspects. During this process of individuation, matter always represents an individuated body's quality shared in common with other bodies, and form represents its difference from other bodies. That commonality forms the genus of that object. The form becomes added to corporeity, thereby making it distinct to a degree, and it takes the name "differentia" as it distinguishes the new composition that it has caused to form. The relationship of ability and action (*qābiliyya* and *fi'l*) between matter and form is conveyed to the relationship between genus and differentia in the form of "the genus containing the differentia, and the differentia being the cause of the distinctness, by which the genus becomes actual and distinct." And because this new composite consisting of a genus and differentia has the definition of "body" and adds a new meaning to it, it also becomes a species of the body, and that body becomes the genus of that species. Therefore, the meaning, which has become a composite with the addition of a genus and differentia, emerges as a species. So, here matter and genus become one and the same thing, because though something is called "matter" in terms of its being an externally distinct and completed body or thing, it is called "genus" in terms of its ability to receive different forms, that is, in terms of its being an unspecified meaning that can exist alongside many meanings. For example, if we consider a body to be a substance with length, width, and depth, and if we stipulate that no other meaning be included in it, all other meanings, such as senses, nutrition, etc., are excluded from the body. In that case, the body becomes matter. The reason for that result is that the body has been completed, and if we add any other meaning to it, a new substance forms from that body

18 See Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyāt*, p. 24.

and meaning, and the body in question becomes the matter of the added meaning, functioning now as a form. And for that reason, the body cannot be a predicate for the substance composited from itself and the added form. In other words, part cannot be predicated to the whole. However, if we take the body as a substance with length, width, and depth, and stipulate that said body is not completed with those dimensions, the body, in that case, becomes a genus. Body, in that sense, is not the corporeity of a substance formed through the aforesaid dimensions alone, but on the contrary, it is the body that belongs to any substance in which the dimensions in question are present along with many meanings that establish the particular existence of substance. In that regard, the whole consisting of meanings becomes three-dimensional like the body, and all of those meanings become contained in the definition of that substance. Whether one or one thousand in number, body, in that sense, gets predicated to every three-dimensional whole composed of matter and form.¹⁹

That explanation of body holds true for all genus as well as all differentia, because when we consider genus as matter, differentia is considered as a form, and both become part of the composite consisting of those things. And when we consider matter as genus, differentia gets added to it as a form potentially contained in that genus, and the outcome is a single thing composed of both. For example, if we consider animal with the condition that only corporeity, nutrition, and sensation be present in its animality, it is materialized keeping out all meanings that could be added to it. In that case, that animal becomes the matter of a human, for instance, and the rational soul becomes its form. That is because the rational soul is added to animal and functions as a form that generates a new species. However, if we consider animal as a body in which corporeity, nutrition, sensation as well as other substantial forms could be present, any differentia such as thinking, neighing, etc., does not require the removal of the forms in question. On the contrary, it enables the powers of nutrition, sensation, and movement as well as any of those forms to exist in animal. In that sense, animal is a genus not a matter. On the other hand, all the differentia predicated to animal can be considered from two perspectives. For example, when we consider “rational” as a body that possesses the faculty of thinking, stipulating that there be no any addition, “rational” becomes a part of the human, and not a differentia. In such a case, we cannot make “animal” a predicate of “rational”. But when we consider “rational” as a body or a thing that makes it

19 See Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ/Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 213-19; cf. İbn Sīnā, *Metafizik I*, pp. 189-93; *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ al-Burhān*, pp. 99-104; cf. İbn Sīnā, *İkinci Analitikler*, pp. 47-51. For the relation of genus-matter and differentia-form in Avicenna, see also, J. McGinnis, “Logic and Science: The Role of Genus and Difference in Avicenna’s Logic, Science and Natural Philosophy”, pp. 165-87.

possible for other forms or conditions to be present after it has acquired the faculty of thinking, it becomes a differentia, and in that case we can make “animal” a predication of “rational”.²⁰

Ibn Sīnā sums up the consideration of the same thing as both a genus and matter in the following manner:

When you take any meaning which is problematic in its state as a genus or matter if you see it possible for any differentia to be added to it in a way that they will be in it and from it, then that meaning is a genus. If you take it in terms of one of the differentia and complete and finalize it with this specific differentia, and if anything else that does not belong to that whole and out of it enters into it then it is not a genus; on the contrary, it is matter. If you make it necessary that its meaning has to be completed in a way those capable of participating in it will do so, it becomes a species. If you do not touch upon this while pointing to that meaning, it becomes a genus. So, it is matter when there are no additions (*bi-ishtirāṭ en-lā takūna ziyādah*); it is a species when there is only one addition (*bi-ishtirāṭ en takūna ziyādah*); and when it is possible for each of the additions to be included in the totality of its meaning without touching upon this, it is a genus. (...) When it is existence in question, there is no any differentiated thing (*shay' mutamayyiz*) in existence which is genus, and which is matter.²¹

That matter and form are genus and differentia turns the part-whole (*al-juz'-al-kull*) relationship in an individual categorized under any species into a relationship between general-specific (*al-'āmm al-khāṣṣ*). In that context, an individual contains all things that are more general than it including its own species and the highest genus. And the highest genus actually contains all of the instances of specialization that occur between itself and the individuals of any species. In the order that goes from general to specific, every stage of specialization is a cause for the meanings before itself to exist in the ones after itself and for their being predicated to those meanings [after it]. In other words, just as a species is a cause for its genus and for the differentia of its genus to be predicated to its own particular, a genus is a cause for its genus and for the differentia of its genus to be predicated to its own species. For instance, “animal” is predicated to Zayd by means of its being predicated to a human being. Therefore, human is the cause of Zayd’s existence as an animal, because animal is predicated to human first, and then human is predicated to Zayd. Human is also the cause of the predication of its own differentia. That is because differentia is like the genus of animal in being part of animal, and it exists for animal, and then for human through animal. For that reason, the existence of sensation (*al-ḥassās*) for a human occurs only through the animality of that human. Likewise,

20 See Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/al-Burhān*, pp. 99-101; cf. İbn Sīnā, *İkinci Analitikler*, pp. 47-8.

21 İbn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/al-Burhān*, p. 101; cf. İbn Sīnā, *İkinci Analitikler*, p. 48.

body is predicated first to animal, and then to the human. Thus, the existence of animal for the human is the cause of the human's existence as a body. Nevertheless, human alone is not the cause of animal's existence in an absolute way, nor is animal alone the cause of the existence of the meaning of body in an absolute way.²²

The essential nature of the relationship between matter and form, and between genus and differentia, reveals the nature of our knowledge of things, since the genus and differentia of an object generate what we call the *essence* of that object. As suggested in the statements presented above, genus and differentia are not peculiar to an individual, but are universals that are commonly shared by multiple individuals. Therefore, the essence that renders an object an individual of any species is not specific to that object but may exist in multiple individuals. Thus, individuals that belong to a species have a shared essence. And what creates a difference between individuals, despite their sharing the same essence, is the concretization of matter and form. In other words, the cause of difference between individuals is the accidents that emerge as a consequence of matter and form. For that reason, accidents –such as quality, quantity, position, time, location, etc.– that cause an individual to be distinguished from other individuals of the same species do not participate in its essence, but they do help generate the object's individuality.

So, do all the meanings belonging to matter, form, and accidents in an individual exist compositely in the external world? Although Ibn Sinā's explanations about the relationship between existence and essence, matter and form, and genus and differentia, may at first glance lead to the opinion that the meanings in an individual are in perfect unity, his explanations are open to various interpretations. That is because the meanings that we abstract from external individuals are not composed only of concomitants such as the properties ascribed to intelligible substances found in the external world in perfect or nearly perfect unity. Every essential predication of an individual has a corresponding property in that individual. Furthermore, essential predications that we have made cannot be reduced to each other. This situation led later commentators, whose thinking was based on the distinction between existence and essence, and genus and differentia, to embrace different views. Now we can repeat the question that we have just asked above. What is it that exists externally? Is it the totality of adjuncts and what is subject to those adjuncts?

Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī criticizes the suggestion that “essence exists in multiplicity just because it is shared in multiplicity”.²³ Mullā Ḥanafī responds to Quṭb al-Dīn

22 Ibn Sinā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/al-Burhān*, pp. 103-4; cf. İbn Sinā, *İkinci Analitikler*, pp. 50-1.

23 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyāt*, p. 20.

al-Rāzī's criticism by asserting that the purpose of suggesting that essence is commonly shared in multiplicity is to assume its presence in multiple things in terms of its conception (*al-taşawwur*), not to claim its actual existence in multiplicity.²⁴ Although it might be argued that such a response is correct if it is taken to mean that nobody asserted that a single essence (*dhāt*) is commonly shared between multiple individuals, it could also be considered incorrect if it is taken to mean that it has not been suggested that one nature is present in all individuals. For example, according to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's, human nature is externally present.

But what we call "human nature" is not a total sum of the adjuncts and what is subject to those adjuncts. Therefore, what is common between individuals is only the thing to which something gets appended. As was stated by Amīr Rūmī, being one and the same thing with respect to genus and species is different from being one and the same thing with respect to an individual. A one can not only exist externally in an individual (*al-wāḥid bi al-shakhs*), but can also exist externally in species (*al-wāḥid bi al-naw*).²⁵ Drawing on Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's explanations, Rūmī rejects this view, saying that, in the event human nature is externally present –regardless of adjuncts– it will be distinct within itself, and therefore does not allow commonality between individuals.²⁶ However, it is difficult to provide a strong justification for that criticism insofar as saying that an individual is composed of a nature and accidents does not require us to comprehend said individual independent of those accidents, let alone necessitate said nature's being distinct within itself. In addition, a nature's being common among individuals requires that the essence (*dhāt*) realized in individuals be one in terms of its meaning, not in terms of existence. Based on "this consideration," Ibn Sīnā remarks in his *al-Shifā/al-Madkhal* that the words "*māhiyya*," "*ḥaqīqah*," and "*dhāt*" convey the same meaning.²⁷ Otherwise, all sides of this discussion could not have accepted that universal, which is the term that its conception does not prevent the commonality of it in individuals, can be predicated to an individual in the external world correctly. Yes, we can state that everything present in the external world and in the mind is an individual. But that does not require that essences and things that get added to essence, such as genus, differentia, proprium, and general accidents, be completely the same thing in terms of existence.

24 Mullā Ḥanafī, *Sharḥ Risālat taḥqīq al-kullīyyāt*, pp. 50-54.

25 Amīr Rūmī, *Sharḥ Risālat taḥqīq al-kullīyyāt*, pp. 122-126.

26 See Amīr Rūmī, *Sharḥ Risālat taḥqīq al-kullīyyāt*, p. 126.

27 Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Shifā/al-Madkhal*, p. 28; cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Mantiḡa Giriş*, p. 22.

III. Conclusion

It seems that the problem stems from Ibn Sinā's establishing the notion of essence as a consideration (*al-i'tibār*), and then employing it as a thing (*shay'*). In Ibn Sinā's philosophy, all the possible instances of essence in itself are mixed with accidents. The state of absoluteness, on the other hand, in which essence is not mixed with accidents, can manifest itself only through a consideration and, hence, there is no external or mental substratum (*maḥall*) for an essence fully abstracted from external and mental accidents. But as the coming to be of essence as well as that of its abstraction from individuals is depicted, it is made to look like part of an external individual, because the relationship between matter and form is explained as matter's taking its form after being prepared. However, matter and form are substances distinct from each other. Form gets lodged in matter, but in so doing, it does not cease to be a substance. Therefore, matter is not the subject in the meaning of *al-mawḏū'*, i.e., the subject of accidents, but rather the substratum in the meaning of *al-maḥall*. That situation does not change in any instance in which matter takes on a form, but holds true for the first relationship between matter and form as well as all later relationships between them. As noted above, things we term as *genus* and *differentia* are in reality nothing but contemplations of matter and form as single meanings that can be predicated to multiplicity. If matter and form are substances that have generated an external unity, and if the external essence gets composed when those two, e.g. matter and form, come together, then that means that there is no reason for the essence not to be in a composite state in the external world, because compositeness does not contradict unity. There are many examples of this among artificial essences. Let's think about a car, for example. It has certain parts made from iron, plastic, wood, etc. Those materials have been designed and arranged to move when ignited with fuel. What we call "form" is realized as an arrangement in which those materials gain their movement capability. For the realization of that form, the materials have to be both suitable and prepared. For example, it is impossible for the engine to be made of wood, since it is the place of ignition. So, the material to be used in and around the engine, where combustion takes place, must be fire-resistant, and likewise, the material to be used in the seats must be suitable for sitting on, etc. All such elements are preparations required for form to be realized in matter. Form originates with the appropriate shaping and arrangement of materials. Therefore, "externally" speaking, what is called matter and what is called form are separate from each other. Of course, it is impossible to draw an absolute distinction between matter and form in a way in which we could set them aside in separate corners and declare "This is the matter, and that is the form"; form cannot be discerned in the external world. But because form realizes itself in matter, it will necessarily be material. So, though form cannot be discerned by itself,

it does become real in matter and comprehensible in the mind through its presence materially. When we transform matter and form into a meaning, and thereby into genus and differentia, we hold no power to bring about any change in its external essence; what happens is, we simply grasp that, when a realized essence is abstracted from its accidents and material adjuncts it becomes suitable to be present in multiple individuals. But such a perception is not a quality originating in the mind; it is nothing but a mental consideration (*al-i'tibār*) regarding form, called "knowledge". In that regard, as was noted by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, it is not knowledge that is universal, but the very act of knowing.

Consequently, essences realized through the combination of matter and form are composite both in the external world and in the mind, because essence is composed externally of various elements and it mentally entails various meanings. The fallacy undermining the arguments of those who support the first and the third opinions of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's three opinions about whether essence is externally composite is that those arguments overlook the fact that the unity of the generic existence is completely independent of the compositeness or simplicity of species, because the existence of an entity cannot be divided. For example, we can divide a car into parts. This process of fragmentation means breaking up the car materially as well as deforming it. Similarly, we can divide the car's essence into elements. However, the existence of the car that originates in a particular car in the sense of being a car is not something divisible, because that entity, in its simple state, can be neither pointed out, nor conceptualized. What we conceptualize in our minds is nothing but the combination of the elements that help an entity come into existence. When that combination of elements takes place externally, an individual arises, when it takes place in the mind, a definition arises. It is this thing that, subsequent the time of Ibn Sīnā, has been called essence in itself. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī is probably referring to that entity when he refers to the thing in the mind that becomes knowable through a form. Also called "special existence" (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*) by Ibn Sīnā, that entity does not originate in the mind as an acquired knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ḥuṣūlī*), even though it can be conceived through the faculties of the soul; on the contrary, it turns into a cognizance by presence (*al-idrāk al-ḥuḍūrī*) once it has been perceived, like somebody's cognizance of their own existence. Therefore, it is not something that can be related through the knowledge of concepts and propositions, but rather the cognitive power must grasp it experientially. Otherwise, only philosophers would be able to read and understand works that conceptualize any cognitions regarding existence. But that is not the case. And the only reason that is not the case is because existence *qua* existence and, by extension, unity *qua* unity never undergo any change through any special existence or unity. In other words, the reason is the independence of the absolute essence of its subjects. For

that reason, Ibn Sinā states that existence *qua* existence undergoes differentiation only in terms of necessity-possibility and beforeness-afterness, naming the generic reality, composed of special existence, “divine existence.” As Plato asserted, if such an entity were to be present without being lodged in any subject externally, it would absolutely be the “Necessary Existence,” because just as that existence has no genus or differentia within itself, it is impossible to be divided in unity. Therefore, one should understand Ibn Sinā’s conclusion that the external presence of everything aside from God is composed of an existence and an essence as follows: apart from the Necessary Existence, everything consists of an external subject and the divine existence. But it is impossible to define the relationship of that existence to the subject with any word but “necessity,” because it never exists as a part and it renders the subject existent though that subject is nonexistent within itself. We perceive the parts of the subject, which is present through such existence, as genus and differentia, and its whole as essence. That’s why all we know about essence is acquired (*ḥuşūlî*) knowledge.

Thus, later thinkers seem to be correct in stating that, though genus and differentia are one with species in the external world, they are separate in a state of matter and form in terms of essence (*dhāt*). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī also seems correct in saying that essence in itself is present externally in a simple state. In this case, what later thinkers talk about is “parts of the subject” –in the sense referred to above–, while Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī points to the “divine existence. Neither al-Ṭūsî, nor Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzî, nor the other thinkers whose opinions have been discussed herein were able to accurately consider this opinion, which was mentioned by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzî, and which is extremely harmonious with Ibn Sinā’s opinion about essence. The only difference is that Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzî managed to get close to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzî’s position in drawing a distinction between knowledge and what is known, but he could not sustain the same level of consideration in the discussion of the external presence of essence.

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