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AL-ĠAZĀLĪ'S PHILOSOPHERS ON THE DIVINE UNITY

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Abstract. The medieval Islamic philosophers held a certain conception of the divine unity that assumes the necessary existent to be both one and simple. The oneness of the necessary existent meant that it is the only necessary existent and its simplicity meant that it admits no composition whatsoever – it is pure essence and its essence is necessary existence. In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* al-Ġazālī presents, with elaboration, an exposition of the philosophers' conception of the divine unity, several arguments for its two components (*i.e.*, oneness and simplicity), and his critique of these arguments. In this paper I focus on six of the arguments attributed to the philosophers. Following the textual evidence, I reconstruct these arguments and offer two possible interpretations of them. The first interpretation, which I call the many-argument interpretation, sees one of the arguments as employing the simplicity of the necessary existent to establish its oneness and the other five arguments as invoking oneness to establish simplicity. The second interpretation, which I call the one-argument interpretation, doesn't offer a new reading for the first argument but sees the other five arguments as defending the simplicity of the necessary existent based on its basic concept. I argue for the superiority of the one-argument interpretation.

Résumé. Les philosophes de l'Islam classique ont une doctrine de l'unité divine selon laquelle l'existant nécessaire est à la fois unique et simple. Son unicité signifie qu'il est le seul existant nécessaire, sa simplicité qu'il n'admet aucune sorte de composition; il est pure essence et son essence est existence nécessaire. Dans la *Destruction des Philosophes*, al-Ġazālī présente avec force détails un exposé de la doctrine de l'unité divine des philosophes, plusieurs arguments en faveur de ses deux composantes (l'unicité et la simplicité), ainsi que sa critique de ces arguments. Je me concentre ici sur six des arguments qu'il attribue aux philosophes. En suivant les données textuelles, je reconstruis ces arguments et en propose deux interprétations possibles. La première, que j'appelle l'interprétation "à arguments multiples", identifie l'un des arguments comme s'appuyant sur la simplicité de l'existant nécessaire pour établir son unicité, et les cinq autres comme s'appuyant sur son unicité pour établir sa simplicité. La seconde, que j'appelle l'interprétation "à argument unique", conserve la première lecture du premier argument mais voit dans les cinq autres une défense de la simplicité de l'existant nécessaire fondée sur sa notion fondamentale. J'argumente en faveur de la supériorité de l'interprétation "à argument unique".

INTRODUCTION

1. In *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*)[1] al-Ġazālī attributes to the Islamic philosophers an extreme conception of

[1] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, 7th edn (Cairo, 1987).

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the divine unity. According to this conception, the necessary existent[2] is one and simple: it is the only necessary existent and it admits no composition whatsoever – it consists of only one aspect, necessary existence, which is its essence. Said differently, this conception denies both that there is a plurality of necessary existents (that is, it denies *external* plurality) and that there is any *real* plurality within the necessary existent (that is, it denies *internal* plurality). The reason for the emphasis on 'real plurality' is that the medieval Islamic philosophers allow for relational and negative "attributes" of the necessary existent. For example, to say that God is Eternal is to negate something – it is to say that nonexistence *did not* precede and *will not* succeed His existence; and to say that God is the Creator is to say something relational – it is to say that God relates to the rest of existence by being its first essential (but not temporal) cause.[3] The Islamic philosophers do not consider this sort of plurality real plurality. It does not threaten the oneness or the simplicity of the necessary existent.

As is the case with almost all of the claims that al-Ġazālī attributes to the Islamic philosophers, this claim about the philosophers' conception of the divine unity is faithful. For instance, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) advances such a conception in *al-Naǧāt* (*The Salvation*),[4] *al-Šifāʾ: al-Ilāhiyyāt* (*The Healing: The Metaphysics*)[5] and *al-Išārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt* (*The Remarks and the Notifications*).[6] Al-Ġazālī's presentation of the arguments for the philosophers' conception of the divine unity and his polemics against them occupy the Fifth through the Ninth Discussions of the *Tahāfut*.[7] For the sake of brevity let us refer

[2] Following many translators, I use 'necessary existent' to translate the Arabic '*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*'. Hence, a necessary existent is an existent whose existence is necessary *by* virtue *of itself*. According to this usage, God is a necessary existent, but the First Intellect, for example, is not a necessary existent because its existence is necessary by virtue of another – namely, its creator. Another way of defining *wāǧib al-wuǧūd* is as an existent that has no cause.

[3] A cause is temporal if it brings about its effect after nonexistence. In this case the effect temporally follows its cause. If the effect is synchronous with the cause, the cause is essential. It is prior to the effect in essence, not in time. The philosophers believed that God is the essential first cause of the world, while al-Ġazālī maintained the more traditional view that God created the world after nonexistence. One might want to say that according to al-Ġazālī God is temporally prior to the world. However, the matter is more complex than this, because al-Ġazālī also maintains that time is created with the world; so before there was the world, there was no time. In what sense then did God precede the world? One way of describing the situation is to say that there was God and there was no world, then there was God and there was the world and God brought the word into existence. Whether this is successful in removing the attribution of temporality to God could be debated.

[4] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, *al-Naǧat*, ed. ʿAbdulrahmān ʿUmayara, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1992), vol. I, pp. 79–108.

[5] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, *al-Šifāʾ: al-Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. Father G. C. Anawati and Saʿīd Zāyid (Qum, 2007), pp. 43–7 and 343–70.

[6] Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā, *al-Išārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt*, ed. Muǧtabā al-Zāriʿī (Qum, 2002), pp. 270–5.

[7] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, pp. 160–95.

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to the conception described above as the no-plurality conception of the divine unity, or simply the NP conception. In the Fifth Discussion of the *Tahāfut* al-Ġazālī presents, on behalf of the philosophers, two different arguments that are supposed to establish that there is only one necessary existent (which is the first component of the NP conception). He then embarks on an expository discussion, also on behalf of the philosophers, summarizing five arguments that aim to show collectively that the necessary existent is simple (which is the second component of the NP conception) and explaining the relational and negative "attributes" of the necessary existent. In the Sixth through Ninth Discussions he engages critically four of the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent.

2. I will be concerned in this paper with (1) the second of the two arguments for the oneness of the necessary existent, and (2) the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent. There are two ways to approach these two groups of arguments. The first is to regard them as logically independent. The second, which I consider to be the better of the two, is to take the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent as subarguments that collectively aim at establishing a pivotal premise of the second argument for the oneness of the necessary existent. When I have this second interpretation in mind, I will refer to the second argument for the oneness of the necessary existent as the *main argument* and to the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent as the *subarguments*. When I am discussing the first interpretation, I will simply speak of the argument for the oneness of the necessary existent and the arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent.

I will consider first the second interpretation, the one I prefer, and will refer to it as the *one-argument interpretation*. I will reconstruct the arguments following the textual evidence closely. My evidence comes not only from the Fifth Discussion but also from later Discussions. It will be seen that, according to this interpretation, two of the subarguments are vulnerable to a charge of circularity, and although one of them can be recast to escape this charge, the other cannot. Al-Ġazālī, in fact, makes this charge explicit for one of the subarguments. Most of the paper (sections 3–16) will be devoted to the study of the one-argument interpretation. I will then briefly consider (17–18) the alternative interpretation that takes the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent as logically independent of the argument for the oneness of the necessary existent. I shall refer to this interpretation as the *many-argument interpretation*.

As I see things, the only recommendation that can be made for the many-argument interpretation is that it renders the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent free from any circularity. But even so, some considerations, in addition to the textual evidence,

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may be brought against this interpretation. I would like to warn the reader, however, that I will consider al-Ġazālī's critiques of these arguments only insofar as they serve my purpose of collecting textual evidence in support of the one-argument interpretation.

Before beginning the project of interpreting al-Ġazālī's arguments on behalf of the philosophers, I would like to address a possible objection. It might be asked, Why study the philosophers' arguments as they are presented in al-Ġazālī's *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* – a book that is critical of philosophical doctrines – and not in the original philosophical works? The answer is twofold. First, the Islamic philosophers' doctrines and arguments that surround the issue of the divine unity are scattered over several philosophical treatises with loose connections and without a clear overarching structure. Al-Ġazālī does a masterful job of grouping these doctrines and arguments into meaningful categories, of presenting them lucidly and concisely, and of giving them an argumentative structure that unlocks much of their force. Second, the focus of this paper is not only on the basic arguments (here, the subarguments against P4(a) – P4(e)), whose contents are articulated by the philosophers, but also on the argumentative structure that al-Ġazālī erects around these basic arguments.

THE ONE-ARGUMENT INTERPRETATION

3. I begin by translating the relevant text that presents what I am calling the main argument. I translate only the argumentative steps, ignoring illustrations and explanatory discussion.

> If we were to suppose two necessary existents, they would be either similar in all respects or different. If they were similar in all respects, multiplicity and duality among them would be unintelligible. … And if similarity in all respects is impossible, and there must be a difference, and this difference is not in time or place, then it only remains to be a difference in essence. As long as they differ in something, they must either share something or share nothing. If they share nothing, then this is impossible; for in this case they must not share existence, necessary existence, or that each one subsists in itself and not in a subject. On the other hand, if they share something and differ in something, then what they share is not the same thing as what they differ in. Hence, there would be composition and division in describing a necessary existent. But a necessary existent admits no composition; and as it does not divide in terms of quantity, it also does not divide in terms of explanatory description; for its essence is not composed of aspects, which can be enumerated by explanatory description. … And such a composition is inconceivable for a necessary existent, and without it, a duality is not conceivable.[8]

[8] *Ibid*., pp. 161–2. (All translations from the Arabic in this paper are mine.)

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For the sake of argument, we will assume that at this stage the philosophers are entitled to the supposition that there is a necessary existent. In the Fifth through Ninth Discussions of the *Tahāfut* al-Ġazālī does not challenge the philosophers' proof for the existence of God. He takes issue with their demonstration in the Tenth Discussion.[9] Our interest here lies not with the Islamic philosophers' version of the cosmological argument, but with the *Tahāfut* arguments for the NP conception of the divine unity.

THE MAIN ARGUMENT

4. First I reproduce this argument as a demonstration and then I give its general form.

1. There is a necessary existent.
2. Assume that there are two or more necessary existents.[10]
3. Since they are two or more existents and not one, they cannot be similar in all respects.
4. Hence, they must differ in some respects.
5. They cannot differ in all respects, for, from 2, they are at least similar in their having necessary existence.
6. From 4 and 5: they must have *at least* an aspect that they share and an aspect in which they differ.
7. Therefore, each one of these necessary existents has *at least two* aspects: one that it shares with the other necessary existents, and one in which it differs from the other necessary existents.
8. Thus, it is clear that these aspects, described in 7, are not identical.
9. From 7 and 8: each of the necessary existents is composed of *at least two* aspects.
10. By conditional proof, from 2–9: if there are two or more necessary existents, then each existent admits composition.
11. But no necessary existent admits composition.
12. From 10 and 11: there is no more than one necessary existent.
13. Given 1 and 12, it follows that there is only one necessary existent.

The general form of the argument is this.

P1. There is a necessary existent.

[9] *Ibid*., pp. 196–7. Although al-Ġazālī rejects the philosophers' version of the cosmological argument, he does believe that an argument of this sort is correct. He doesn't discuss, with detail, his argument in the *Tahāfut*, but he gives an exposition of it in *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I'tiqād* (*Moderation in Belief*), ed. Ibrahim Agâh Çubukçu and Hüseyin Atay (Ankara, 1962), pp. 24–35. (I am currently working on a translation of this book.)

[10] The argument need not be restricted to the case of two necessary existents. It can be straightforwardly applied to the general case of two or more necessary existents.

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P2. If there are two or more necessary existents, then each necessary existent admits composition.
P3. No necessary existent admits composition.

C1. There is only one necessary existent.

5. Al-Ġazālī challenges the third premise (P3).[11] He writes:

It is accepted that duality is inconceivable without there being some difference, and that the non-identity of those that are similar in all respects is inconceivable.[12] But your statement that this type of composition is impossible for the First Principle is merely arbitrary.[13] What is its proof?[14]

The charge of arbitrariness, according to the one-argument interpretation, may seem premature, but in fact it anticipates what is to come. Al-Ġazālī will offer, on behalf of the philosophers, five subarguments that collectively lend support to P3. In essence, these arguments will constitute the proof that he asks for at the end of the passage above – a proof that he will argue is unsatisfactory.

The second premise (P2) is an inferential premise. It is the conclusion of the conditional proof, which occupies steps 2 through 9 of the demonstration above. Al-Ġazālī does not take issue with P2. His statement about the identity of indiscernibles seems to suggest that he accepts the reasoning of the conditional proof. I think this is right. Steps 2 through 9 appear to be sufficiently benign. Now, since the general form of the argument is valid and since P1 is presupposed, this leaves P3 as the controversial premise.

Let us discuss P3 and its scope in order to see why an Ashʿarite theologian, such as al-Ġazālī, would find it objectionable and in need of a proof. P3 rules out any composition in a necessary existent. One can imagine two types of composition: quantitative and qualitative. In the words of al-Ġazālī's philosophers, "as it does not divide in terms of quantity (*bi-al-kammiyya*), it does not divide in terms of explanatory description (*bi-al-qawl al-šāriḥ*)." I take qualitative composition to be a composition that lends itself to explanatory description, and vice versa. An example might clarify the idea. The pen in my hand is hollow and it has a nib. It divides quantitatively into a nib and a body. They are two quantitative parts that make the larger mass of the pen. But they are also qualitative parts and so is the hollowness of its

[11] He challenges P3 because he wants to challenge C1. The declared goal of the Fifth Discussion of the *Tahāfut* is to show the philosophers' inability to prove the oneness of God. Of course, al-Ġazālī accepts the doctrine of the oneness of God independently; he only thinks that the philosophers' arguments for the oneness of God are unsound.

[12] In other words, indiscernibles are identical. In Western philosophy, this is usually referred to as "Leibniz's Law."

[13] It should be clear that the First Principle is God, and it is another way of describing the necessary existent.

[14] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, p. 162.

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barrel. Presumably their terms are all parts of an explanatory description of the pen. However, while it makes sense to say that the nib and the body are quantitative parts of the pen, it does not seem to make much sense to say that the hollowness is a quantitative part of the pen. Similarly, one can think of quantitative parts that are not easily thought of qualitatively. For example, the body of my pen could be broken into two equal parts in shape and mass – a division that does not seem to lend itself to an explanatory description of my pen.

As we will see later, al-Ġazālī does not dispute the claim that a necessary existent cannot admit quantitative composition. It is fair to assume that he sees as sound the argument, which I will reconstruct shortly, against the possibility of quantitative composition. He never explicitly says this in the *Tahāfut*, but he also never engages the argument critically. There are also passages in *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād* that suggest that this type of composition is specific to (extended) bodies, and, of course, the necessary existent, according to the Ashʿarites, is not a body.[15] So the types of composition that al-Ġazālī thinks to be appropriate for the necessary existent are qualitative in nature – compositions that can be utilized in explanatory descriptions of the necessary existent. Not all qualitative compositions are appropriate for a necessary existent according to al-Ġazālī. For example, the composition of form and matter is not possible for a necessary existent.[16] However, there are other qualitative compositions that al-Ġazālī thinks are true of a necessary existent, and which the philosophers deny are possible for a necessary existent. Examples of such compositions are the division into essence and attributes, into genus and species, and into quiddity and existence.[17] For each of these sorts of composition, there will be a subargument, attributed to the philosophers, denying the possibility of that composition.

6. The passage that follows al-Ġazālī's question, "What is its proof?", is pivotal for my interpretation. There is clear evidence in it that, for al-Ġazālī, the lack of compositionality in the First Principle is what the philosophers believe establishes His oneness. We have already seen in the general form of the main argument that P3 (the lack of compositionality in the necessary existent) is sufficient to establish its oneness, and that is because neither the validity of the main argument, nor P1, nor P2 is disputed. Thus if the philosophers can establish that the necessary existent is simple, then they would obtain both oneness (*i.e.*, no external plurality) and simplicity (*i.e.*, no

[15] Al-Ġazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād*, pp. 38–9.

[16] Al-Ġazālī does not think that the philosophers are entitled to this claim. He challenges their arguments for the incorporeity of God in the Ninth Discussion of the *Tahāfut*.

[17] *Māhiyya* is usually translated into 'quiddity' and *ḏāt* into 'essence'. In Arabic texts the distinction is sometimes blurred, but the most consistent usage of these terms suggests that *māhiyya* is essence without the assumption of existence. (I'll have more to say about this later; see 15.)

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internal plurality), which together constitute the NP conception of the divine unity.

Here is al-Ġazālī's transitional (and pivotal) passage.

> Let us describe this issue as it stands. For among their famous statements is that the First Principle does not admit division in terms of explanatory description or in terms of quantity. *And based on this the oneness of God is established according to them*. They, in fact, claim that the doctrine of the divine unity is not made complete unless the unity of the essence of the Creator is established in every respect; and the unity is so established by denying plurality in every respect. Plurality reaches essences in five forms.[18] (Emphasis added)

He then proceeds by presenting five subarguments that are supposed to demonstrate that a necessary existent does not admit any of these five forms of plurality.

I believe that the best reconstruction of these arguments is to connect them logically to the main argument via a secondary, transitional argument that supports P3 of the main argument. I am not claiming that this argument is stated explicitly in al-Ġazālī's text. But there is good textual evidence for it in the passage above. His remarks about how the oneness of the First Principle is proved on the basis of His simplicity and how the unity is not fully established unless all five forms of plurality are refuted are very suggestive as to what this argument might be. Here is what I think is a plausible reconstruction of this (secondary) argument.

P4. If there is composition in a necessary existent, then this composition must consist of one or more of the following five types of plurality.[19]
  (a) An actual or conceptual quantitative plurality.
  (b) A conceptual qualitative plurality, such as of matter and form.
  (c) A plurality of positive (neither relational nor negative) attributes, which are additional to the essence.
  (d) A conceptual plurality of genus and differentia (or species).
  (e) A plurality of quiddity and existence that relates to it.

P5. None of these types of plurality is possible for a necessary existent.

C2 (= P3). There is no composition in a necessary existent.

As I noted previously, these types of plurality seem to fall into two categories: quantitative plurality, which is type (a), and qualitative plurality, which includes types (b)–(e). We will find later that type (b)

[18] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, pp. 162–3.

[19] These five types of plurality are the five forms alluded to in al-Ġazālī's transitional passage above. The descriptions of these five forms are given in the following five subarguments. (See al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, pp. 163–4.)

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could also involve quantitative pluralities. There is an important observation to make here. To the best of my knowledge, no Islamic philosopher or theologian argued for or against P4. It appears that everyone accepted these five types of plurality as exhaustive. What is debated is P5. Ibn Sīnā and his followers and many of the Muʿtazilites argued for P5. Most Islamic theologians, including the Ashʿarites, argued against P5.

Immediately after the transitional passage cited above al-Ġazālī offers, on behalf of the philosophers, five subarguments, each of which is aimed at refuting one of the forms of compositions listed in P4(a) – P4(e). He accepts the subargument against P4(a) but rejects the subarguments against P4(c), P4(d), and P4(e) in the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Discussions of the *Tahāfut*, respectively. In the Ninth Discussion he argues that the philosophers are not entitled to the denial of P4(b). Although he accepts the denial of P4(b), he thinks that the philosophers' arguments against P4(b) are unsound, given their other doctrines. Some of his arguments against P5 supply us with further evidence for the one-argument interpretation.

The logical form of P5 is a conjunction. It denies each type of internal plurality listed in P4. So an adequate defense of P5 would consist of five subarguments each of which shows the impossibility of one type of internal plurality for a necessary existent. As I said above, al-Ġazālī produces these arguments immediately after the transitional passage. I will translate each of the relevant passages and then present a reconstruction of the argument summarized in the passage.

But before we discuss these subarguments, I must stress one point. A necessary condition for the cogency of these five arguments is that their premises must not invoke the claim that there is only one necessary existent. For this would render the main argument circular. The five subarguments are needed to establish P5, P5 is needed to establish P3, and P3 is needed to establish the oneness of the necessary existent (which is C1). As we will see, not every argument of these subarguments is free from this charge.

THE SUBARGUMENT AGAINST P4(a)

7. It is not hard to see why the philosophers and the Ashʿarites, among many other theological schools, rejected this form of plurality. The main idea of this subargument is that if a necessary existent is divisible quantitatively into parts, whether actually or conceptually, then its existence depends on these parts staying together. In other words, since it is conceivable that these parts may come apart, it is also conceivable that the necessary existent may cease to exist. But this is absurd: the existence of a necessary existent is necessary by virtue of itself; hence, it is inconceivable that it might cease to exist.

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Here is the relevant passage with emphasis added.

The first is to admit actual or conceptual division. For this reason the one body is never absolutely one; *for it is one only by the presence of the cohesion that is capable of cessation*. Hence, it is conceptually divisible in terms of quantity, and this is impossible for the First Principle.[20]

The argument may be reconstructed as follows.

P6. If a necessary existent is quantitatively divisible into parts, whether actually or conceptually, then it is conceivable that the cohesion between these parts might cease to exist.
P7. If it is conceivable that the cohesion between the parts of a necessary existent might cease to exist, then it is conceivable that the necessary existent might cease to exist.
P8. It is inconceivable that anything whose existence is necessary by virtue of itself might cease to exist.
P9. The existence of a necessary existent is necessary by virtue of itself.

C3 (= not-P4(a)). A necessary existent is not quantitatively divisible into parts, whether actually or conceptually.

It is clear that this argument is valid. One can fuss about the correct relations between the concepts of actuality, necessity, and conceivability, but that does not remove the unmistakable feel of plausibility attached to these premises. Hence, it is not surprising that al-Ġazālī doesn't take issue with this argument. Of course, al-Ġazālī independently accepts, as an Ashʿarite, that God is not divisible into quantitative parts (see 5). But there are many occasions in the *Tahāfut* in which al-Ġazālī criticizes a philosophers' argument whose conclusion he accepts independently.[21]

THE SUBARGUMENT AGAINST P4(b)

8. This argument begins with a general supposition but it is abruptly restricted to a single case. The general supposition is to assume that a necessary existent is divisible, in terms of description and not necessarily in terms of quantity, into two different parts. The restrictive single case is that of the divisibility of body into matter and form. The argument proceeds by denying that God is divisible into matter and form. In fact, even the general supposition is unnecessarily restricted: why two parts only? So in reconstructing this argument one should investigate if these restrictions are essential to the argument or an argument can be made without them.

[20] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, p. 163.
[21] For example, in the Ninth Discussion he argues that the philosophers' arguments for the incorporeity of God are invalid.

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Let us examine the relevant passage.

> The second is for a thing to be divisible not in terms of quantity but conceptually into two different meanings, such as the divisibility of body into matter and form. Both matter and form, although it is inconceivable that they would subsist independently of each other, are two things different in definition and reality. By their union a single thing is obtained – namely, a body. This, too, is denied of God. For it is not possible for the Creator to be a form in a body, matter for a body, or their union. It cannot be their union for two reasons. One of them is that it would be divisible in terms of quantity when it is decomposed actually or conceptually. The second is that it would be divisible in terms of meaning into form and matter. It cannot be matter, for it needs a form, and the necessary existent is independent in all respects; hence its existence cannot be conditioned upon anything other than itself. It cannot be a form, for it needs matter.[22]

There is tension in this passage between its general inclination and specific-case discussion and also between qualitative and quantitative divisibility. The divisibility in terms of meaning or definition is qualitative. The idea is that there are two parts that are not homogenous; they differ in the definitions of their concepts or, equivalently, in the meanings of their terms.[23] This division could be purely conceptual or conceptual and actual. If it is also actual, then it might imply a division in terms of quantity as well.

An illustration might help here. Let us reconsider our previous example: the division of my pen into a nib and a body (see 5). As explained earlier, this is a quantitative and qualitative division. I don't think this sort of division is what al-Ġazālī has in mind in the passage above. As a quantitative division, it is already within the scope of the argument against P4(a). The distinction between the body of the pen and the hollowness of its barrel is closer to the spirit of the passage. It is a conceptual and actual division ("two things different in definition and reality"). The pen is a single object that is obtained by the union of its components, including the hollowness of its barrel. But if one tries to remove the hollowness from the pen, that is, if one "decomposes" the pen, the pen breaks into quantitative components. Thus, we have a conceptual and actual qualitative divisibility that implies, under certain circumstances, quantitative divisibility ("it would be divisible in terms of quantity when it is decomposed actually or conceptually").

The case of matter and form is similar in some respects to the case of the pen's body and hollowness. We have a single body, say a solid

[22] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, p. 163.

[23] The Arabic word is *maʿnā*, which literally means "meaning." The medieval Islamic philosophers and theologians use it frequently to mean "meaning," concept," "notion," or even "thing." Simon Van Den Bergh chooses 'concept' instead of 'meaning' in his translation of Ibn Rushd's (Averroes) *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), published by the Trustees of the "E. J. W. Gibb Memorial" (Cambridge, 1954), vol. I, pp. 175–6.

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cube, obtained by conjoining matter and a form. In order for this cube to persist, neither its matter nor its form may stand alone independently of the other (I propose that this is the correct way to understand the clause "it is inconceivable that they would subsist independently of each other").[24] But the divisibility of the solid cube into matter and form is an actual as well as conceptual division. If one attempts to decompose the cube by separating its form from its matter, not only would the cube cease to exist, but also it would break up quantitatively (its "parts" take different shapes). The cube needs (it depends on) the existence of its form and matter in order to exist. This is why a necessary existent cannot be made of matter and form; for its existence, in this case, would be conditioned upon the existence of its matter and form in their conjoined state. Since a necessary existent cannot depend in its existence on anything other than itself, it is clear that a necessary existent cannot be the union of matter and form.

It remains to be asked, Why cannot a necessary existent be the union of matter and form in the sense that it is primarily matter and form is concomitant with it, or alternatively, it is primarily form and matter is concomitant with it? Al-Ġazālī answers this in the last part of the passage: it can be neither because each needs the other as a condition for the existence of the whole, and this produces a condition for the existence of a necessary existent, which, as we already explained, is absurd.

9. Now that the argument is laid out in these terms, it is easily seen that it could be generalized beyond the case of matter and form. Any conceptual (which might also be actual) qualitative plurality of parts such that (a) by their union a single entity is obtained and (b) they mutually depend on each other in order to form the resulting entity is impossible for a necessary existent. Seeing that divisibility into matter and form satisfies the two previous conditions, we may paraphrase the conclusion of this argument compactly as follows: A necessary existent is not conceptually divisible into qualitative parts such as matter and form.

Here is a schematization of the reconstructed argument.

P10. If a necessary existent is conceptually divisible into qualitative parts such as matter and form, then the necessary existent is the union of these parts, which are mutually dependent on each other.

P11. If a necessary existent is the union of qualitative parts that are mutually dependent on each other, then its existence is conditioned on the mutual dependency that exists between these parts.

[24] Otherwise, that clause makes little sense; for the philosophers and theologians agree that matter is a substance (*ǧawhar*), and as such it is self-subsisting.

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P12. The existence of a necessary existent is not conditioned on anything other than itself.

C4 (= not-P4(b)). A necessary existent is not conceptually divisible into qualitative parts such as matter and form.

While al-Ġazālī accepts the conclusion of the argument (we know this from his other works such as *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād*), in the Ninth Discussion of the *Tahāfut* he argues that the Islamic philosophers are not entitled to this argument. He argues there that the philosophers cannot establish that God is not an extended body, and of course an extended body is divisible (at least conceptually) into matter and form.

What concerns us here is the way al-Ġazālī thinks the philosophers argue against such a division. His interpretation of the philosophers' argument lends support to our reconstruction. Responding to the philosophers' argument that God cannot be a body for He is not susceptible to a conceptual division such as the division into matter and form, he writes:

> We have shown that you don't have any proof for it other than the claim that if the parts of a whole were in need of each other, then the whole would be an effect. We have discussed this and shown that if it is not improbable to postulate an existent without a cause for its existence, then it is not improbable to postulate a composite without a cause for its composition.[25]

The important point is that al-Ġazālī attributes to the philosophers a claim similar to P11. This coheres well with our reconstruction of the subargument against P4(b).

THE SUBARGUMENT AGAINST P4(c)

10. We previously mentioned that the medieval Islamic philosophers are willing to attribute only relations and negations to God (see 1). They considered the affirmation of any attribute that is additional to His essence (*i.e.*, a positive attribute) a form of attributing composition to God, and this would contradict the NP conception of the divine unity. As we explained in the Introduction, according to the philosophers, it is meaningful to say that God is Eternal because this is to attribute two negations: God's existence was *not* preceded by nonexistence and it will *not* be succeeded by nonexistence; and it is meaningful to say that God is the Creator because this is to attribute a relation: every existent, other than God, emanated from God either directly or through intermediaries. In general the medieval Islamic philosophers give imaginative readings to all the attributes of God

[25] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, p. 193.

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typically found in the monotheistic traditions as well as some additional attributes, such as "enjoyer" and "enjoyable" – readings that render all of these attributes relational or negative.

The Ashʿariyya and many other theological schools believe that God has positive, eternal attributes, that is, attributes that are additional to God's essence, subsist in His essence, and coexist with His essence. If this doctrine implies that there is a composition in God, as the philosophers see things, then so be it: such composition is consistent with the divine unity. Of course, this is not the philosophers' NP conception of the divine unity.

11. Al-Ġazālī presents, on behalf of the philosophers, the argument against the positive attributes in the following passage.

> The third is to have a plurality of attributes, by positing knowledge, power, and will. For if these attributes were to have necessary existence, then necessary existence would be shared by the essence and these attributes. Plurality, then, would be attached to the necessary existent and unity would be eliminated.[26]

It is clear that this argument invokes the oneness of the necessary existent to rule out this form of composition. This is what we cautioned against earlier (see 6). Such a move renders the larger argument circular. According to the one-argument interpretation, the simplicity of the necessary existent is required in order to establish its oneness. So one is not at liberty to invoke the oneness of the necessary existent to argue for its simplicity.

To see how the supposition of the oneness of the necessary existent enters into this argument, we need to reconstruct the argument with some elaboration.[27] Suppose that a necessary existent has positive attributes, that is, it has attributes that are additional to its essence and that cannot be rendered as merely relations or negations. Then, these attributes must be pre-eternal. They did not simply occur to the necessary existent at some point in time. Otherwise, the necessary existent would undergo change: it would change, e.g., from not having knowledge to being knowledgeable. By the same reasoning, the attributes are post-eternal. They don't cease to exist at some point. Otherwise change would ensue in this case too. The Islamic philosophers and most of the Islamic theologians, including the Ashʿarites, assumed an immutable conception of the necessary existent: the necessary existent does not undergo any change whatsoever. So if there were positive attributes, they would have to be eternal – they would coexist with the essence of the necessary existent. It is also thought that it is incorrect to assume that the essence *caused* its

[26] *Ibid*., p. 163.

[27] The Sixth Discussion of the *Tahāfut* is devoted to a critical analysis of the philosophers' arguments against the positive attributes. The reconstruction here is guided in part by that analysis.

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attributes (see al-Ġazālī's passage below). Thus we have positive, eternal, *uncaused* attributes, which are additional to the essence. It follows that there would be a plurality of necessary existents: the essence of the necessary existent and its positive attributes. But there is no plurality of necessary existents. Therefore, the necessary existent has no positive attributes.

Here is a schematization of this argument, which isolates the supposition of the oneness of God as an explicit premise.

P13. If the necessary existent has positive attributes, which are additional to its essence, then these attributes cannot occur to it at some point in time or cease to exist.
P14. If the positive attributes cannot occur to the necessary existent or cease to exist, then they are eternal and coexist with its essence.
P15. The positive attributes of the necessary existent are uncaused.[28]
P16. If the positive attributes of the necessary existent are eternal, uncaused, and coexist with and additional to its essence, then they have necessary existence by virtue of themselves.[29]
P17. The essence of the necessary existent has necessary existence by virtue of itself.
P18. If the essence and the positive attributes of the necessary existent have necessary existence by virtue of themselves, then there is a plurality of necessary existents.
P19. There can be only one necessary existent.

C5 (= not-P4(c)). The necessary existent does not have positive attributes, which are additional to its essence.

[28] This is assumed to be true because the positive attributes are supposed to be constitutive of the necessary existent's nature.

[29] One might object here that the positive, divine attributes have necessary existence by virtue of their subsisting in the divine essence, and hence their necessary existence is not by virtue of themselves but by virtue of another. If this reasoning is correct, then the positive, divine attributes would not be necessary existents, in the technical sense of 'necessary existent' used here (see note 2). Although al-Ġazālī's passage cited above is silent about this point, I believe he would reject this reasoning. When we say that something has necessary existence by virtue of itself, we mean that its existence is necessary due to its own nature and not because it is a necessary effect of a necessary existent. The First Intellect, for example, is not necessary by virtue of its own nature (in fact, it is contingent when it is considered on its own) but rather it is necessary by virtue of being a necessary effect of God, who is the necessary existent. An attribute's nature is to subsist in an essence; hence the positive, divine attributes have necessary existence by virtue of their nature. Also, these attributes satisfy the other condition of a necessary existent – namely, being *uncaused* existents. In the passage that I cite below al-Ġazālī does indeed say that the difference between the divine essence and the divine attributes is that the essence is self-subsisting while the attributes subsist in the essence. For al-Ġazālī, this marks the distinction between the type of necessary existent that the divine essence is and the type of necessary existent that the divine attributes are, and this distinction is what permits one to maintain that God is one despite the presence of necessarily existing attributes, which subsist in the essence.

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P19 is the source of the difficulty. It is a paraphrase of the principle of the oneness of the necessary existent. Al-Ġazālī, in fact, points out this circularity in the Sixth Discussion of the *Tahāfut*, where he critically examines the argument above and other arguments against the positive attributes of the necessary existent. He asks the philosophers to present a more detailed proof for the claim that the necessary existent cannot have positive, eternal, necessarily existing attributes, which are additional to its essence. He answers the question and presents, on behalf of the philosophers, the following argument.

> The proof for this is that for each of the attributes and for the holder of the attributes, if this is not that and that is not this, then either each one is independent of the other for its existence, or each one requires the other, or one is independent of the other and one requires the other. If it is supposed that each is independent of the other, then both would be necessary existents; and this is absolute duality, which is impossible. If, on the other hand, each requires the other, then neither would be a necessary existent. For the meaning of necessary existent is to be self-subsistent and independent of all others in every respect. … Finally, if it is said that only one requires the other, then the one that is in need of the other is an effect, and the other is the necessary existent. But as long as it is an effect, it requires a condition. It follows that the essence of the necessary existent is attached to a condition.[30]

Al-Ġazālī objects to this argument. He writes:

> The objection to this is to say that the chosen option among these options is the last. But your rejection of the first option on the basis that it is absolute duality is a rejection for which you have no proof, as we have shown in the Discussion that is prior to this. *And it cannot be established without being based on the rejection of plurality in this case and in the following cases. So how is it possible to base this case upon that which is a branch of this case*?[31] (Emphasis added)

Here is how I think the italicized sentences ought to be understood. The first 'it' refers to the philosophers' rejection of absolute duality (*i.e.*, to their affirmation of the oneness of the necessary existent). So the first italicized sentence says that the philosophers' denial of absolute duality (which is the basis for their rejection of the first option) cannot be established unless internal plurality is refuted whether in this or the other cases. The phrase 'is a branch of' means, I believe, 'is a consequence of'. Hence, the second italicized sentence asks how it is possible to base their rejection of the composition described in this case on the rejection of a duality of necessary existents, where the latter (*i.e.*, the rejection of the multiplicity of necessary existents) is supposed to be a consequence of the former (*i.e.*, the rejection of internal plurality within the necessary existent).

[30] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, pp. 172–3.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 173.

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Because of the importance of al-Ġazālī's analysis to my one-argument interpretation, I will restate his point more conspicuously. Al-Ġazālī's charge against the philosophers is this. The philosophers are attempting to reject internal plurality on the basis of their rejection of external duality. But, the rejection of external duality requires the rejection of internal plurality. So, how can they base the rejection of internal plurality (or the affirmation of simplicity) on the rejection of external duality (or the affirmation of oneness) when the rejection of external duality is itself a consequence of the rejection of internal plurality?

12. This is exactly how the one-argument interpretation sees matters. According to this interpretation, the five subarguments, including this one (*i.e.*, the subargument against P4(c)), aim at showing that the necessary existent is simple, and the main argument invokes the simplicity of the necessary existent to establish its oneness. In arguing, then, for the simplicity of the necessary existent, it is illegitimate to appeal to its oneness. One may legitimately appeal only to aspects that are part of the concept of necessary existent, such as its necessary existence, its eternality, its independence of all conditions outside its essence, and its constancy, all of which are part of the philosophers' conception of the necessary existent. Al-Ġazālī shows that since the subargument against P4(c) appeals to oneness to establish simplicity, it renders circular the larger argument that then appeals to simplicity to establish oneness.

THE SUBARGUMENT AGAINST P4(d)

13. The fourth type of (internal) plurality that the secondary (transitional) argument rules out is a conceptual plurality of classification. The main point is this: the necessary existent does not share a genus with any other thing from which it is differentiated by a differentia (that is, by belonging to a different species). This is because if it is possible to recognize a genus and a species in a necessary existent, then the necessary existent would be conceptually divisible into two qualitative parts. The second subargument against qualitative composition might be applicable to this case as well. Recall that the second subargument refutes the possibility of conceptual divisibility into qualitative parts by showing that these parts are in need of each other in order to maintain the existence of their union, which is the necessary existent. In such a case, the existence of the necessary existent would be conditioned upon the interdependency of these parts. Typically the differentia is a subcategory of the genus, but much more needs to be said about theses different categories in order to cash out the interdependency relations correctly.

Consider the relevant passage.

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The fourth is a conceptual plurality that is obtained by conjoining a genus and a differentia. For black is both black and color. But being black is conceptually different from being a color. Being a color is a genus and being black is a differentia. Hence, black is composed of a genus and a differentia. And being an animal is conceptually different from being [rational];[32] and man is a rational animal. Being an animal is a genus and being rational is a differentia; and man is composed of a genus and a differentia. This is a type of plurality. They claim that this, too, is denied of the First Principle.[33]

If this argument is meant to show that a necessary existent is not conceptually composed of genus and differentia, then it fails miserably. It presupposes the negation of P4(d), which is the goal of the argument.

The argument seems to run as follows.

P20. If it is possible to classify a necessary existent into genus and differentia, then it is possible to conceive of a necessary existent as a composite of a genus and a differentia.
P21. If it is possible to conceive of a necessary existent as a composite of a genus and a differentia, then it is possible for a necessary existent to admit a conceptual plurality of genus and differentia.
P22. It is not possible for a necessary existent to admit a conceptual plurality of genus and differentia.

C6 (= not-P4(d)). It is not possible to classify a necessary existent into genus and differentia

This is not really an argument for the simplicity of a necessary existent, though it does avoid the circularity of the preceding argument inasmuch as it does not invoke the oneness of the necessary existent. Nevertheless, it is question begging in a strong sense. This argument is one of a collection of subarguments that are jointly supposed to show that a necessary existent admits no type of internal plurality. Each subargument aims at refuting one type of plurality. This argument aims at refuting the possibility of having a conceptual plurality of genus and differentia in a necessary existent. But this is P22. The argument, instead of arguing for this form of simplicity, invokes it to conclude that a necessary existent is not subject to classification of genus and species.

Al-Ġazālī disputes the conclusion of this argument in the Seventh Discussion of the *Tahāfut*. As I said earlier, our interest in al-Ġazālī's polemics is solely focused on corroborating our one-argument interpretation. In a few places he indicates that the philosophers invoke the simplicity of the necessary existent to infer its oneness. This is the

[32] In the original it is *insāniyya*, which means *humanity* or *being human*. But the context clearly implies that the correct phrase is 'being rational'. I took the liberty of substituting 'rational' for 'human' to maintain the natural flow of the passage.
[33] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, p. 163.

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central idea of the one-argument interpretation. This interpretation sees the five subarguments as aiming, through the transitional secondary argument, at establishing the simplicity of the necessary existent, which is invoked in the main argument to establish the oneness of the necessary existent. Al-Ġazālī asserts this central idea in the following passages of the Seventh Discussion. Responding to the philosophers' claim that the First Principle cannot be composed of a genus and a differentia, he writes:

> How do you know that this is impossible for the First Principle, *so that you have built upon it the denial of duality*?[34] (Emphasis added)

> The import of their statements is that *they have built the denial of duality upon the denial of the composition of genus and differentia*.[35] (Emphasis added)

In another passage he makes it clear that the philosophers' burden is to show that a necessary existent is simple and one.

> Let them show that a being that has no cause or agent cannot exhibit multiplicity and differentiation.[36]

14. Our reconstruction of the argument against P4(d) makes it hopeless. Could we be more charitable? Is there textual evidence to suggest a better reconstruction of this argument? Al-Ġazālī presents a more elaborate argument against P4(d) in the Seventh Discussion of the *Tahāfut*. Let us examine the passage with some care. Again, he is challenging the philosophers to advance an argument for the impossibility for a necessary existent to be a composite of genus and differentia.

> How do you know that this kind of composition is impossible? You have no proof for it other than your argument for denying the attributes. It is that the composite of genus and differentia is a union of components. If it is permissible for a component or the whole to exist without the other, then it would be the necessary existent but not the other. And if it is not permissible for the components to exist without the whole and for the whole to exist without the

[34] *Ibid*., p. 185.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 188.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 187. 'Agent' is an unfortunate translation of the Arabic *fāʿil*. In the grammatical sense the *fāʿil* of a sentence is the subject of the verb, that is, the *agent*. The *fāʿil* in general is a doer, an active agent, someone or something that performs an action. There is a debate between the philosophers and al-Ġazalī whether agency in this sense requires will or not. The issue is important because the philosophers describe God as the agent (*fāʿil*) of the world, even though they believe that the world emanated from God by necessity. Al-Ġazālī thinks that calling an unwilling cause "agent" can only be metaphorical. According to him, agency requires will. Thus, he says in the Third Discussion of the *Tahāfut* that if someone threw another into a fire, then it is literally said that the man who threw the victim into the fire is the killer and it is only metaphorically said that the fire killed him. To this Ibn Rušd responds in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* that there is confusion here because the fire in this case is an instrument for the killing, but if the victim is burned without anyone throwing him into the fire, no one would say that the fire burned him metaphorically. (See Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 4th edn, ed. Maurice Bouyges [Beirut, 2003], p. 160.)

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components, then all of them are effects and not independent. We have discussed this when we addressed the attributes and have shown that this is not impossible regarding what terminates the regression of causes, and demonstration only establishes the termination of the regression.[37]

The argument here seems to be this. Suppose that a necessary existent is a composite of genus and differentia. This means that the necessary existent is the union of the two, which are its components. Now, what is the relation between the whole and the components? If it is a relation of mutual dependency, then none of them is a necessary existent, including the necessary existent, which is absurd. The other possibility is that the whole or at least one of the components is independent of the rest. In this case, what is independent is the necessary existent and everything else that is not fully independent is not a necessary existent.

What the argument does not articulate is which one of these possibilities is applicable to the genus-differentia composition. It is very likely the second possibility is the relevant one. For example, being human is conditioned upon being an animal and being rational. Being rational is a species of being an animal. This leaves being an animal as the most likely candidate to be the one aspect that is independent of the other two. If it is permissible to carry this analysis to the case of the necessary existent, then it would follow that the necessary existent, which is the union of genus and differentia, is not the necessary existent, but most likely the genus is. This is absurd too.

If this is correct, we obtain a reconstruction of the argument that is not subject to the charge of question begging.

P23. If a necessary existent is conceptually divisible into genus and differentia, then the necessary existent is the union of components.
P24. If the necessary existent is the union of components, then either the whole and the components are all dependent for their existence on each other or one of them is independent of the rest.
P25. If they are all dependent for their existence on each other, then none of them, including the necessary existent, has necessary existence by virtue of itself.
P26. If one of them, call it x, is independent of the rest of them, then the necessary existent, which is the union of the components, is not x.
P27. If the necessary existent is not independent for its existence of all the components, then it cannot have necessary existence by virtue of itself.

[37] Al-Ġazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, pp. 185–6.

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P28. A necessary existent has necessary existence by virtue of itself.

C7 (= not-P4(d)). A necessary existent is not conceptually divisible into genus and differentia.

This argument is far more elaborate than the original short passage from the Fifth Discussion. But there is no reason why we shouldn't avail ourselves of the elaborate analysis in the Seventh Discussion. Note that we didn't do the same for the argument against the positive attributes (P4(c)). The longer passage we cited from the Sixth Discussion did not improve the situation. The argument there was based on refuting three options. One of those refutations invoked the oneness of the necessary existent – a point that al-Ġazālī makes explicit, as we have seen.

It might seem that P26 above is too convenient. This might be true, but it is not unreasonable for a reconstruction of the argument against P4(d) to include such a premise. Although the passage we cited does not state P26 or a paraphrase of it, the analysis we gave of the example of humanity, animality, and rationality is quite plausible. In fact, al-Ġazālī, too, gives a similar analysis in the Seventh Discussion shortly after he presents, on behalf of the philosophers, the argument we reconstructed above.

> The divisibility of a thing into genus and differentia is not similar to the divisibility of a holder of an attribute into essence and an attribute. For the attribute is not the essence and the essence is not the attribute, but the species is not different from the genus in all respects. Whenever we mention the species, we mention the genus together with an addition. For if we mention man, we don't mention anything other than animal with the addition of rationality. Someone's statement "Is Humanity independent of animality?" is similar to his statement "Is humanity independent of itself when something else is conjoined with it?"[38]

Even though al-Ġazālī does not say that the genus is the independent factor among the triad of genus, species, and their composite, the important point that is relevant to P26 is that the composite is not independent of the genus and species. Al-Ġazālī's analysis lends support to our analysis.

THE SUBARGUMENT AGAINST P4(e)

15. As explained in note 17, the Islamic philosophers and theologians frequently (but not always) distinguished between *māhiyya*, which is usually translated as 'quiddity', and *ḏāt*, which is typically translated as 'essence'. The distinction, when maintained, is that the *māhiyya* of something is its true nature without the supposition of existence.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

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When existence is added to the *māhiyya* (whether existence is necessary or contingent for the *māhiyya*), the resulting combination is *ḏāt*. Hence, a nonexistent thing might have a *māhiyya* but not a *ḏāt*. Henceforth, I shall use 'quiddity' and 'essence' instead of *māhiyya* and *ḏāt*, but the distinction must be borne in mind for the following discussion to make sense.

The relevant passage is somewhat long. Only part of it contains the argument; the other part explains that existence is additional to the quiddity. I will translate the argumentative statements fully and the explanatory ones selectively.

> The fifth is a plurality necessitated by positing a quiddity and an existence for that quiddity. … The triangle, for example, has a quiddity, which is that it is a figure bounded by three sides. Existence is not part of this quiddity. … If existence were to substantiate its quiddity, it would be inconceivable that its quiddity can be imprinted on the mind before its existence. Hence existence stands in a relation to the quiddity, whether it is necessary for it… or contingent…
>
> They claim that this plurality must be denied of the First Principle as well. It must be said: "He has no quiddity to which existence relates, but necessary existence for Him as quiddity for others."… If there were quiddity posited for Him, necessary existence would be a consequence of this quiddity but would not substantiate it. A consequence is something that follows and is an effect. Thus, necessary existence would be an effect, which is contrary to its being necessary.[39]

The gist of the argument is condensed in the second paragraph. Let us unpack it. If a necessary existent is divisible into quiddity and existence, then it seems that it is possible to conceive of its quiddity without its existence. But the philosophers believe this to be obviously false. For in this case, it would be possible to conceive of a necessary existent as nonexistent. The philosophers think that since the existence of a necessary existent is necessary, it is not possible to conceive of it as nonexistent. So, it must be the case that when the quiddity of a necessary existent is conceived of, the existence of the necessary existent is conceived of as well. How could this be? By definition, existence is not part of the quiddity. This leaves us with one option: the existence of a necessary existent is an *immediate* consequence of its quiddity. The consequence must be so immediate that as soon as one thinks of the quiddity of a necessary existent, he has also to think of its existence. It is akin to a triangle's being three-sided and its being three-angled. But now the existence of a necessary existent is conditioned upon its quiddity: if the quiddity is removed, existence ceases. This contradicts the philosophers' conception of a necessary existent as an existent independent of all conditions.

[39] *Ibid*., p. 164.

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Below is a schematization of the reconstructed argument.

P29. If a necessary existent is divisible into quiddity and an existence that relates to it, then the existence of the necessary existent is not an immediate consequence of its quiddity only if it is possible to conceive of its quiddity without conceiving of its existence.
P30. If it is possible to conceive of the quiddity of a necessary existent without conceiving of its existence, then it is possible to conceive of a necessary existent as nonexistent.
P31. It is not possible to conceive of a necessary existent as nonexistent.
P32. If the existence of a necessary existent is an immediate consequence of its quiddity, then its existence is conditioned on its quiddity.
P33. The existence of a necessary existent is not conditioned on anything.

C8 (= not-P(e)). A necessary existent is not divisible into quiddity and existence.

16. We now reach the end of the one-argument interpretation of al-Ġazalī's argument, on behalf of the philosophers, for the NP conception of the divine unity. I did not discuss the cogency of this multi-faceted argument or the plausibility of its many premises. That is beyond the scope of this paper. My interest here is to understand the logical structure of this argument and the logical forms of its various parts, and to give faithful reconstructions of these parts in order to identify their premises and conclusions.

We observed that all of these reconstructions are valid, yet there is one serious problem: the third subargument, against the positive attribute of the necessary existent, begs the question against the main argument. The subargument invokes the oneness of the necessary existent in order to conclude that the necessary existent is not composed of essence and attributes, which in turn is needed to establish the absolute simplicity of the necessary existent. The main argument relies on the simplicity of the necessary existent to demonstrate its oneness. Al-Ġazālī devotes a whole Discussion to refute the philosophers' doctrine against the positive attributes of God. The discussion there is not helpful to remove the circularity. Indeed, I cited a fairly long passage in which al-Ġazālī presents an elaboration of the philosophers' argument against the positive attributes (see 11). As noted

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there, the elaborate argument is still circular, and al-Ġazalī points this out.

THE MANY-ARGUMENT INTERPRETATION

17. There is a way of understanding these arguments that does not render the argument for the oneness of the necessary existent as a main argument and the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent as tributary arguments feeding into the main argument via the secondary, transitional argument. This interpretation sees the relation between these two categories of arguments as making converse points. In the argument for the oneness of the necessary existent, we show that simplicity leads to oneness; in the arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent, we show that oneness leads to simplicity – they are not subarguments that are meant to establish the simplicity of the necessary existent independently of the supposition of its oneness. So the many-argument interpretation runs as follows: if God is simple, He is one; and if He is one, He is simple. There is one revision to this formula. The second part is best understood in the contrapositive form: if God is not simple, He is not one.[40]

This interpretation does not offer new reconstructions of the arguments. After all, our reconstructions were guided by careful examination of the textual evidence. There is, however, one clear advantage to this interpretation. The charge of circularity is no longer applicable to the argument against the positive attributes of God. There would be no modification to the argument. The oneness of the necessary existent is still a premise of the argument, but the argument is no longer circular because it is not supposed to be employed to prove the oneness of God.

According to the many-argument interpretation, there are six independent arguments. The first argument presupposes the simplicity of the necessary existent and delivers its oneness. Each one of the other five arguments *may* presuppose the oneness of the necessary existent in order to establish one type of its simplicity – except that it does it in the contrapositive form. In a sense, the last five arguments are not fully independent of each other because they collectively aim at establishing the absolute simplicity of the necessary existent. Thus, on this interpretation, the six arguments are not meant as a multi-faceted argument for the NP conception of the divine unity. All that they show is that each component of this conception entails the other: simplicity entails oneness and oneness entails simplicity.

[40] I am grateful to Roslyn Weiss for making this observation.

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18. If the many-argument interpretation solves the circularity problem, why then do I prefer the one-argument interpretation? There are three reasons for my preference. First, there is something attractive about saying that there is an argument for the philosophers' extreme conception of the divine unity. It is not simply that its two senses (namely, oneness and simplicity) entail one another, but actually one can give a proof for the whole conception. The "proof" for it is meant to be based on the philosophers' basic conception of the necessary existent. For the philosophers, the essence of a necessary existent is necessary existence. They understood this to mean that it is inconceivable and impossible for the necessary existent to be nonexistent at any point in time, that it is uncaused temporally or essentially,[41] and that its existence is independent of all things and conditions. They also believed that the necessary existent is unchanging: it is not susceptible to occurrences and cessations. It is not clear why they thought that this immutable conception is part of the essence of the necessary existent,[42] but there is no question that they held such a view.

Second, the structure of the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent lends significant support to the one-argument interpretation. Except for the argument against the positive attributes, all the arguments rely on the philosophers' basic conception of the necessary existent. These arguments do not show that oneness entails simplicity; rather they show that necessary existence entails simplicity. While the many-argument interpretation makes sense of the argument against the positive attributes, its explanation is irrelevant to the other four arguments.

Third, there is the textual evidence, of course. We have seen that al-Ġazālī's comments about some of these arguments fit nicely with the one-argument interpretation. In the transitional passage and other passages (see 6, 11, and 13), he indicates that the denial of the various forms of compositionality in the necessary existent is employed by the philosophers to argue for its oneness (or, equivalently, for the denial of duality). Add to this, his recognition of the circularity of the argument against the positive attributes – a feature that fits the one-argument interpretation but not the many-argument interpretation. If one supposes that the many-argument interpretation is the correct reading of these arguments, then much of al-Ġazālī's analysis makes little sense. Al-Ġazālī argues that four of the five arguments for the simplicity of the necessary existent fail, and he takes this failure as showing the philosophers' inability to prove that the oneness of God

[41] See note 3 for the distinction between temporal and essential causation.

[42] Of course, arguments could be, and actually were, given to show that a necessary existent could not undergo change. In the language of the era, the necessary existent is devoid of occurrents (*ḥawādiṯ*). What is unclear is why this is assumed to be part of the essence of a necessary existent rather than a consequence of its essence.

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follows from the basic concept of necessary existent. The Sixth through Ninth Discussions of the *Tahāfut* are devoted to showing that the philosophers are unable to refute P4(b) – P4(e). His central claim is that if the philosophers are shown to be unable to establish that there is no plurality within a necessary existent, then they are shown to be unable to prove that there is no plurality of necessary existents, and this shows, he argues, that the philosophers cannot establish the doctrine of divine unity. He doesn't argue that they fail to show that the two senses of the divine unity entail one another, but that they fail to show that God is one, that is, they fail to show that the oneness of the necessary existent follows from the concept of necessary existent.

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